# 異世界魔法は遅れてる！

The different world magic is too behind !

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Gamei Hitsuji
Illustration = himesuz

OVERLAP

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朽葉初美
「……え？」

# Prologue

## The Third Hero

On this day, a black sea was once more pushing in from over the horizon. The identity of the black sea was a swarm of living beings. They were the enemies of humanity, the embodiment of evil that devoted themselves to the destruction of anything and everything. In other words, they were demons.

The wasteland covered in dirt and a small amount of greenery was dyed by the black power clad around the demons. Like a piece of cloth as it slowly soaked in dye, they seeped ever forwards. In the northern part of the Alliance, standing atop a hill with an unbroken view at the south end of the Norfolk wastelands, the Alliance's hero, Kuchiba Hatsumi, was gazing at this situation.

Once in a while, a refreshing dry breeze would blow gently in from the north characteristic of the landscape. What was carried along with the wind though was a sensation that felt like it pierced and numbed one's skin. The reason for this was certainly the thirst for blood mixed in with the demons' impatience. It felt like the atmosphere was carrying desperation in the air from the sea of demons.

Those demons were in an unfavourable position after the previous battle and were now cornered. After being abandoned by their other forces, they were now in an unrecoverable predicament. That's why, to regain their honour, they were trying to bring about a definitive result by rushing in while gripped by the madness of inevitable death.

Sharply sensing that the opportunity for battle was steadily approaching, Hatsumi looked behind her over her shoulder. Right behind here, as if hiding themselves within the forest, were the companions she made when she was summoned over as well as the soldiers of the Alliance. To her right was the martial artist from the Alliance country of Larsheem, Gaius Forvan. To her left was the female mage from the self

governed states, Selphy Fittney. And right behind her, kneeling down like he was calmly meditating, was the swordsman who served as the prince of the Alliance's sovereign state of Miazen, Weitzer Ryerzen.

These three names were known far and wide across the three countries and they were all warriors of valour who possessed skills which did not bring shame to those names. Their capabilities were already well proven. Up until now they had engaged in battle with the demons four times. Every time they had entrusted their backs to each other, and every time they cooperated perfectly.

After nodding to the three of them as if signalling them, Gaius returned a hearty smile as he struck his chest, Selphy quietly nodded back, and Weitzer put on a devoted face as he always did like he fully understood. After confirming their determination one last time, Hatsumi leaped off the top of the hill.

She spoke no words to signal the beginning. She spoke no words as a leader would to spur forth their men. However, there was no inadequacy in her actions. Cutting forwards straight towards the demons was nothing but swordsmen. Even without speaking, they followed her. As fellow followers of the sword, their wills were all as one. Thus, she ran down the hill without even looking behind her. She was plunging downwards head first. That slope that would normally make one feel uneasy was now a trifle before her body which received the divine protection from the hero summoning. Running at a tremendous speed, she traced the slope of the hill. The companions and soldiers behind her saw her as the vanguard and followed in her fervour. That was why there was not a single person present who felt uneasy, anxious or apprehensive.

While maintaining her speed, she came down at the demon army spread out over the wastelands right into the centre of their formation. Having received an assault from an unexpected direction, their reaction was late and became chaotic.

Kuchiba Hatsumi drew her sword. The weapon in her right hand was something she received from a dwarf blacksmith. Using materials that only appeared in stories, it was a rare beauty created using techniques

also only found in stories, an uchigatana. It was a long mithril sword with a one hundred twenty centimetre long blade.

With the blade which gave off a silver lustre and the talent Hatsumi had for using a sword, the demons before her were just like thin sheets of paper. As she brandished it, whether it be flesh or iron, she split them in two easily without feeling any resistance. No grease or blood even remained on her blade.

She just had to swing it. By moving her body, her sword and arm were as one. Once she gave herself over to it there was no way she would ever lose. Facing the crowd of demons right in front of her who were rallying together in confusion, she swung her sword. The demon standing before her was cleaved clean in two. And then following the flow of the strike, she rotated her body and sent the head of the demon next to it flying.

Weitzer and Gaius swooped down on the demons on both her sides. The martial artist's fist and the swordsman's sword annihilated several of the demons. Soon after cutting down all the nearby demons, a battle cry was raised by many people. Though belated, the unit parted to the left and right. The swordsmen cut into the stretched out flank of the demons. The demons were completely divided. Seeing this happen, magic support came pouring down from the rear.

The mage unit commanded by Selphy were dealing the finishing blow to the divided demons just as planned. Before long, the demons who had their formation completely destroyed were bitterly crushed just as they had planned by the skillful swordsmen. If the first strike went well, all that was left was to continue at their own pace.

Perhaps because the demons' formation had been destroyed or perhaps because of their individual strengths, they no longer cooperated as they fought. There was also the fact that they were a force gathered together with monsters, they struck back immediately each using only their own strength. Such grandstanding while fighting would prove to be a fatal mistake.

That's why, all that was left to do from here was to cut out the affected

region and remove the pus. The power of unity and the existence of a hero stood firm like a rock. A short time later, a demon whose status was an order of magnitude higher than the other demons came before Hatsumi. It was the demon general. Holding a sword clad in mana in its hand, it was a skinny demon swordsman wearing an overcoat. If she remembered correctly, his name was Mauhario. Calling himself the 'Violent Flickering Wind', it seemed that he had beheaded many of the Alliance's soldiers with his sword skills.

“Hero of the Alliance!”

What poured down as they met was a roar. It was a tremendous voice that one would not expect from his slender frame. Shaking the wastelands, it kicked up and blew away the sand in the area. Just from his voice, the movements of the Alliance soldiers became dull. It must have affected their spirits. As the demon's spirit shot through their hearts, their movements surely faltered. The only ones who were unfazed by the roar were several of the commanders, Hatsumi and her companions. In the brief moment after letting out a roar, Mauhario closed the distance to her in a flash. And then he let out a slash accompanied by a devilish storm.

“ORAAAAAAAA!”

“Seaah!”

Matching this, Hatsumi swung her large sword. As her blade cut through the air, it made a sharp sound and repelled the incoming demon's sword. As she did, Mauhario reopened the distance between them that he had closed in an instant. And then in the blink of an eye, he wrapped around to her left and brought his sword to task.

Putting out her mithril sword to defend, the harsh sound of metal clashing against metal rang through the air. Keeping that up, the demon who was taller than Hatsumi pushed down on his blade and brought the fight into a deadlock. Her body only had the muscle strength of a weak woman's body, but she was able to push back due to the power of the divine protection from the hero summoning.

“Hero of the Alliance! Today will be the day I defeat you and offer your

damn head to Nakshatra-sama!”

“Tch… Too bad I don't have any intention of dying here.”

Finding his angry roar from close proximity to be rather annoying, Hatsumi slipped past both Mauhario and his sword and she pushed it to the side. And then as she went to slash at him, contrary to her expectations, having sensed the incoming danger, Mauhario broke away in the opposite direction.

Mauhario corrected his stance at a place that the tip of her blade would definitely not be able to reach. His movements were terrifyingly fast to the point where they could not be grasped… This demon swordsman was the type whose primary strength was speed. He always stood at a distance where her blade could not reach. In an instant he could leap in, close the distance and strike. With this distance between them where only he could attack, thinking about it normally, Hatsumi would be at a disadvantage.

Even so, she would not complain about it. Lightly opening her stance, she pointed her left ankle to her right heel and lowered her body. Her sword was hidden behind her neck as she held it over her right shoulder. Along with the breeze in the air, she could feel the cold metal against her skin.

She estimated there was about eight metres between her and the demon general who held his sword at the ready. The length of her blade was a little over one metre long. For that demon who specialized in speed and charging power, this was likely the ideal distance. Looking at her figure that was ready to attack at any moment, a scornful and joyous expression floated on Mauhario's face.

There was no mistaking that he judged that Hatsumi was gambling to launch herself towards him to bet on whether she would kill or be killed. That expression on his faced showed his confidence in his own victory at this sort of match… From her estimates, if she held out her blade, there was still over six metres to her opponent. It was a distance that her blade could never reach. However, this was a trivial problem for her. On the other hand, for the demon general who did not know this, it was a fatal

problem.

“DIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIE!”

The demon general let out a ferocious and violent scream filled with fighting spirit. The sound wave which was like a mass of killing intent closed in like a forewarning, however Hatsumi's heart was like perfectly still water. All information she received from the outside world had been degraded to trifling matters.

Right at this moment, the howl filled with killing intent, the demon's joy, the screams of the soldiers and her companions' panicked voices all did not cause a single ripple in her heart. And then, the hand that she would play out was...

—The Phantom Sword of the Kurikara Dharani, the Long Sword of the Morning Sun

And then, at the same time that she abruptly opened her eyes wide, she exhaled her fighting spirit and brandished the sword on her shoulder as if she intended to clear away every single demon on the other side.

In the distance behind the demon general, one could hear the sound of the wind rumbling. Betraying the expectations of each and every being present, along with that swinging blade, the demon general's lower half gruesomely tumbled over with tremendous speed. Rubbish, wind, his upper half and blood were blown away in a jumble in the opposite direction.

Without even taking a single step forward, Mauhario tasted defeat. And then, all that was left was silence. Immediately following that was the cheers of joy raised by the soldiers. There was quite the number of them who were watching the demon's defeat. However, the demons in their surroundings did not move. The reality that a demon higher ranking than themselves was defeated was thrust right before them, but first and foremost they were completely bewildered as to why he was defeated in that kind of situation.

Having yet to actually die, while still lying on the ground, Mauhario pointed a surprised gaze at Hatsumi while spewing blood from his mouth.

“Im…possible. The range of your sword was surely…”

Yes, the tip of her sword never reached the demon general's body. However, just as Hatsumi had thought to herself earlier, it was a trivial problem. Looking down coldly at the body of the demon general who would never get up again, she flicked her sword as if removing blood from it, and spoke.

“—Despite being a swordsman what are you saying? A swordsman who can only cut things within their sword's range is at most second rate right?”

Her cold declaration would send shivers down the back of any she confronted. However without even being able to feel this sensation, the demon general perished.

... Eventually, the rustling of demons and humans came to and end. It was the humans—the Alliance's victory. The cheers of joy from swordsmen and mages alike could be heard all over. It was evidence that the fighting came to an end. A short time later, the wall of soldiers opened up, and a single young man walked out from them.

He was dressed like a knight. It was the prince of the Alliance's sovereign state of Miazen, one of the Seven Swords, Weitzer Ryerzen. He then knelt at Hatsumi's feet.

“It was a magnificent fighting style. Hero-dono.”

“I thought I had told you to stop calling me a hero like that many times already. Weitzer.”

Kuchiba Hatsumi let out a disconcerted breath after hearing the overly serious and stubborn young man's flattery. However he did not pay her any mind and took her hand as he attempted to give her a kiss on the back of her hand. Perhaps it was some sort of ceremony. Hatsumi did not feel particularly bad about that action itself, but for some reason, today, she also pulled away her hand like she was running away. As Weitzer looked up at her, his clever expression became slightly disappointed.

“Hero-dono...”

“Like I was saying, Weitzer...”

And then, from the opposite direction, Hatsumi's companion, Selphy Fittney called out to them.

“It can't be helped right? Hatsumi is in fact a hero after all.”

“Even Selphy...”

“Even if you say that like its troublesome, you cannot distort reality.”

“Muuu...”

As Selphy drew that conclusion in a taciturn tone, Hatsumi let out a groan. Selphy was wearing a pale green robe with a hood pulled over her eyes and truly looked like a mage. It seemed that under that hood, her stifled laughter had started to leak out. Hatsumi then noticed that at

some point, a large shadow was standing behind Weitzer.

“So you were rejected again today, Prince.”

An awfully lively and loud voice came pouring down on Weitzer. The one standing behind him was a man who seemed to give off the image of a complete muscle man, Gaius Forvan. He slapped Weitzer's shoulder with his hand that had an old scar carved into it. Hatsumi thought that even though they were companions, he should hold back a bit when interacting with a prince, but setting that aside, it seemed that he misinterpreted Weitzer's flattery. Weitzer looked back at Gaius with a sharp gaze and bitterly narrowed his eyes.

“... It's not like I was particularly rejected.”

“Hooou? From what I've seen, I think that's always been the case though?”

“Kuu...”

As Gaius spoke like he was playing dumb, Weitzer's eyes showed just a little bit of irritation.

“I-It's not like I hate Weitzer you know? It's just that I'm not used to having that kind of thing done to me. Or rather than feeling like I'm not used to it...”

“But you know? It certainly looked like the behaviour of someone who disliked it.”

“Gaius, will you be quiet?—Hero-dono. It is because I genuinely respect you...”

“Both of you, don't go troubling Hatsumi like that.”

Selphy offered her candid opinion in a taciturn tone. However the two of them seemed to still have things they wanted to say. They both had a dissatisfied expression as they replied with a 'Yes...' and a 'Yeeeeah.'

“Well... At any rate, good work everyone.”

Hatsumi raised her voice in appreciation to them. With those considerate words, she raised her hand telling them not to reply, and the

three of them each pleasantly nodded.

“But, it's surprising that there weren't as many as we thought there would be.”

Hatsumi knit her brows as she was not quite satisfied. Selphy then replied to her.

“That's because only one of the three armies of demons showed up this time.”

“Like I thought, the demon army we defeated just now was nothing but a sacrificial stone.”

Right now, there were three demon armies assaulting the Alliance. They had just defeated one, but there was still two other demon armies left and their scale was exceptionally larger than the one they just fought.

“But isn't it fine? We got a good result out of today's fight after all.”

“The enemy Hero-dono defeated just now was a demon general. Asking for more military gains than that would simply be aiming too high.”

“But...”

“Hatsumi, leave it at that. If you say any more than we would lose our position after having such a hard time until Hatsumi came along.”

“Yes. Until you came along, a single demon army was enough to push back the Alliance army. The moment you stood on the battlefield, not only were we able to push them back, but we were even able to fight against the reinforcements that came after them. And today...”

“We crushed one of those three armies and killed one of their generals. It was all because of Hero-dono's power.”

“Ah? All because of that? Then what about the ones I defeated?”

“The fact that we were able to crush the demon army, that we were able to defeat the demon general and that Gaius defeated the demons is all thanks to Hero-dono.”

Weitzer bluntly declared this before Gaius. Seeing that curt manner of

speaking, Gaius' eyes were filled with anger. Seeing that it was probably going to turn into another fight, Hatsumi let out a sigh and changed the subject.

“Weitzer. We only won because we had prepared sufficient forces for the battle. It isn't just all thanks to me right? Besides, the hard part is yet to come.”

“... That's right isn't it.”

The only one who spoke up in agreement was Selphy. The demons they defeated this time were led by a demon general who was the type who was confident in his own strength. Thus, he used his army by leaving it simply all too individual strength. Because they only attacked monotonously, he was a relatively easy opponent to deal with.

After Hatsumi stood on the battlefield, they overturned their unfavourable situation and gained superiority over the demons. However, reinforcements arrived shortly after and brought the situation back to an equilibrium. The general leading the reinforcements was one who laid out proper plans and made fighting difficult. If it was not for those reinforcements, they would have been able to retake their territory much earlier. Seeing Hatsumi make a difficult expression as she thought about it, Weitzer spoke to her with an expression on his face like that kind of thing was completely worthless.

“As long as Hero-dono is here, something like a demon army is nothing to fear.”

“That's how it is. There's also me too.”

Gaius powerfully struck his chest as he brimmed with overconfidence as he always did. This time, not only Weitzer, but Selphy also pointed a sharp gaze towards him. In contrast to their high spirits, Hatsumi had a slightly gloomy expression on her face.

“... Hey, what does everyone think I am?”

And then as if she just remembered something...

“Ah, you can't reply by saying a hero okay?”

The three of them then exchanged glances with each other, and then each gave her their own reply.

“If not a hero, then an extraordinarily beautiful swordswoman right?”

“As for race, a human woman would be about it.”

After Gaius and Selphy gave their answers, Weitzer put his fist to his heart with an extremely serious expression and looked at Hatsumi.

“Hero-dono, is our princess.”

“—Hee!?... Weitzer, that kind of thing is super embarrassing though.”

“Hohooou! However, it doesn't seem like you hated him saying that, little princeeeeeess!”

“Even Gaius!? Geez...”

Having such embarrassing things said right to her face, Hatsumi's face had become as red as the setting sun. However, she then immediately hung her head like she was somehow dispirited.

—That was not what she had wanted to hear. Selphy got closer and knelt down, looking up at her eyes which shook with anxiety.

“Does not having memories make you anxious after all?”

“... Isn't it obvious? I can only remember my name and sword skills you know? There's no way I wouldn't be anxious.”

The hero summoned by the Alliance, Kuchiba Hatsumi, only had memories from the moment she was in the room she was summoned to... In other words, all memories of her life before she was a hero were missing. To sum it up, she had amnesia. She didn't know what she had been doing up until this point, who she was or what she wanted to do. The only things she knew was that her own name was Kuchiba Hatsumi and the sword techniques that she used. Because of that, even now, the anxiety drove her to feel like her feet were not touching the ground. Gaius then walked up to her, and slapped her shoulder in a friendly manner.

“We're here for you. Right?”

“That's, true, but...”

“Hero-dono. If you do not have memories, then it's fine to just make them from hereon out, together with us.”

“Weitzer...”

Even after receiving those kind words and Weitzer's gentle smile, she could not get rid of her anxiety. Then, as if to make public the embarrassing secrets of another person, Gaius cupped both his hand around his mouth.

“Ooooh, Weitzer's corny speech has starteeeeed!”

Weitzer stood behind him and quietly drew his sword from its sheathe. After glancing briefly at her companions who were acting happily in a moment of victory, Hatsumi looked up at the sky.

“...”

She had lost her memories. But once in a while, she would see a scene that she believed to take place before she came to this world in her dreams. It was always the same dream. There were many things that did not exist in this world, and the same person always appeared. Whenever she woke up, everything became vague and ambiguous, however this only fanned her anxiety more.

It was something she must never forget, something extremely important. She just had that feeling scorching deep within her heart like a buried fire.

# Chapter 1

## To the Saadias Alliance

—There is a clue regarding the hero summoning ritual in the Saadias Alliance.

Suimei had found this information in the book Felmenia brought to him. And so, with Felmenia, Lefille and Liliana in tow, he left the capital city of the Nelferian Empire, Filas Philia, and was now on a journey to the northwest of the continent where the Saadias Alliance was situated. Right now, they were shaking about in a carriage headed towards the Alliance from the Empire. Though it wasn't actually a horse drawn carriage. With large horns and long fur, a creature about the size of an elephant called a cowhorn was pulling the large carriage—but setting that aside.

The modern magician, Yakagi Suimei was in a corner of a room in the cowhorn pulled vehicle lecturing Felmenia and Liliana about magic. He spread out papers he had prepared across the wooden floor of the carriage while Felmenia and Liliana quietly listened to him talk. On the other hand, having only begun learning magic and being a complete amateur, these kinds of talks were simply on a different dimension from what Lefille understood. She was on her own behind Suimei humming a song while polishing her sword.

“—And that's about it for that topic. Shall we move on to the next?”

“Yes.”

“It's, alright.”

After hearing a response from both Felmenia and Liliana, Suimei moved on to the next topic.

“So, what I'll be talking about from here is liturgical techniques from my world's magic and its practical use. Liturgy is a technique that takes the complex processes to use magic and simplifies them into simple actions and short chants. Moreover, it optimizes the processes and shortens the

time it takes to use magic. It shortens long chants into abbreviated ones, takes chants which are hard to pronounce and changes them into gestures, replaces the need for difficult movements with a chant, among other similar things.”

After pausing briefly to take a breather, Suimei continued.

“The magic that I use with the most frequency is an easy to understand magic which uses liturgy, my attack magic. By only snapping my fingers, the effect manifests.”

“It's that right?”

As if to connect those words, Felmenia snapped her fingers. Following along, Suimei lightly snapped his fingers and sent the paper in his hand flying with a light shock.

“Whenever I used it in this world, everyone was excessively surprised.”

“In our world, magic is fundamentally something that is invoked by chanting a spell or keyword and requires the aid of the elements after all.”

“Because if that is not performed, using magic so simply, completely opposes the principles of magic in this world, anyone would be surprised.”

Having only touched upon magic that defied conventional wisdom, Liliana was still not used to new theories and knit her brows as she tilted her head to the side. Chants were something absolutely necessary. Being taught that this was unchangeable common knowledge, there was probably no way they could come up with something like liturgy.

“Attack magic. Originally, the effect was manifested after chanting the spell, but reciting the chant was replaced with the action of snapping my fingers, so after snapping my fingers, the spell which was brought out by a chant is called forth and the same effect can be pulled out.”

The two of them were fluently writing the contents of what Suimei was talking about onto paper. After seeing that they finished writing, Suimei continued his explanation on liturgy.

“By throwing away the waste, reducing the information and simplifying the necessary actions, magic becomes easier to use. Even in a situation where one is unable to speak or their actions are limited, magic becomes possible to use. And this part is quite important, but magic with many processes can also have their activation time reduced.”

“Suimei. How do you shorten it?”

“For example, say you have a chant which requires five verses to invoke magic. The time it takes to chant five verses is the time needed to invoke the magic. But say we replace two of those verses with a gesture and the use of a magic item as we recite the chant—”

“I see. The time to use the magic is reduced by two verses right?”

“That's right. Liturgy provides that kind of advantage except for circumstances where the actions you can take are limited.”

Hearing this, Felmenia and Liliana both let out a “Hooou...” in admiration.

“But Suimei-dono. Even if you shorten the time with liturgy, entropy still does not change right?”

“Yeah. Exactly.”

“Felmenia, what do you mean?”

“Shortening time using liturgy is different from modern magic theory where the time is shortened by mixing together different magic systems. The action of chanting is only substituted for another action, which means that in essence, what is being done is the same.”

“I see...”

Suimei had previously explained this to Felmenia and it seemed she did in fact properly understand it. It was not all that long ago that he began teaching her magic. Her ability to understand so quickly made him agree with her moniker as a genius mage.

“Well that's the basic structure of it, but let's go back over two thousand years ago in my world. At that time, in a western region, it was popular to

perform speeches before congress and the masses to fascinate the audience and persuade others. Politics were taken care of in this manner as they yearned to guide their society down a better path. It became an indispensable technique for these performances to skillfully control intonation to convince others they were speaking the truth during their speeches. There was another technique that was also important, do you know what it is?”

“If it is about speaking, then it would be the ability to memorize the contents of the speech?”

“Yes, you're on the mark. To be specific, it's the ability to correctly pull out the memorized contents from one's head, mnemonics.”

Magic and memorization. The two were unable to see the connection and were making faces like they didn't really get it. Carefully taking that into consideration, Suimei continued his explanation.

“For example, when you're trying to memorize something, performing some other movement while doing so can make it easier to memorize. When you then perform a similar action you end up remembering what you had been memorizing at the time more easily. This kind of thing happens right?”

“Yes. I've heard of this.”

“Not being able to memorize something is usually attributed to having poor memory, but that does not necessarily mean that the brain does not remember it. People are able to learn things even when they are in an unconscious state right? Simply put, not being able to remember something only means one was unable to pull the information out of their head. In short, the actions I was talking about before are meant to support the brain and make pulling out that information easier.”

After pausing once more, Suimei returned to the original topic.

“And so, mnemonics will end up developing as a technique to pull out memories and end up in a state where it can even be incorporated into magic. Well, to put it simply, performing an action will call forth your memories, that stored information, so in other words—”

Felmenia continued from where Suimei left off.

“If we hypothesize that the information stored in one's head is the use of a magic spell, then not just with chanting, but with motion or gestures one would be able to draw out information about that magic, right?”

“Yeah, that's the way to think about it.”

Suimei gave a very satisfied nod to Felmenia's answer. Using the action used when memorizing the magic as a key, when one once more performs it properly, as if pulling that memory from within their head, they would be able to directly invoke the magic. After listening to this, Liliana made an expression like she was suffering.

“It sounds like, an erratic story, to me.”

“That certainly may be true. However, in the explanation just now I rushed from the theory straight to its established result. There was quite a lot of research in between to complete it.”

“Muuu....”

As Suimei explained further, Liliana groaned like she still wasn't fully convinced. Certainly what he had told them, taken to the extreme, was that just be memorizing magic they would be able to use it. Liliana must have been stuck on the point that without ever putting it into practise, just recalling something meant that it would only come up within her own mind, there was no chance to convey it into the physical world.

“It seems that you're still clinging onto the physical material. That kind of thing materializes due to phenomena using unnoticeable mysterious energy, mysterious vectors and mysterious laws. These are the 'mysteries' that we aim to dispel... Don't worry about it, once you start touching on it, you'll begin to understand gradually.”

Persuading Liliana with those words, Suimei brought his lecture to an end.

“So that's how it is. This arrangement and replacement of mystical actions, the materialization of a magic circle, Notarikon, Temurah and Gematria among others, are techniques to produce the ritual oneself and

then analogize it. This is called liturgical techniques, or in short, liturgy.”

As Suimei finished his explanation, he asked if the two of them still needed more details.

“Any questions?”

Liliana then raised her hand.

“Magic circles... The one Suimei uses, when a magic circle is suddenly drawn, I want to hear about it.”

“Sorry, I'll talk about that another time. It is better to have a firm understanding of liturgy before moving on to the materialization of a magic circle.”

“That's, regrettable.”

Liliana seemed to be quite interested in that as she sulked.

“That's how it is, I prepared a fill in the blanks test. It has gaps on the main points of everything I talked about today except for liturgy.”

As Suimei handed them some paper, Felmenia looked at it with a doubtful face.

“Suimei-dono. I think it is better to learn by practical use but... In this case, it would mean actually implementing liturgy...”

“That may be so, but we can't put a whole lot into practical use within this carriage right? To do that kind of thing we need a properly prepared location, I prepared this because it is convenient to do here.”

“Well that is certainly...”

Felmenia agreed, but she didn't seem completely satisfied. Just as she said, just by doing this kind of test it didn't really give them any proper sense for what they were learning.

“I thought you would understand faster if you thoroughly remembered the details of the theory but... Teaching people is quite difficult huh.”

As if something heavy was sitting atop his head, Suimei hung his head down like he was troubled. Because he had never officially taken on

students before, he was not used to teaching others. There was more or less a single exception to this, but that one was able to use magic considerably beforehand and was more of an assistant who used peculiar magic. This was the first time he taught anything starting from the absolute foundations. As expected, he couldn't escape having a hard time with it once in a while. Because of this, he had the two of them give him their opinions all the time though.

“Roger that. I'll think about something more in the line of practical use, so for now have a go at this.”

“Understood.”

“I feel like treating this pure white paper by just throwing it away, is a waste though...”

For quite a while now Suimei had been using the white sheets of paper quite liberally. Liliana lifted one up and frowned. In this world, pure white paper was quite valuable. Unlike the other world they had yet to have an industrial revolution. The machinery to create paper hadn't been created and no mass production lines existed.

*(Is this also because of magic throwing its weight around...?)*

In the other world, when it came to materials to write magic circles on, rather than white paper, specially manufactured parchment was judged to be better and more valuable. But in this world dominated by magic culture, rather than the easy to mass produce white paper, that kind of parchment was possibly much more mainstream. Before long, Felmenia and Liliana started their fill in the blanks test. Suimei span around on his butt and faced Lefille.

“Taking a short break?”

“We finished off one level after all. How much longer do you think we'll be in this vehicle?”

“The fortress on the national border should be coming into sight soon, it shouldn't be much longer.”

“It's been long. My ass hurts after sitting on a wooden floor for three

days.”

“Suimei-kun. That's vulgar.”

As Suimei made a sour face, Lefille put on a smile and flicked him lightly on the forehead.

“Owowow... Anyways, even though we're close to the border, why have we not seen anything resembling a mountain?”

While rubbing his forehead, Suimei stuck his head out the window and looked towards their destination. Just as he had said, there was no mountain range or even a small hill in the direction they were going. In general, most national borders used a mountain range as a boundary. It was typical to place the bordering fortress within a valley which broke up the mountain range. It was a necessity to make it difficult for neighbouring countries to invade them, but strangely enough, Suimei could not spot any mountain ranges. While Suimei basked in the wind showing signs of skepticism, Lefille showed him a refreshing smile like it was a trivial matter.

“Beyond here there is a large fissure in the earth called the Valley which Peeks into Evil. This serves as the border between the Empire, and the Alliance and the self governed states.”

“A fissure?”

“In short it is a deep valley carved in the earth. It is said that it was created when the spirit who formed the counterpart of the Goddess' servant Ishaktney lost its temper and tore open the earth.”

“Hou...”

Suimei let out a breath with great interest. These kinds of stories tended to spike his inquisitiveness. The image of something the scale of the large belt carved across Africa came into his mind.

“At its deepest sections one is unable to see the bottom at all, so a bridge fortress was built at the shallowest section serving as the fortress at the national border.”

“... Hm? Does that mean there's only a single fortress?”

“The bridge fortress belongs to the Alliance. The Empire's fortress is basically enclosed within it. What we'll be seeing is that.”

Lefille gestured for a paper and pen from Suimei and then began drawing a picture to demonstrate. Across a black line which represented the fissure in the earth, she drew three bridges which crossed over it connected to a single fortress. As if to seal off the path leading out of it, the fortress had the shape of a semi-circle. After the two of them talked about it briefly, Lefille remembered something and changed the topic.

“Come to think of it, before we departed, we heard a rumour that the victims of the coma incident regained consciousness right?”

“Aah, that? It would have been fine if they were put to sleep a little longer though.”

Suimei made a bitter face as his plans were all thrown out of order. For him, he wanted the nobles who were victims of the coma incident to remain asleep until the memories of the incident became dim in the populace and they didn't see it as a problem anymore. It would have been fine for them to be dead to the world.

Though due to the fact that the citizens of the Imperial Capital had their perception of Liliana changed, this ended up not being an absolute necessity, but it would have been better to make sure they didn't take any action. On the other hand, Lefille was looking at Suimei like he was someone really shady as he talked about the victims of the incident in a rather reprehensible manner.

“... I think of it from time to time but, you are quite merciless, or rather cruel huh.”

“Hm? I'm a magician you know? I'm not a respectable human being.”

“Nevertheless, I don't think that's something you should be saying.”

“Well, that may be so. But doing this kind of thing at this point in time, I'll end up acting considerably selfish. You can tell from when I got Liliana pardoned right? At the end of the day, I'm the type of person who

doesn't care how some unrelated guy ends up groaning over my actions.”

“Though wouldn't you just make people angry if you unreasonably hurt them?”

“I know that I'm being inconsistent. Well, that was more or less resolved before I came to this world. I believe that I'm well aware of what is born from the results of that inconsistency.”

“I see.”

Suimei was gazing at Lefille like he resigned himself. Perhaps having grasped his sentiments, Lefille did not continue questioning him about it.

“It's about that time where I faced a major setback. That thing I touched on lightly after we defeated Rajas.”

“Umu, I'm quite interested in it. I'd like you to tell me about it next time without fail.”

“I'll have to decline since I don't even want to remember it.”

“Fufufu.”

Suimei was very puzzled seeing Lefille let out a light laugh with a smile. He then moved the conversation back to the original topic away from this talk filled with his weaknesses that he couldn't possibly continue for his own dignity's sake.

“Well, the people of the Imperial Capital had their awareness changed, so Liliana should be fine anyways.”

“Speaking of being fine, I wonder if Reiji-kun and the others are alright?”

Lefille casually moved the topic onto Reiji and the others. They currently planned to stay in the Empire and ended up splitting up with Suimei, but...

“Is there something wrong?”

“No, it's just that they did end up raising a disturbance in the Imperial Capital. I just have apprehensions that they might be put at a

disadvantage because of it.”

Lefille's concerns were natural. Suimei had Reiji and the others take a role in resolving the incident. It was quite the unreasonable role of stalling Graziella's party. In the end it all turned out well, but taking into account that they got in the way of an investigation and ended up having a scuffle in the Imperial Capital, it was natural that feelings of anxiety would be born from the possibility that their position in the Empire may be perilous. However, Suimei, who put up the plan in the first place, was surprisingly making a carefree expression.

“Suimei-kun?”

“Yeah. That will somehow work out. Before we left I played out my hand after all.”

“Did you do something?”

“Well yeah. An eentsy-teensy simple thing.”

Suimei was pressing and separating his thumb and index finger on one hand while making a very small crafty smile like a brat playing a prank.

“I get it. If you've done something then there isn't a problem.”

Perhaps because she heard that Suimei had dealt with it, Lefille's concerns were cleared away as she returned a relieved nod to his evil smile. Just like that the two of them amused themselves as they talked for a while when Felmenia raised her hand vigorously.

“Suimei-dono! I've finished writing my answers!”

“Oh, you're already done?”

Looking at Felmenia's appeal and her smile, Suimei drew nearer and received the paper from her.

“Fumu fumu. Un. Well it's filled in nicely. Liliana, how are you doing?”

“Just, a little more.”

As one would expect, it was still quite hard for Liliana who only just started to study his world's magic. While wrinkling her brows, she was

scuffling with the paper using her pen. Her figure while she was groaning with a 'Muu...' as she tried her best was somehow charming. On the other hand, after receiving well over a passing mark from Suimei, Felmenia made a grand smile as she started to appeal to him for something.

“Suimei-dono! Suimei-dono!”

“What is it?”

“If you think I have done well, then please praise me!”

“Ha? Heh?”

While Suimei was completely bewildered, Felmenia was making an extremely cheerful face. If she sprouted dog ears and a tail, her ears would surely be pointed straight up and her tail would swing around as she was overflowing with vitality. As he sidled up to her like he was about to tease her, something suddenly pulled on the back of Suimei's collar vigorously.

“—Gueh.”

A shriek without an ounce of cuteness escaped from Suimei's mouth. The next thing he knew, Lefille, who was behind him, had grabbed the back of his collar and was gripping it tightly. Even though he didn't actually do anything yet... As Suimei looked at Lefille implying this, she focused her gaze in Felmenia's direction.

“Wh-what are you doing Lefille!? Are you trying to get in my way!?”

“Yeah that's right. Felmenia-jou, you're clinging to Suimei-kun a little too much.”

“Th-that's not, particularly...”

Felmenia was at a loss for words, Lefille then continued as if pushing in for an answer.

“You can't say that you haven't been. You've been sticking to Suimei-kun at every single opportunity have you not?”

“I-It's not like I particularly have an ulterior motive!”

“Even so, it's not allowed. I can't overlook it.”

While the two talked about it, their gazes crashed against one another. As Suimei winced while looking at of their two faces, Felmenia suddenly began fluttering around her hands in a panic.

“Just what is wrong with it!? When Lefille became small did you not also spend a lot of time with Suimei-dono!? Besides, you were having a fun looking conversation with Suimei-dono just now!”

“I-I was just genuinely talking to Suimei-kun about our plans from here on out! It was nothing more or less than that!”

“Then for me it is also no more or less than that!”

“You still can't! Right now your wicked thoughts are completely transparent! Just get away already!”

“I w-i-l-l n-o-t!”

In the middle of throwing her tantrum, Felmenia leaped into the air. Naturally the one she flew towards was not Lefille, but Suimei—

“Menia, what are you!?”

“What the!?”

Suimei was completely flustered as Felmenia clung to him like she would absolutely not let go.

“Suimei-dono! Please praise me!”

“Felmenia-jou! You can receive praise without having to do this kind of thing right!? Stop that disgraceful behaviour!”

Lefille pulled on the collar she was still holding and tried to tear Suimei away. On the other hand, Suimei, who was being whirled around being pulled on and climbed on, tried to mediate between the two of them, but...

“C-calm down! Both of you just step ba.... Uuu!?”

Because Felmenia was clinging on to him, her bountiful chest was pressing against him. Due to the unexpected soft sensation, Suimei

became conscious of it and started to get flustered.

“Wai, this is bad! Oi, Menia! This is bad right now! It's become extremely bad so get away quickly!”

This was bad for Suimei as a teenage boy. However, being completely ignorant of this, Felmenia looked at him with teary eyes and sniffed up her runny nose.

“Suimei-donoo~. Even Suimei-dono is saying that kind of thing~?”

“Don't grumble about it! What's with you!? L-Lefi help me out h...”

“If Felmenia-jou is going to resort to that method, then I can also...”

“Wha, Lefille-san!? Why did it end up like this!?”

Lefille pressed up against Suimei's back with her hands on his shoulders and was completely glued to him. Being clung on to from both front and back, the three of them were now all bunched together.

“Wai-, both of you!? It's painful! Painful!!”

Suimei was no longer able to endure it and yelled out, but the two of them weren't listening to him at all as they held on to his body like their lives depended on it. Discerning that it was useless to try to talk to the two of them, he quickly resorted to appealing to someone else to escape this crisis.

“Liliana! Save me!”

Suimei earnestly appealed to her, but...

“Suimei, that's what is called 'If you cut somebody, your body will be wet with blood.'”

“What's with that!?”

“It's a proverb, from this world.”

Suimei guessed it had the same meaning as getting one's just desserts. However that's all Liliana had to say as she ignored his plea. She was still focused on her paper and did not even look at him.

“Oi, wai-, you're not going to save me!?” “I'm still, busy with the test.”

“No way, that won't get affected by just helping me a little right!?”

As Suimei kept hounding her, Liliana let out a deliberately loud exasperated sigh. And then...

“Suimei. The moment Lefille returned to her original form, this should have been obvious. Not being able to deal with it despite this, is Suimei's fault.”

“How should this have been obvious!?”

“That part of Suimei, is just like the Colonel...”

In the end, Liliana criticized Suimei as she looked at him with a half closed eye. Meanwhile, Felmenia and Lefille's battle was still continuing.

“Suimei-dono!”

“Suimei-kun!”

“I got it! I got it so both of you calm down a little! If you keep causing a ruckus it'll bother the other customers!”

... In the end, Felmenia and Lefille did not calm down until they arrived at the fortress on the national border.

★

In the northwest of the continent where Suimei and the others were currently located, though the temperature was cold enough to be appropriate for winter, there wasn't the dampness or dryness of the other seasons, so the climate was at a relative equilibrium and was quite calm. However, it was said that dragons lived in the craggy mountains and forests filled with black trees. There was quite a lot of land which was too harsh for people to live on, so compared to other countries, the amount of land untouched by human hands was relatively large.

After disembarking from the cowhorn drawn vehicle in front of the national border, they crossed the bridge and without any problems, were let through the fortress on the Alliance's side and were now visiting their first town of their first country in the Saadias Alliance.

Clouds were scattered in the sky, it wasn't quite a perfectly clear sky, but

it was still nice to look at. It was the type of weather that was just good. The wind blowing around was cool despite it being the season in this world's calendar where it should be quite hot, it was rather relaxing.

The first alliance town they came across was unlike the Imperial Capital and the other towns in the Empire where houses were coloured based on section. Without any sort of colour coding, the buildings were vibrant.

Even the shape of the buildings varied with triangular roofs, flat roofs and gabled roofs among others. Overall it gave the town a gentle atmosphere. The space between houses was also quite wide and there was a lot of greenery and trees planted between them. One could see the flat shaved stone which formed the pavement once in a while, but the amount of nature present was considerably large. This could also be attributed to the fact that they were still far from the centre of the country, but Suimei felt like the Alliance town gave off more of a pastoral feeling than a fantasy one.

“So this is an Alliance town.”

Looking at the ornaments decorating the buildings and the town as well as at the people living out their lives, Suimei was somewhat moved. The Alliance town showed aspects that were different from Astel and Nelferia here and there. As if to add on to his impression, Liliana chimed in as well.

“To be precise, it is a town of one of the Alliance countries, Grafille. The Alliance is unlike Astel, Nelferia and the self governed states in that it is made up of a gathering of five different countries.”

“So this would be part of one of those confederate nations huh.”

While talking about such things with Liliana, Suimei took a casual look to the side and spotted Felmenia looking around restlessly at their surroundings just as he was. Suimei couldn't help but call out to his fellow comrade who was entranced by the appearance of the houses and the magic lamps hanging along the roads.

“It seems this is also unusual for Menia right?”

“Ah, yes. This is my first time in the Alliance, I was just a little curious... At any rate, the Alliance is quite different from Astel and Nelferia isn't it?”

Felmenia acted a little bashful like one of her embarrassing sides was spotted. Liliana then cut in and began explaining.

“Since long ago, it was a trait of the people of the Alliance to live in harmony with nature and the local flora and fauna, so unlike the Empire, they don't have many structures or products. But the Alliance feels somewhat relaxing, I like it.”

Certainly, it seemed like a place where people preferred to be around nature. This also applied to Liliana who was stretching her arms widely while taking a deep breath, but the people of the town seemed like they were all relaxing as well. Suimei then looked at Lefille. She had a composed appearance that wasn't all that different from her usual self.

“It doesn't seem like this is the first time for Lefi huh.”

“It's because I've come to the Alliance before when I was still a child. This isn't my first time here.”

“So it hasn't really changed since that time?”

“Yeah. I believe that time flows at a carefree pace in places like the Alliance so there aren't that many changes.”

Lefille was talking as she lightly raised the brim of her wide hat. Perhaps she was feeling nostalgia from her previous visit. In her adult form, the same as ever, Suimei saw all her gestures as quite elegant. Lefille then dropped her gaze down towards Liliana.

“Setting that aside, Lily is quite knowledgeable about the Alliance.”

“To memorize the state of affairs of neighbouring countries, is the duty of the Intelligence Branch. Moreover, I infiltrated it before with the Colonel.”

“That is to say, secret intelligence activities?”

Liliana gave a nod to Felmenia's question. It seemed that due to her time in the army she had quite a lot of experience. With Liliana's magic

abilities, there were many things they could accomplish after all. Despite being rather young, she was a girl who had survived through quite the number of scenes of carnage.

Suimei and the others continued to talk about the Alliance as they walked down the streets. Suddenly, off the side of the stone pavement, they could hear some kind of speech being given in a loud voice. Turning their gaze towards it, they could see two men in white religious garments complaining to an audience about the Goddess' name.

“Oh children of man born in this world! Now is the time to throw away your faith in Alshuna!”

“Precisely now that the demons are approaching, everybody must unite not only in front of the menace closing in before our eyes, but also to release ourselves from all the fetters which bind us!”

The two men in religious garments were giving a speech while alternating between each other skillfully. They were making grand gestures and had quite the sense of presence. However, there weren't many people stopping to listen, the crowd at the side of the street was quite sparse. It was probably because the contents of their speech showed contempt for the Goddess Alshuna who had the deepest following in this world. Most people likely saw them as shady as they glanced at them and walked by.

“... What's with that?”

Suimei stopped and made an odd face as he tilted his head to the side. Following up on that, Felmenia and Lefille also looked at them with a puzzled expression.

“I wonder... It is the first time I've seen that kind of thing.”

“Same for me. Good grief, to think that they would criticize the Goddess in this kind of public place... To do so upon the land blessed by the Goddess is simply outrageous.”

Lefille was seething. She must have taken great offence. Though the majority of the people present likely shared her mental state in their

minds. Faith in the Goddess Alshuna and the teachings of the Salvation Church served as a foundation for the people of this world after all. However, thinking of it like that, Suimei thought that people giving out this kind of speech in such a public place wouldn't be possible—

Liliana then narrowed her sleepy left eye even further as she gazed at them.

“That's, the anti-goddess religious organization.”

“Anti-goddess religious organization?”

“It's a religious group that has been gaining followers in the five Alliance countries as well as the self governed states. Their fundamental teachings largely emulate the teaching of the Salvation Church, but they adopt the principle that freeing themselves from the divine protection of the Goddess will allow the seed known as humanity to flourish, so they urge the people to call off their belief in the Goddess. They largely criticize the widespread use of magic and the oracles.”

“For this world where magic civilization is mainstream, you'd think that kind of thing would get weeded out right away though.”

“It seems that there are actions being taken with regards to that. I hear that once in a while they end up in skirmishes with the believers of the Salvation Church. However, they are still unable to sever the enrolment of new members.”

“Fuu...?”

It seemed that just by opposing the system, the organization had just that much more of an attractive lustre to it. Iconoclast-like people who derived a sense of purpose out of being part of a large, powerful crowd acting as they pleased against the status-quo came out everywhere one goes. There were also nations which created such organizations to harass enemy nations, so it wasn't completely baffling to Suimei, but taking into consideration the status-quo of this world which revolved around the Goddess, it was inevitable that carelessness would bring them in opposition to pretty much every country in the world. That was probably why this kind of organization came out after the chaos of the demons

invading had started—

“The Goddess is not protecting us! For her own benefit! To guarantee her own interests! She is only pretending to protect the world!”

“The words of the Goddess are a poison which corrodes humanity! If you listen to her words blindly as you are now, humanity will not be able to flourish anymore and remain the slaves of the Goddess for all of eternity! Therefore, now is the time that humanity must flee from atop the Goddess' palm!”

Suimei was still looking at the two of them making their speech in a strong tone while closely scrutinizing them.

“... They're not denying the Goddess' existence but saying to call off the belief in her. Since the existence of magic proves the existence of the Goddess, it probably ended up like this.”

However, this kind of thing was occasionally used to prop up the existence of another god by passing down teachings that just sounded good. To pull down the belief in a one god by raising up a belief in another organization, it was faster and easier to just create another god.

But from what Suimei could hear, they weren't really urging people to change their stance on the teachings they were already following, so he couldn't tell what kind of benefit they were trying to get out of this. All he could feel was that those words, 'we cannot believe in the Goddess,' and 'we must run away,' held quite the sense of reality.

“Suimei-dono? Is something the matter?”

“No, it's nothing. So? What should we do from... Well there's one thing to do before saying that. Shall we do something about lunch first?”

Liliana, Felmenia and Lefille agreed with Suimei's proposition.

“I am also, hungry.”

“Then where shall we go...”

“It's right in the middle of lunchtime so everywhere must be crowded. Shall we just look around that area and pick one at random?”

The three others nodded to Lefille's suggestion to just find a place at random. After splitting up into groups to look around at the local restaurants, they fortunately chanced on a place with vacant seats and the four of them went in after Lefille. Just as they saw from the outside, there seemed to be seats available, and they were guided to a table that was a little large for the four of them.

At a glance it looked like a regular restaurant largely made of wood that one could find anywhere. But looking closely there were empty barrels everywhere. The tables and chairs were made out of repurposed barrels and the magic lamps were also made out of empty bottles. It was quite the elaborate interior design that wouldn't be outdone by even the modern world.

They eventually asked for whatever the waiter who came to take their order recommended, and before long the food was brought over to them.

... A little while later, Suimei and the others were relishing their food and taking a short break as they had some water while casually looking around at the other seats. Due to it being lunchtime, the restaurant was dreadfully packed with a whole lot of commotion going around as the crowd continued to jam in. Suimei noticed that those energetic customers all had a common characteristic.

“As expected of a place called the country of swords, there aren't many mages huh...”

From what he could see, even those who didn't appear to be swordsmen or warriors also had a sword at their waist. In comparison, the ratio of mages to swordsmen in the Empire was much higher. Over there it was somewhere around five or six out of ten people who were mages. But here it was maybe two or three out of ten. After Suimei expressed his thoughts as he looked at their surroundings, Lefille and Felmenia responded to him.

“Compared to other countries, the Alliance is a culture that respects swords greatly. Though they weren't summoned heroes, there is a history of hero swordsmen who liberated the lands in this area from the demons

for the sake of the people.”

“To add on to that. The Alliance and the self governed states treat social status a little differently from Astel and the Empire. Rather than the important officials of a town, the swordsmen have a much higher social status and position.”

“Hoou, so as long as one holds a sword they'll receive favourable treatment?”

“No, that is not quite the case. To name yourself a swordsman in the Alliance you need proper authorization to do so. You can't call yourself a swordsman until you receive permission from the government of one of the five Alliance countries or from the Twilight Pavilion.”

“So in short, right now Lefille can't call herself a swordswoman.”

“That's how it is. If I did so here it would have to be self-proclaimed.”

Suimei thought it didn't really mean anything to someone who used a sword to say they were self-proclaimed, but Lefille made a somewhat self-deprecating smile. As she did, Liliana took a bite out of a sweet pastry larger than her own face, pushed it into her cheeks, and began explaining while slowly chewing it down.

“Even so, in the Alliance, just by holding a sword, it is certain, you get better treatment.”

“How so specifically?”

“Ha~mu. Your priority, goes up. Because there is quite the number, of services in this country, when they are in a hurry, the public agencies will see you favourably, without asking questions.”

“Well that's quite wonderful huh...”

“It doesn't mean, it applies, to absolutely everyone, though. Ha~mu ha~mu.”

Even so, it was quite the thing to have priority just by holding a sword. After Liliana finished talking while entranced with the sweet pastry pressed against her cheeks, Lefille cut into the conversation.

“So taking that into account for our plans from now on, shall we go to the Alliance's sovereign state Miazen first?”

“To the sovereign state?”

“The guild master of the Twilight Pavilion in the capital city there is an acquaintance of my father. If we rely on them as an intermediary, we should be able to arrange all sorts of things including the authorization to be called a swordsman.”

“Ha~mu. That, sounds good.”

“It is said that if you don't have a swordsman as a companion while walking around the Alliance, you should go hire one. I also agree with Lefille.”

“Well then, the investigation will have to wait until after that...”

Suimei talked as he brought some more food to his mouth. It was certainly true that he was in a hurry to return to his world, but it wasn't to the extent where he would be negligent of other matters. If he was to progress forwards, it was better to have an absolutely firm foothold. While talking some more and relishing their food, a waitress approached their table with a troubled expression on her face. She was a fair bit older than the other waitresses and had quite the good physique. If she were wearing an apron she would look exactly like the old lady running the local lunch shop. She was probably the proprietress of this establishment.

“Could I bother you for a minute?”

“What's the matter?”

As Suimei asked, the woman let out a weak laugh and pointed towards the entrance.

“I'm sorry, but would you mind sharing your table with that person over there?”

The one standing where the proprietress was pointing was a tall dark-skinned man. He was wearing an overcoat to protect himself from sand which hid the characteristics of his body, but his arms that came out of

the overcoat were sinewy and thick. Suimei could guess that they were well tempered. He had long black hair and a peculiar embroidered bandana on his forehead. He had a scar running across his face, but rather than dangerous, he had a virile slender face which gave off a somehow sociable impression. The dark-skinned man was going 'Aah...' with a troubled voice, but he pointed a pleasant smile towards Suimei. So that the atmosphere wouldn't worsen, Lefille replied as their representative.

“Aah, we don't mind.”

“Sorry about that...”

The proprietress apologized meekly and then in a complete turn, she fired out a vigorous voice to the kitchen informing them that there was one more customer. The younger waitresses then came out with a seat and water. Opening up a space beside Suimei, the waitress set down the seat quickly and the man settled down in it.

“Aaah, sorry about coming in as you were getting excited~! After coming to this town I wanted to eat the chef's recommendation here no matter what!”

Slapping the back of his own head, the man let out a hearty laugh. He didn't give off a bad impression just from his appearance, but just as expected he seemed to have quite the sociable character. He didn't seem timid in the least and his cheerful smile was quite pleasant. The man then unexpectedly let out a timid laugh.

“Ah, but did I maybe do something bad to you lad?”

“... Hm? To me?”

Suimei didn't understand what he was talking about and cocked his head to the side. The man then suddenly put his thick arm around the back of Suimei's neck and joined shoulders like he intended to talk in secret.

*(No, I mean another man just intruded on your meal with these beauties you know? Well, one of them is just a tiny girl, but aren't I*

*completely being an extra wheel here?)*

*(Ha? N-no, I don't particularly think that you know!? Besides, those girls are just my companions...)*

*(...)*

The man let go and made an astonished face while staring at Suimei who was making excuses in a fluster. Having no idea why he was being looked at like he was something strange, Suimei spoke up with a puzzled expression.

“What is it?”

“... Nothing, I get it. You're a virgin right?”

“HAA!?”

“No, like I said, you're a virgin right?”

“Wh-what the hell are you saying after just meeting someone!?”

Suimei bolted out of his seat as he yelled in a fluster. The man was slightly taken aback by his vigour.

“Aah, sorry sorry. My honesty is my redeeming feature you see. I have a habit of saying exactly what I'm thinking.”

“That kind of habit is too much of an annoyance!!.... Ah.”

Suimei then realized that what he was saying was just proof that he was in fact a virgin.

“Aah, I see. As expected huh.”

“As expected my ass...”

Suimei writhed in agony from the man's stupidly sympathetic voice. After using all his energy yelling, he let out a long breath and looked around at his surroundings as he remained on edge. He didn't know if Liliana was even listening as she was sitting beside him while completely focused on her sweet pastry. On the other hand when he looked at Lefille, she just dodged his gaze. As for Felmenia, she was staring at Suimei fixedly.

“... Suimei-dono is, a virgin.”

“I-is that a bad thing!?”

“Ah, no, it isn't particularly bad! Absolutely, completely, eheheh...”

Suimei thought she was trying to deceive him by laughing as she somehow seemed delighted. As Suimei was beginning to boil and returned his gaze elsewhere, he met Lefille's eyes.

“Uh.”

“Ah.”

Their eyes met, and the both of them only let out a single sound. Suimei and Lefille both stiffened up in this strange atmosphere. Eventually, as if to wipe away the difficult atmosphere, Lefille cleared her throat with a slightly red face before talking.

“No, un. I think it's a good thing that Suimei-kun is a virgin.”

“What's good about it dammit...”

While still standing up, Suimei hung his head in shock. His secret (?) was revealed to everyone and he was filled with despair from the embarrassment. Sensing that the atmosphere around Suimei was stagnating, Felmenia, intending to soothe him but probably just adding oil to the flames, called out to Liliana.

“H-hey, Lily, say something to Suimei-dono too.”

It was obvious going further with this conversation would only drive Suimei deeper into desperation, it was a terrible blunder on his part to let it out. Realizing that Felmenia was calling her, Liliana looked towards Suimei and tugged lightly on his sleeve. And then—

“Suimei. Even if you're a virgin, it isn't that embarrassing you know?”

“Fuguuu—”

Before her powerful words, Suimei crumbled to his knees. Hearing such an innocent girl encourage him in such an innocent way had quite the dramatic destructive power on him. On the other hand, the one who dealt

the final blow to Suimei, returned to the conquest of her enormous pastry diligently. And then, all that was left was an air of pity hanging over Suimei's head.

“... So I'm a virgin dammit. I don't have any experience with girls dammit. None at all dammit. What do you want dammit, what's wrong with that everyone just goes virgin virgin likevirginsaresomethingtobehatedImeantherearen'tthatmanyguysmyagew wrongwiththatevenI'mlivingmylifethebestIcansodon'tscrewwithmeeeeeee

Suimei had tumbled into the abyss of his mind as he began mumbling to himself. Unable to just watch that pitiful man, the ringleader, the dark-skinned man, took on a shameless attitude as he tried to cheer Suimei up.

“... Well umm. Cheer up lad, you're still young. Life is just starting.”

“Shut up you damn ringleader...”

The man's gaze faltered as he heard Suimei voice out his resentment. And then like he suddenly realized something, he clapped his hands together.

“Oops, I haven't introduced myself yet huh? My name is Gaius Forvan. I'm a martial arts instructor in Larsheem.”

After his introduction, Suimei and the others also named themselves. Felmenia and Liliana gave out fake names while Lefille named herself normally. Though there was one among them who was in low tension acting quite slovenly, it didn't really need to be said who that was. To make up for the one who didn't want to participate in any more conversation, Felmenia spoke up.

“Speaking of Larsheem, that's a country in the northern part of the Alliance, but why are you in this town?”

“I had a job to do in the area, right now I'm in the middle of returning to Miazen.”

“To Miazen?”

“That's where my current workplace is.”

“Is that so? Right now, our current destination is also Miazen.”

“Hoou! That's quite the coincidence.”

Gaius was happily laughing at the unexpected coincidence. But he quickly stopped smiling and made a troubled expression as he gripped his jaw.

“But you guys sure are an unusual group huh.”

“We're not, spies, from another country, you know?”

Taking a short break from eating her pastry, Liliana pouted as she spoke hypocritically. Gaius returned her a laugh like he was in agreement.

“I can tell that much from looking. I mean it's a virgin lad accompanied by a bunch of women right?”

“You're still saying crap like that...”

Hearing Gaius pull back out the topic of his virginity, Suimei let out a low voice like he was cursing him. However, it seemed that Gaius was unaware that one among them was actually a former spy. Lefille then questioned Gaius.

“Then, why are we unusual?”

“Well that's cause your garments are all over the place. There's two of you wearing clothes from Astel, and a little girl wearing the frilly clothing that is popular right now in the Empire. And, Lefille right? You're from Noshias right? It's a curious combination. Well it might just be that you all just know each other, but it's also curious that you all came all the way out to the Alliance.”

It seemed that this man named Gaius was not just a simple hearty person. Suimei did not overlook that his eyes had sharpened for an instant while explaining his curiosity. Having finished making his point, Lefille continued to question him.

“Why do you think it is strange for us to come to the Alliance at this time?”

“Well, that's cause the northern part of the Alliance has become the site

of a bloody battle with the demons. It's not the kind of situation where you just come sightseeing quietly right?”

He certainly had a point, there weren't many people who would come sightseeing in a region where the danger of having demons marching on the capital could occur at any time. Lefille then replied with a somewhat meek expression.

“I have an acquaintance in the Alliance. We're headed to go meet them.”

“Hoou, is that so? If that's the case, then it makes sense.”

Suimei finally recovered and reclined in his chair and folded his arms.

“But still, a battleground huh?”

“I believe I heard the demon army was forced back right?”

“Damn right! The hero summoned by the Alliance you hear!? She just chopped up the demon general! It was quite the magnificent view.”

As Felmenia looked at him while asking, Gaius slapped his chest and replied. It was as if he was bragging about his own reliability. But seeing him act like that, Suimei knit his brows and questioned him.

“A magnificent view you say, did you see it?”

“Fuufuufuu, what is there to hide? My glorious self was just recently fighting the demons alongside Hero-sama you hear?”

As Gaius revealed this full of pride, Suimei looked at him like his story was fishy.

“Is it that old man? Are you a day-dreamer? That's quite disappointing.”

“I'm not! It's the truth I say!”

“Really?”

Suimei shrugged his shoulders like he was poking fun at Gaius, who then fired off a turbulent voice while laughing.

“Fufufufufu... and so, are you saying that I'm some sort of small fry?”

“I'm lying I'm lying it's just a joke. I can tell from the muscles on your

body that I would die instantly if you hit me.”

“That's right! Aren't muscles great!?”

Setting aside whether or not they were great, Suimei could tell that the martial artist in front of him was quite skilled. He couldn't tell specifically, but he gave off the atmosphere of a strong person. Gaius then suddenly went from his high spirited tales of heroics to letting out a complaint as he sighed.

“Well, thanks to that most of the army moved northwards.”

“Is something wrong with that?”

“Well yeah. All our forces are up there facing the demons you know?”

Suimei still didn't get what was wrong as he tilted his head to the side. Liliana then nonchalantly began explaining.

“The defence against the Empire, is thin. He likely has apprehensions on that front.”

“That's how it is. The little lady is quite well-behaved. Want me to pet you?”

“Please don't. I'll sue.”

Liliana did not seem to like being treated like a child by Gaius, she closed her eye and stuck out her tongue, then turned away from him.

“Is the relationship between the Alliance and the Empire stormy?”

“You don't know that it isn't very good? You sure are ignorant of the world huh. The Empire openly cooperates with Astel and the self governed states, but when it comes to the Alliance they are just treated as a neighbour you know? From what I've heard, the recent Empire has even been lunging at allied nations.”

“Mu...”

Gaius was speaking in astonishment, but it didn't really click with Suimei. In truth, he was fairly disinterested in the matters of this world. He had no reason to get serious about it and deny them. Liliana then

brought herself close to Suimei's ear.

*(It's, deceptive manoeuvring. Lately the Empire, has been distributing rumours of non-existent military expansion, to keep neighbouring countries, in check.)*

*(I see...)*

It was probably something she learned during her time in the Imperial Army's intelligence branch. But if that was the case, Suimei couldn't really tell why they were spreading deceptive information. Intentionally deteriorating their image outside the country would cause hostility to build up towards them from new directions which would cause depression within the country. This usually ended up causing animosity towards the government. Furthermore, not only the country they were antagonizing, but even their neighbours would start keeping an eye on them. All this at a time where demons were invading as well...

Suddenly, Gaius regained his cheerfulness.

“Well there's a bunch of serious issues, but in our ranks we have both me and Hero-sama. There's no problem.”

He was probably making this declaration to wipe away the gloomy mood that he created.

“The hero huh...”

“And the glorious me.”

“So what kind of guy is this hero?”

“Don't just ignore me... Dammit. Hero-sama who was summoned by the Alliance is, believe it or not, a tremendously beautiful swordswoman.”

As Gauis boasted full of pride, Lefille spoke up next.

“That is to say the hero summoned by the Alliance is a woman right?”

“Yeah. You're also quite the beauty, but she's a woman whose beauty can be compared to yours... Well, she's still a little immature so she falls out of my strike zone though.”

“We're not asking about your taste.”

As Suimei quipped at him, Gauis looked at him in astonishment.

“... If you keep refusing to take part in this kind of conversation, you'll be a virgin for life you know?”

“You're still saying that dammit!?”

Suimei let out a cry as he once more stood out of his seat. He managed to learn a lot, but it ended up being an inconceivable lunch.

A few days after separating from Suimei's party, in the audience hall in the castle Groschler enshrined on the south end of the Imperial Capital Filas Philia, Reiji, Mizuki and Titania were attending a meeting with the Emperor of the Nelferian Empire. And just now, that audience had ended.

“I-I'm sooo tired!”

After arriving at the noble guest room, Mizuki was the first to raise her voice. After being freed from the restrictions of that stuffy atmosphere, she threw her back onto the leather sofa and let out all the breath that she had been holding back. She was draped over it just like laundry tossed to the side on the chair. She must have found it difficult to endure the atmosphere in the audience chamber. She was still sweating from the lingering sensation of the Emperor's intense aura but she was now recoiling from the tension and completely loosened up. Reiji was also quite tired. He sat down on a red antique chair that was in the room and gave Mizuki an awkward smile.

“Mizuki, good job today.”

“Uuun...”

As expected, Mizuki replied like she was there in body but not in spirit. Reiji wasn't sure if she heard him or not when she replied, but she was still just lounging in the sofa without moving at all. Even Titania who was a veteran at this sort of thing was letting out a relieved breath.

“... It looks like even Tia is quite exhausted huh?”

“Yes. I'm somewhat more accustomed to it, but I also have some problems dealing with his Imperial Majesty the Emperor.”

“I guess his status… is just that amazing.”

“Compared to other members of royalty, his Imperial Majesty is fairly unique. He is like a beast of prey.”

“Hahaha…”

Reiji let out a dry laugh at Titania's unfavourable opinion while recalling the Nelferian Emperor. Standing before the Emperor sitting atop his throne, more than just his majestic aura, Reiji could feel a sense of danger like he was standing before a carnivorous animal. The pressure was such that he felt that if he loosened his focus even just a little, then he would be immediately devoured. It must have been the aura of a leader who lead a military nation for a long time. However—

“In the end, they didn't say anything about what happened last time huh?”

Reiji was talking about the time they came into conflict with Graziella and the others for the sake of catching the real culprit behind the coma incidents. Lefille also had apprehensions about what would happen, but contrary to their expectation, the Empire did not make a fuss of it at all and it was not touched upon once during their time in the audience chamber.

As if the turn of events was slightly different from Titania's expectations, she stroked her jaw as she spoke.

“Since it involved the hero, they probably also do not want to make a problem out of it. I believed our public summons was likely either to restrain us or to strike a deal with us, but I guess his Imperial Majesty also wanted to avoid coming into conflict with the church.”

“Is that so...? It is only my intuition, but I felt like he was the type to swoop down on somebody the moment they revealed a weakness and would chew them down to the bone.”

“Reiji-sama's intuition probably isn't wrong. Certainly when I asked father about him he had said something in the same vein.”

While Reiji and Titania were showing signs of skepticism, Mizuki cut into their conversation while still lounging on the sofa.

“About that, Suimei-kun said he sent a letter to Elliot-kun.”

“Suimei did?”

“Something about for this state of affairs, on this occasion where every nation is depending on the existence of heroes or something, you probably don't want to cause any issues between the Empire and the Salvation Church he said~. That's why, Elliot-kun who didn't want to cause problems with heroes from other nations, something something or other~.”

She trailed off and started speaking nonsensically in the end, but Reiji understood what she was trying to say. If a rumour spread that two heroes ended up fighting each other due to a blunder by the Empire, then the world would turn against them. With the current state of affairs, that would be a major landmine for them to step on. However, Reiji tilted his head to the side as he still found it rather unusual.

“... It seemed like Suimei and Elliot didn't get along at all though.”

“Even if he hates me~, he seemed quite fond of Reiji-kun so if I ask he won't flat out refuse he said~. After that won't it work out one way or

another~? He said something like that~.”

“... That is to say everything went exactly as Suimei intended it to right?”

“Seriously, somehow or other he really is cunning, that Suimei.”

“Usually I can't see him as anything but flippant though.”

Titania let out a sigh like she couldn't really accept it and mixed in some toxic words on top of Reiji's observation. Hearing these words which sounded like she was somehow annoyed, Reiji questioned her as if it was something rather unusual.

“... Somehow, Tia, aren't you suddenly rather cold towards Suimei lately?”

“Eh? No, that isn't the case right? Hohohohoho...”

Titania's unnatural laugh filled the room. To anyone who knew the actual situation, it was obviously laughter to try and deceive others, but Reiji and Mizuki did not know this.

“Well, it's true that Suimei-kun is flippant here and there though right~”

“I can't deny that... But when it comes to it he's the type who gets things done.”

“I agree with that, though reluctantly.”

Reiji let out a better smile as Titania grudgingly agreed with him. And then, as if she wanted to talk about something more sincere, she changed the topic.

“And so, Reiji-sama, what shall we do from here?”

“Our original plan was to go to the self governed states right?”

“Yes. The plan was to give solace to the citizens and inspire the soldiers as usual. Is something the matter with that?”

Reiji's expression grew hazy like he had something he was worrying about.

“... Un. I've been thinking about it. That I'm actually rather weak.”

“Ha?”

“Reiji-kun, what are you saying...?”

Titania was taken aback by his words while Mizuki looked at him with her eyes half closed like she was reproaching him. However, Reiji shook his head suggesting it wasn't really that off the mark.

“I mean, back in Astel I was overpowered by Rajas, and Elliot even held back on me. Moreover, I felt like her Imperial Highness Graziella's magic was quite the threat.”

“So with that, you're wondering if you are weak or not?”

As Titania predicted what he had to say, Reiji nodded seriously. On the other hand, Mizuki let out an exasperated voice.

“You know what, Reiji-kun. Someone like me still can't fight properly you know? Back when we fought in the Imperial Capital I somehow got by, but compared to that, hasn't Reiji-kun always been properly fighting?”

“Mizuki. I received divine protection from the hero summoning right? Even so, I got overwhelmed by the enemy I was meant to fight, and someone who received that same divine protection was able to make a clear distinction between our abilities. Do you think that's really okay?”

“Reiji-kun...”

Mizuki let out a worried voice as Reiji expressed why he thought he was unreliable. And then, after quietly listening to Reiji express his inner thoughts, Titania completely changed her attitude, and questioned Reiji with an increasingly firm expression.

“I will be repeating a question from before, but Reiji-sama, you said that you were unrelated to sword techniques, magic and fighting correct?”

“... That's right, but Elliot had a lot of composure over me you know?”

“I've heard that Hero-dono summoned in El Meide was a heroic warrior even in the world he came from. There was already a gap between him and Reiji-sama from the beginning. I believe it is quite substantial to be

able to bite at him despite that gap existing.”

“...”

Reiji thought that Titania had a point. However, it all just seemed like an excuse to him. Stuck in a whirlpool of anxiety, he couldn't hear it as anything but empty words. Because she understood this fully, Titania continued to criticize his way of thinking.

“I understand Reiji-sama's feelings. However, that thing known as strength is not something which can be mastered in a single day. Strength, and the dignity attached to it, are things that are obtained only after experiencing a great many things that would have one's blood run. That's why, if Reiji-sama desires strength, then the only way to do so is to fight. And so, is that not what you shall be accumulating from now on?”

After speaking her opinion with fervour, Titania switched to a somewhat calmer tone as she continued.

“It is something that happens quite often to march forwards impatiently only to go down the wrong path. That is why I believe that it is for Reiji-sama's benefit that we move forwards while carefully looking ahead of us.”

As she finished speaking, Titania continued to stare at Reiji. On the other hand, Reiji closed his eyes for a brief moment, and then looked up at the ceiling.

“... That's right isn't it? Un, I got it.”

Perhaps because she was frankly addressing his concerns, Titania's words resonated deep in Reiji's heart and his expression became just a little bit more refreshed. The two then nodded to each other. Mizuki then spoke up with a wrinkle between her eyes.

“But, I know this is weird coming from me, but I think it is undeniable that we are out of our depth right? I think that if we're not at least as strong as Felmenia-san and Lefille-cha... I mean, Lefille-san, we're going to end up at the end of the line pretty soon.”

“That's...”

Titania was also concerned about that point. If Suimei didn't weaken Rajas as much as he did, Reiji and Mizuki would have been forced into a much harder fight. From here there would be other demons with the same combat prowess, and then there was the Demon Lord who probably surpassed all of them. If that one came out, there would probably be nothing they could do. With a wrinkle between his brows while racking his brains, Reiji turned to the two girls.

“What do you think we should do?”

“Dunno, training or something?”

“That's kind of trite isn't it?”

“But, isn't that about the only method we have?”

While Mizuki was struggling with the difficult problem before her, Titania let out a quiet voice like she had some sort of brilliant plan.

“There is one suggestion I'd like to make.”

“Which is?”

“It will not raise Reiji-sama and Mizuki's actual strength, but if we go to the self governed states near the Saadias Alliance, the equipment used by a hero previously summoned to this world is still there.”

Hearing those words, Mizuki, who was still slacking up until now, had a sudden change of expression.

“Th-that's what would be called a legendary weapon right!? Right!?”

“If one were to describe it cheaply, then that's what it would be.”

“That kind of thing exists?”

“Yes. A long time ago, a King who possessed tremendous power from the self governed states plotted to conquer their neighbouring country. Sensing an impending crisis, the Salvation Church performed the hero summoning ritual to defeat the tyrant. It is said that the esteemed hero summoned at that time possessed a substantial amount of power and wielded a powerful weapon. Not just the weapon used by the esteemed hero, but altars used to praise the tyrant as a god and books kept by the

tyrant are all being kept under the church's jurisdiction as relics.”

“And so, you're saying we should go get it?”

“If we do, I expect it will raise our combat potential.”

“Good! That's good! Let's go with that! It's a legendary weapon! It's becoming interesting~!”

Setting aside Mizuki who was all of a sudden in high tension mode, Reiji also thought that retrieving the weapon would be a good plan. Improving himself was important, but the weapon he used was also essential.

Just as their conversation was coming to a head, someone suddenly knocked on the door to the guest room. Reiji and the others turned towards the door, and heard a familiar voice from the other side.

“Excuse me. I was informed that the hero Reiji was here but... Are you?”

“Yeah. That voice is Elliot right? By all means, I don't mind if you come in.”

With Reiji's permission, Elliot and Christa came into the room.

“Hello Elliot. What's the matter today?”

“Nothing really, I was told to come to the castle so I came. And then I decided to come and greet you.”

“Thanks for going out of your way.”

“I did have something else I wanted to talk about though.”

Before moving on to what Elliot wanted to talk about, Reiji cut in with something he had to say first.

“By the way, it seems that you made all sorts of arrangements with regards to the matter this time around.”

“Aah, that...? Fuu, I resent it going exactly the way that man planned, but I couldn't not do it for the hero who he was requesting it for after all.”

“Thank you. You saved us.”

“No no, you don't need to worry about it. It's fine to just think of it as

me being meddlesome. Aah, if you meet that guy tell him he owes me. Also that he absolutely has to pay it back.”

“Hahaha… Got it.”

It seemed that it was his principle to show no mercy to Suimei. Reiji acknowledged his request with a smile. Mizuki then cocked her head to the side.

“I know it's rather sudden, but what does Elliot-kun plan to do from here?”

“Hm? Aah, we spent quite a bit of time discussing it, but we're planning to stop our sympathy calls and start linking up with the other summoned heroes.”

“I see… That's also quite important isn't it?”

Reiji had completely forgotten about that. Nobody had ever recommended it to him, so the thought never passed through his mind—

“This is what my business with you was today. Before heading to the decisive battle with the demons, I want us to be able to keep in touch. It's also important that we're able to move the armies of every nation. In this kind of situation, it's frankly best to act in harmony right? Though I don't know whether or not we'll be able to rely completely on the power of the church.”

The reason why cooperation had dulled was likely due to the cynicism of each nation's leaders. Elliot had put quite a lot of thought into the subjugation of the demons.

“That's why, when it comes down to it we'll have to be able to gather our forces. Frankly speaking I don't think an order from the church would be sufficient. So I thought that I would first start with the Alliance which is closest to us right now…”

As Elliot trailed off, for some reason he was making quite the bitter expression.

“Aaah, it's because I heard they were headed towards the Alliance. I'd

like to talk to Lefille-chan and Felmenia-chan properly once more, but, that, will be there right?”

“Does Elliot-kun dislike seeing Suimei-kun?”

“Just seeing that face somehow causes me great offence. I heard the hero summoned by the Alliance was quite the beauty so that in itself is quite regrettable but… Ow!?”

“Elliot-sama?”

“Uuuuun, it's a joke, a joke, okay?”

Elliot started to try and calm Christa down in a fluster. From Reiji and Mizuki's perspective, it looked like a Nioh was standing behind Elliot. After trying to soothe her anger for a while, he let out a cough to clear away the strange atmosphere.

“Ehem! We'll be going through Astel to meet the hero in Thoria. So, about you three…”

“We're heading to the self governed states.”

Seeing Mizuki throw her arms in the air as she replied, Christa spoke up.

“The self governed states… is it?”

“We're also putting our sympathy calls on hold and going to get hold of the legendary weapon left behind by the heroes.”

“Legendary… Aah, that thing right?”

“Eh? Does Elliot-kun know about it?”

It seemed that he had an idea of what it was. However, Elliot went from looking like he knew to not being able to recall as he knit his brows.

“Sacra… something or other was it? It had a name like that right?”

“Eh? Sakura? Why sakura?”

“Elliot-sama, it is Sacrament.”

“Yeah, that. It's just that I also heard it was a weapon, but when I went

to see it, it was just a decoration with a blue gem in it.”

“Could it be, you took it?”

“Aah, I intended to.”

Elliot paused there. Reiji could tell he wasn't permitted to, but he didn't know why, and he also didn't know what he meant by the weapon being just a decoration. As Reiji and the others tilted their heads to the side, Christa gave them the answer.

“From literature, it is certain that the decoration was passed down as a weapon. From the legends, it seems that as long as it is not someone deemed appropriate for it, it will not transform into a weapon...”

Christa hesitated to say it. Titania then looked towards Elliot.

“But Elliot-sama, you do not seem to be carrying anything like it right?”

“Yeah, I don't have it. When I tried it out, nothing happened at all.”

“That's why you left it?”

“Yeah.”

Elliot smiled weakly. After giving out that self-deprecating smile, he suddenly turned towards Reiji.

“Well, there's value for you to go and test it isn't there? It didn't acknowledge me, but it might acknowledge you after all.”

“That being the case, I feel like Elliot-sama is declaring his own flaw...”

“It's likely that there is a special condition for it. You can't deny the possibility.”

Elliot said this with a refreshing look. Reiji was compelled to nod reflexively such was the persuasive power of his attitude. He then looked at Elliot with a bit of envy.

“...? What's wrong Reiji? Looking at me like that.”

“No, I was just thinking that Elliot was quite refreshing.”

“I may just be squirming frantically behind this look.”

Reiji was unable to tell if Elliot was lying or not.

“But, you're strong right?”

“Hm?”

“When you fought against me you were holding back, and from what Suimei told me, that time you fought her Imperial Highness Graziella you weren't going all out either or something.”

“…”

“Elliot-sama?”

After a moment of silence, Elliot suddenly let out a snort with a cold expression.

“To be seen through by that guy, it gets on my nerves.”

“Then, Elliot-sama! That time!?”

“I didn't go all out. It was in that kind of place and time after all. But a loss is a loss.”

As Elliot gallantly accepted his loss, Christa closed in on him with force, hunched over like she couldn't accept it.

“Elliot-sama!! Why didn't you go all out!? It would have been fine to just beat her Imperial Highness Graziella into a pulp!!”

She didn't seem to be able to endure the fact that Elliot lost and began stomping on the ground with force. Mizuki looked at this in surprise and spoke up.

“Wait a sec, we're in the Empire's castle you know… Christa-san, you're inadvertently saying some amazing things right?”

“Aah!?”

Finally realizing what she had been doing, Christa looked around her surroundings abruptly. No matter the reason, it would obviously be bad if someone heard her showing contempt for an Imperial princess within an Imperial castle. Seeing Christa suddenly become silent over her blunder, everyone else smiled towards her. Soon after that, Titania made a serious

expression and looked towards Reiji.

“And so, Reiji-sama, what do you think of going to the self governed states?”

“Un. Let's try and go. I think it is better to be greedy about strength right now. That's why, let's go and test whether I can use that Sacrament or not.”

“Okaaay! Then our next destination is the self governed states by the Saadias Alliance!”

Reiji showed a weak expression like he was troubled as Mizuki thrust her fist energetically into the air.

“But, it's not like we'll be going right away...”

“What do you mean we're not... AAH!!”

Mizuki let out a loud voice. She seemed to have finally remembered exactly what reason they were in the Empire to begin with.

“Fumu. Is there something going on?”

Titania replied to Elliot's question with a composed expression.

“There are some slight circumstances. It is not something that Elliot-sama needs to worry about.”

“Well that's fine then. If you're going it would be better to do so sooner though. The demons won't exactly wait for you.”

After giving them that warning, Elliot suddenly remembered something and turned a cynical smile towards Reiji and the others.

“At any rate, you also really have it quite rough huh?”

“...? What do you mean by that?”

Following Reiji's question, Mizuki and Titania also tilted their heads to the side. They had no idea why Elliot was shrugging his shoulders like he was saying 'good grief.' His words were too fragmented to grasp what he meant. Elliot then turned around.

“It's nothing, you'll understand what I meant soon enough. Now, it's

about time we left, Christa.”

“Yes. As you will.”

“Well then, farewell.”

With those words, Elliot left the room accompanied by Christa.

“What was that…?”

“D-dunno…?”

While Reiji and Mizuki were completely bewildered, after a short pause, they could hear footsteps outside the door. Perhaps Elliot had come back, or maybe it was someone else? While Reiji and the others were thinking of that—

“Excuse me.”

A woman's voice called out to them from the other side of the door. Without waiting for a response, she rudely opened the door right away. The one who came in, was the one they were opposing the other day in the Imperial Capital, Graziella Filas Rieseld.

Today, she wasn't wearing her over the top military uniform, but a regular shirt. She still didn't look like an imperial princess and was dressed quite roughly. Perhaps this was what she wore casually. Her cleavage was exposed, but her style was so indifferent that it took away from her voluptuousness. However, her usual strong-willed and prideful features had a slight amount of dissatisfaction and irritation mixed into them and she was making a sullen expression. It seemed she appeared because she was unable to calm down. On the other hand, seeing her natural enemy appear, Titania went from her usual gentle expression to a cold one in an instant.

“Your Imperial Highness Graziella, do you have some sort of business with us?”

Seeing that Graziella was still quite composed, Titania made no attempts of hiding the hostility in her tone.

“Don't glare like that.”

“I am not glaring though.”

“My goodness, it seems that I am quite hated.”

Graziella was a little tired of the one sided hostility, yet Titania faced her with a swordsman's gaze as she questioned her further.

“And so, what is your business with us today?”

She more or less already had an idea as to why Graziella was there. As if speaking for her, Mizuki cut in with an anxious expression.

“C-could it be about what happened last time...?”

“Hm? Aah, that has already been resolved. I have no intentions of bringing it up again after all that. Besides, it would only be contrary to the Emperor's decree to continue hounding you about it after father already deemed it as something irrelevant.”

“I-I see...”

Seeing that her anxieties were unfounded, Mizuki let out a sigh of relief. It seemed Graziella had a surprisingly refreshing personality. Though she said that she did not mind in general, it seemed she was still holding a slight grudge, but she had no intention of mentioning it. Though it may be because she hadn't gotten to it yet... But setting that aside. She then let out an outrageous answer to the earlier question.

“And so, about the reason I came here today, it seems I'll be troubling you bastards from today onward.”

“Ha?”

“Heh?”

“Wh-what does that mean your Imperial Highness!?”

Titania yelled with such force that she bolted out of her seat. She hadn't even asked for confirmation and suddenly made that declaration which seemed to affect Titania quite deeply. Graziella then answered her with a bitter expression.

“It doesn't mean anything. It's exactly as it sounds. Your Royal

Highness Titania.”

“No, but that's...!”

“In short, I'll be accompanying you bastards on your journey.”

“_ _ _ _”

Titania fell back into her chair with force. It couldn't be helped. Reiji and Mizuki also had surprised and doubtful expressions on their faces. Graziella then offered them some candid advice.

“There's no need for all of you to make that kind of face. Loosen up. Well, I am also completely reluctant about this matter.”

“Then why?”

“If I was told by an oracle then I can only obey.”

“Wha... Alshuna's oracle...!”

“Elliot, this is what he meant earlier...”

Reiji finally understood. Elliot already knew this would happen beforehand, so he left them with those words. He likely predicted their current bewilderment and was laughing like a little imp. Reiji was unable to stop rubbing his brow. They were still unable to regain their composure as they all looked at Graziella.

“There are no objections I assume?”

“... Even if we did, we can't do anything but obey Alshuna's oracle.”

Titania's mental state must have been very complex as she admitted that. Her face showed that she did so grudgingly. Taking a short glance at her, Graziella then turned her attention to the other two.

“And you two?”

“I'm... As long as you don't squabble then it's fine, but...”

Still overwhelmed, Mizuki's words trailed off at the end. Reiji gave up with a sigh and showed Graziella a composed attitude.

“Then, I have one condition.”

“What's that? Are you saying that I should spend one night with you or something? You're unexpectedly a quick working man huh?”

“Th-that's not it!? Why did it end up like that!? Isn't the conversation progressing too quickly!?”

Reiji stood up and let out a grand yell towards Graziella's bombshell. Looking at his panicking figure without paying it any mind, she added on some words indifferently.

“What? I don't particularly mind you know?”

“I mind!”

“Me too!”

Unable to hand that over, Titania and Mizuki both objected instantly. After making a bored expression, she once more returned her gaze to Reiji.

“So, what is your damn condition?”

After letting out a tired breath, Reiji told her his condition with a serious expression.

“I'd like you to stop calling us bastards.”

“Fumu. Certainly, even it is only temporary, calling people who are to be my companions bastards is quite disrespectful huh. Fine then.”

She honestly accepted his condition. Reiji got the impression of a haughty woman from her, but she was unexpectedly understanding. Just like when she said she didn't mind about the previous matter, she had a much more refreshing personality that he thought she did.

“Well then, Astel's hero Reiji, your Royal Highness Titania, and our guest from another world Mizuki, I look forward to working with you.”

“L-likewise...”

They were taken aback by Graziella's suddenly humble attitude. Titania was making a dumbfounded expression. On the other hand, Mizuki leaked out a completely bewildered voice at the unexpected development.

“Just what's going to happen to us...?”

It seemed that their little group had suddenly become quite the stormy combination of people.

Suimei's party arrived at the Alliance's sovereign state of Miazen with the intent of relying on Lefille's acquaintance. On the way, they passed through two or three other major towns, but being the sovereign state, Miazen was simply on a different scale in terms of size. The walls surrounding the city were not particularly high, but its total circumference was larger than Filas Philia. Perhaps due to this fact, like the other towns in the Alliance, the houses were quite spread out, nothing was crammed together.

Also, other than just swordsmen, this city also characteristically had many demi-humans. As one would expect of the city called the Capital of Swords, the dwarves who created them had gathered in force, and characteristically of the country, there were many therianthropes around. Despite the fact that it was still the middle of the day, there were dwarves gulping down alcohol at restaurants. Due to the cheerful atmosphere, there were therianthropes and humans basking together in the sun outside. The mix of races was more prominent than it was in the Empire.

After arriving in town, Suimei and the others headed straight for the Twilight Pavilion. After informing the receptionist they were acquaintances of the guild master, she immediately went to get confirmation and they smoothly arrived at the guild master's office on the second floor.

—Inside the room, a person who looked like the guild master was sitting on a leather sofa while relaxing.

She was a woman. Her age was on the more youthful side and she leaned back considerably into her chair. She was wearing clothing which was somehow similar to traditional Japanese clothing while puffing at a pipe. However, her defining characteristics would be her golden hair and the fox ears sprouting out of it. From her rear there were one, two, three...

all of seven fox tails coming out.

She gave off a calm presence, and appeared to be quite the showy fox type therianthrope. Lefille, who was the one who requested the audience as an acquaintance, was smiling pleasantly. Felmenia seemed to be quite nervous. On the other hand, Liliana just leaked out 'Many... Tails,' like she was completely entranced. Her eyes were pinned to the woman's golden, furry tails.

After everyone took their seat across from the therianthrope woman, a delightful stifled laugh came out of her like if she passed her limits. And then, after a while, she bit down her laughter.

“—To think that you were actually alive, Lefi. Kuu, fufufu... How do I say it, you've had quite the unexpected good fortune huh?”

The representative of the Twilight Pavilion's Miazen branch, Rumeya, raised her voice in joy at the stroke of good luck.

“It has been a long time, Rumeya-dono. I don't have the words to thank you for receiving us so pleasantly during this sudden visit.”

As Lefille expressed her gratitude in an overly formal attitude, the therianthrope woman, Rumeya opened her mouth with a 'Haa...?” like she was looking at something suspicious.

“What's this what's this? It's not like it's the first time we've met but you're really standing on formality huh? Even though we're sitting in this kind of place, I don't particularly mind you know?”

“It's been a long time so isn't it appropriate for my greeting to at least be properly formal?”

“How stiff. What are you even saying to a therianthrope?”

Lefille was making a difficult expression and Rumeya was just shrugging her shoulders. Suimei often heard that the therianthropes in general were, to put it poorly, rough around the edges. They seemed to dislike the decorum that humans used in formal situations. This woman must also be of that kind of disposition. As if to say that that was enough of formality, Lefille loosened her expression.

“By the way, what is that?”

Lefille pointed her gaze at the earthenware container in Rumeya's hand. Rumeya then replied quite indifferently.

“Isn't it obvious? It's alcohol. Al-co-hol.”

“A-aren't you in the middle of your official duties...?”

“Like I care? This is a celebratory drink to your survival.”

Saying that, Rumeya lifted her cup up and gulped down its contents. However, contrasting her merry attitude, Lefille was making a somewhat gloomy expression. Grasping the meaning behind this, Rumeya quietly closed her eyes in a complete change of attitude.

“... Like I thought, your father didn't make it?”

“Yes. In order to let me get away, his Majesty and the leader spearheaded the soldiers to stall for time. He probably didn't survive...”

“We lost a good man...”

“It honours me as his daughter to hear Rumeya-dono describe him as such.”

Lefille bowed down respectfully. Both her and Rumeya remained silent for a while to raise a prayer to the dead. After a period of silence passed, Rumeya put her pipe to her mouth and let out a puff of smoke.

“Fuu, a solemn moment isn't something to drag on forever. So, it is about time that you introduced the friends that you brought along with you.”

Rumeya tapped the ashes out of her pipe and took her time to pass her gaze at the others. Going along with her request, Lefille gave a brief introduction of Suimei and the others to Rumeya. As her introductions came to an end, everyone began to name themselves.

“Just as I have just been introduced, I am called Suimei Yakagi.”

“I am called Felmenia Stingray.”

“I'm, Liliana Zandyke.”

The reason Rumeya let out a 'Hou...' in an interested tone was likely because there were familiar names mixed in. And then, despite reprimanding Lefille for her stiff behaviour earlier, she set aside her pipe, corrected her posture in her seat, and named herself.

“My name is Rumeya. Rumeya of the golden fox clan. I am sure you are already aware, but I serve as the guild master here.”

Suimei noticed that Felmenia's expression hardened slightly from tension when she heard that introduction. That name was likely something that would normally make one wince. However, since Suimei didn't know who the famous people of this world were, he didn't receive any shock. Felmenia whispered into his ear that Rumeya was in fact famous. She was one among the Seven Swords, the swordswoman known as Camellia Sasanqua.

*(I take it she's strong?)*

*(Camellia Sasanqua the Empress of the Sword Dance is considered strong even among the Seven Swords. If you are having difficulty grasping it, then it would be proper to think of her abilities to be on par or beyond the abilities of her Royal Highness the Princess.)*

*(Aah is that so... How scary.)*

Suimei shrugged his shoulders as he felt disheartened. To have someone so dreadful show up out of nowhere was bad for his heart. Titania was in fact quite the menace and Rogue's abilities were also considerable. If the woman before him was on par with or beyond those two, she must have been a swordswoman with terrifying abilities.

Rumeya then suddenly focused her gaze on Suimei. Without saying a single word, she returned her gaze back to Lefille's face.

“I haven't heard this young man's name before, but the other two you brought along are quite famous aren't they? Astel's genius mage, and—”

For only a brief moment, she pointed a sharp gaze towards Liliana.

“One of the Empire's Elite Twelve, the daughter of the Lonely Figure Sword Master-dono.”

“I'm not, one of the Elite Twelve, anymore. Neither am I, a soldier of the Empire.”

“If I recall correctly, I heard you were made out to be the culprit of some incident. Did you resign after being reprimanded?”

“There were some circumstances, but if you were to put it simply, it's something like that.”

“Fumu, so there were circumstances. Well, as long as you weren't picking a fight with the children from the guild I don't really care.”

They couldn't tell if that was true or not as she tried to push aside the issue. Grasping this subtlety, Lefille spoke forcefully to bring it to a close.

“It's alright. Lily is my companion.”

“Fuu, is that so?”

Sensing the virtue behind Lefille's declaration, Rumeya smiled as she exposed her canines. She was either happy about such a strong declaration backing her companion, or she was showing her joy after seeing Liliana tightly cling onto Lefille's arm. Seeing the two of them get along, Rumeya's expression softened once more.

“I've never actually had a match with Lonely Figure-dono right?”

“The Colonel, also said the same. Also, that he wanted to have a match.”

“That reminds me, Lefille, you've also finally become stronger than me right?”

“No, that isn't the case. My swords skills still have a long way to go.”

“Fuuu... Do you really think that?”

Seeing Lefille speak humbly in a calm tone, Rumeya made a somewhat obstinate and evil smile. Just from seeing her movements, she probably saw through Lefille's abilities completely. The keen insight of a skilled swordsman was truly terrifying. Having said that, Suimei didn't doubt that Lefille's strength could be comparable to one of the Seven Swords but—

“Now that I think of it, why isn't Lefi one of those Seven Swords? You're about that strong right?”

Suimei had thought this quite a while ago, but he suddenly remembered and brought up his doubts. Lefille was the one to answer him.

“Once a year in the north, there is a competition to decide the swordsmen who are granted the title of the Seven Swords. If you don't participate and win, you can't receive the title.”

“So you didn't participate? Why not?”

“Because I have the power of the spirits. With that the matches will become unfair right?”

“I don't really think that kind of thing matters though. You used the same excuse to get out of the competition in Aldyfize. Lefi sure is stubborn.”

Rumeya puffed out some smoke once more. Just as she said, the power of spirits were Lefille's own power, it wasn't unfair. But that only applied as long as the person in question didn't deem it be unfair. It was necessary for the one who attained victory to be convinced of that fact after all. Having seen Lefille's power before her own eyes back in the Empire, Felmenia nodded deeply.

“With that power, I believe you could probably place quite highly among the Seven Swords... Or rather, I think it's possible you could even take the crown among the Seven Swords.”

“I'm also confident I could win.”

“I bet so.”

Suimei didn't complain about her confidence. Ever since he met her at the Twilight Pavilion, he already felt that Lefille was quite capable. On top of that, back when they fought with Rajas, it was her power which ultimately overpowered him. Even though there was a period time where her power was blanked out by her becoming tiny, it could be said that it was a small side effect of her tremendous power. He didn't know who all the swordsmen of the Seven Swords were, but if they all gathered in one

place and fought with Lefille, he was sure their ranks would change. While Suimei was thinking about this, Lefille turned towards him.

“But if Suimei-kun used your magic freely, you'd be able to compete with your sword skills wouldn't you?”

“Me? No… That would be quite hard. Throwing a half baked swordsman like me against those opponents in an arena would be rather unreasonable.”

“Half baked? Didn't you study swordsmanship?”

“Partway through I became unable to continue learning after all. I mostly just know the fundamentals. Well, I was at least taught by an instructor though…”

An instructor—Kuchiba Kiyoshiro. This was the name of the swordsman who taught swordsmanship at the dojo Suimei attended, one of Japan's foremost sword masters. He was an old acquaintance of Suimei's father, and using that connection, Suimei strove to practice the sword under his tutelage from a young age.

Partway through he ended up giving magic his undivided attention and neglected taking lessons in the sword, but he did find this somewhat regrettable. His instructor also knew of his circumstances so if he went back after all this time to learn the Kuchiba's sword style, he would probably be pleasantly welcomed back… Though, it was obvious an unreasonable condition like 'you'll throw all your energy into this until you die,' would be tagged on.

“Fumu… From what I saw when you exchanged blows with Rajas, I don't think you would fall behind though…”

“What's that, little buddy here was named Suimei right? Are you really that strong? From the looks of it you seemed quite stringy and squishy, well I can at least tell you're a mage though…”

“Mu… Well, I can't really deny that about my physical constitution…”

Suimei let out a bitter voice as he agreed with her. It was true that he was not really muscular, and he may appear to be quite unreliable but…

Even so, being compared to food like that was a bit much. Lefille then let out a bold laugh.

“He is quite strong.”

“Is that true? From what I hear, he looks like a mage though...”

“Suimei-dono is someone I summoned using the hero summoning ritual aside from the hero himself, he's a mage from another world... A magician.”

“Hou! He's a mage from the same world as that famous Hero-sama huh? I see, so that's why you guys are strong, I guess you really are powerful.”

After letting out her admiration, Rumeya took another gulp from her cup.

“Good grief it sure is amazing huh? Are people from other worlds nothing but strong guys?”

“No. It isn't quite like that.”

“Fuu? Is that so? This time around I heard that the heroes summoned over by the hero summoning ritual were pretty much all unusually strong.”

This was the first time Suimei heard this kind of story, he then began counting on his fingers.

“... Setting Reiji as a miss and that playboy hero from El Meide as sufficient, then the others would be...”

“I also don't know much about the hero summoned by Thoria, but the hero summoned by the Alliance is an incredibly skilled swordswoman. Once she stood on the battlefield, the demon army was pushed back. Though I haven't actually met her yet.”

“Now that you mention it, back in the first town we also heard Hero-dono from the Alliance pushed back the demons didn't we?”

“... As I thought, those summoned by the hero summoning ritual are simply different.”

Lefille suddenly leaked out some discouraged words as a shadow clouded over her face. She was likely feeling worthless when comparing the attack on her own country.

“I heard the demon army that attacked the Alliance was only a third of the size of the one that attacked Noshias you know? If it wasn't the case, I wouldn't be smoking tobacco here all carefree.”

There was nothing to feel down about. Rumeya was trying to cheer Lefille up like that. Hearing her concerned words, Lefille's expression cleared up slightly and Rumeya gave her a grand smile as she puffed smoke out of her pipe. She then bent herself over the table.

“So Suimei. In the end, exactly how strong are you?”

“Well, about the level where I can take pride in it.”

As Suimei modestly appraised himself, Lefille and Liliana both made astonished expressions.

“You sure can talk. As usual you've got quite the shady mouth.”

“Seriously. That statement, is a complete deception.”

“Oioi, what's with you two?”

While receiving Lefille and Liliana's criticism along with their glares, Suimei let out a perplexed voice. He only intended to humbly reply like anyone normally would, did they not hear it like that? Then, even Felmenia let out an astonished sigh.

“Didn't you even defeat her Royal Highness back in the Imperial Capital?”

“Hou? When White Flame-dono says her Royal Highness, that would be about the Twilight Beheading Princess right? Well that's quite amazing.”

Rumeya let out a grand laugh. She probably knew of Titania's true abilities. Felmenia then once more turned her reproachful gaze towards Suimei.

“... As I thought, wouldn't everything end peacefully if Suimei-dono just went to defeat the Demon Lord?”

“No way, no matter how you put it that would be unreasonable. I said before that the numbers would be relentless right?”

“Couldn't we solve that by gathering soldiers?”

“If it comes to that, the soldiers who came to support me would have to be prepared to get caught up in my magic.”

“Mu… However, with Suimei-dono's talent…”

Felmenia presented the possibility and was still clinging onto it. Suimei then suddenly showed his face as a magician.

“Menia, aren't you thinking about magic on the battlefield using this world's standards? I talked about mystical entropy the other day right? Thanks to the small amount of entropy produced by the mages here, there's no problem using magic on a battlefield. But I can't recklessly fire off magic repeatedly in that kind of place. On top of that, all the people on the battlefield would get stuck in the big magic explosions. We wouldn't absolutely mesh together right?”

“Ah…”

“But Suimei-kun. You can still fight without using large scaled magic right?”

“You're talking about that time? At that time I certainly did defeat ten thousand of them, but in exchange I was beaten up quite a lot. There was also the fact that I was gripped by anger and wasn't paying attention to myself or my surroundings, but the fight took enough time to adjust for entropy.”

As he finished, wanting to jump into the argument, Rumeya sneered as if she had just found something interesting.

“Fufuu. In that case, it would be fine to go around just defeating the enemy commanders right? With just that the fighting would become a fair bit easier.”

It was certainly just as she said, it was a sound theory to take out the head first. However, in a war against demons, that hand may only draw

slight results.

“It's still unreasonable. Striking down the generals will surely give the upper hand on the battlefield, but in the long term there won't be much of an effect. After defeating the demon generals, the next batch of demons will just receive divine protection from the evil god.”

“... What do you mean by that?”

“Aside from their individual powers, the demons are given a piece of the evil god's power. That's why even if we defeat the stronger demons, the evil god will just split that power to a different target, so their total war potential doesn't change all that much. Well, if we defeated some genius strategist it would be another matter though...”

“Then Suimei-dono, just what needs to be done to remove the threat of the demons?”

“It's just my conjecture, but there is nothing but simply reducing their numbers.”

“The demons' numbers?”

“In short the problem is the evil god's ability to intervene and its capacity to do so. To start with, the existence known as divinity which exists outside the world exists on the fundamental principle that they are unable to directly interfere with the world. That's why they must appeal to beings who exist in the world and have them act as their own agents. Well, there's the exception of summoning someone over, but even so the intervention from the outside requires an indirect process. First of all, in the case where divinity wants to make the world their own, they must take the roundabout path of creating large amounts of beings who sympathize with them, such as the demons and the evil god.”

After taking a short pause, Suimei continued his explanation in his own way.

“They can either whisper in one's dreams to brainwash them or conceive fallen children. This way, divinity is able to increase the number of pawns under their control. And so, when the number of beings desiring

the power held by divinity increases greatly, it becomes easier for the divinity to interfere in the world. When its ability to interfere increases, it becomes able to share its power with more beings. When that happens, the number of targets it is able to interfere with and brainwash increases, and then the number of pawns begin to increase—”

“Fumu. And a cycle begins, right?”

Hearing Rumeya groan, Suimei returned a nod.

“That's right, that's why as long as many of those things exist in the world, the divinity's influence will not be reduced. That's why in the end, the only way to bring about a resolution would be to do something directly about the evil god, or reduce the number of sympathetic beings until the evil god's ability to interfere is at threat. In other words, it is absolutely necessary to reduce the number of demons. That said, suddenly trying to face the evil god would be without a doubt completey reckless, so— ”

—Before going after the general one should first go after its horse, it becomes something like that.

“Well, this is all based on the origin of the demons' power really being the same as what we call evil gods and divinity in my world though.”

“So to summarize what Suimei-dono is saying, to do something about the demons, something must be done about the evil god. And to do something about the evil god, something must be done about the demons...”

“How, bothersome.”

“Seriously.”

After Liliana let out a tired breath, Suimei agreed completely and also let out a tired breath. However—

*(However, thinking of it like that, it feels just like a war game where you just push into each others base. Well, that's based on the premise that the people are not released from their dependence on gods and spirits though... Ah?)*

Now that he thought about it, he heard something similar back in the first town they came to in the Alliance. The anti-goddess religious organization or something. Certainly they were saying that they must release themselves from the Goddess. If they in fact managed to grasp the truth, and were taking action in that vein—

*(Impossible, right...?)*

Suimei hated overthinking things, he shook his head and scattered those thoughts away. He was being overly concerned. In this world where they didn't have the knowledge regarding divinity, they didn't have the grounds to think along those lines, so there was no way they would arrive at the answer of a conflict between gods. While Suimei was shaking away this thoughts, Rumeya seemed to suddenly remember something and cut in.

“Somehow we've gone a fair bit off topic huh? What were we talking about to begin with again?”

“Whether or not, Suimei is spouting lies right?”

“Oi Liliana, don't lie so nonchalantly.”

“My apologies. I meant, spouting big lies.”

“Oi...”

Suimei hung his head down like he was troubled while looking at Liliana let out a joke with a charming smile. Lefille and Felmenia then took on an attitude in complete agreement with her.

“What Lily is saying is not necessarily wrong huh.”

“Definitely.”

“How mean.”

Suimei no longer had any allies.

“—So, I still haven't asked, but what did you all come to the Alliance for?”

“We talked about how I was summoned from another world before

right? So we came here looking for clues for returning to that world. It was written in an old book in Astel that the first hero summoning ritual was performed in a region within the Alliance.”

“So you came to look around. Certainly the place where the ritual was performed is still around.”

Rumeya replied with a quiet expression as she seemed to have an idea as to what he was talking about.

“Is that true?”

“Yeah, but about that place. Right now it's in the sphere of influence of the demons. I'm sure you heard that the demons invaded the Alliance because it was in the way by simply existing so you probably didn't look into it more. But when they first attacked they took over quite a lot of territory you see. At that time, the ancient ruins where the ritual took place was also taken over.”

“Mu… If that's the case…”

“If you want to go there, you'll have to do something about the demons who are still hanging around.”

Rumeya declared this with a serious expression as if to warn them. She was likely suggesting that it would be quite dangerous. Hearing this, Suimei let out a grand sigh.

“Haa… As expected, it ended up like this…”

Suimei slouched back into the sofa and looked up at the ceiling. He lost his strength knowing that in the end, a large scale battle with the demons was now unavoidable. Lefille then began speaking to him with a knowing look.

“Suimei-kun, it seems it is your fate to be unable to escape from battle.”

“Cut it out Lefi. What's with that commonly said phrase, seriously…”

“So, will Suimei-dono dive into the fighting by your own will?”

“What, she said.”

“Uu...”

Suimei couldn't say anything back to Felmenia or Liliana... And then, after the five of them talked of frivolous matters for a while, Suimei had one more matter to request of Rumeya.

“By the way, it may be somewhat impudent, but could you introduce us to some lodgings we could stay at for a while?”

“Aah, that much is no problem. Let's see... I know of a good inn, but I should take your financial situation into consideration. There are rooms available in the Twilight Pavilion's lodging house. How about there? It's free you know?”

“If you're letting us use it, then by all means we'll take it.”

Suimei lowered his head to Rumeya to show his gratitude. He only intended to have her introduce them to some lodgings, but the unexpected arrangements were more than welcome.

“By the way, how long are all of you planning to stay in Miazen?”

“We don't intend to inconvenience you for too long. Once our business is done I think we'll return right away but...”

“Aah, sorry, my bad. I'm not telling you to get out right away. I was just thinking it would be better if you could stay here for a longer period of time.”

“Why is that?”

“You see, the thing is, lately in the Alliance... No, not only here, but in Astel and the self governed states as well, feelings towards the Empire seem to be deteriorating. There's unrest everywhere. Well, it isn't to the extent where it will break out into a battle. So I was just thinking if it wasn't better to stay here instead of the Empire.”

They had just heard the same thing from Gaius back in the restaurant in the first Alliance town they visited. In other words, opinion towards the Empire has deteriorated considerably in the Alliance. That being said, even though a war wasn't going to start, she was probably being

considerate because she worried for their safety. And then, Rumeya puffed at her pipe like she was really annoyed.

“And then there are those anti-goddess fanatics right!? Those guys can all just leave. Good grief every last one of them had to begin moving right with the demon invasion, they're all just worthless...”

Those last words likely came out of her position as a leader of the Twilight Pavilion. She must have had many anxieties in her heart to deal with. As she was complaining, Felmenia, Lefille and Liliana turned towards Suimei. The one to decide would be Suimei, the three of them were waiting for his thoughts.

“So, Suimei. What will you do?”

“I'll decide after observing the situation for myself. At any rate, I left a bunch of tools behind so I'd have to go back at least once to get them.”

“Got it. Well, with the skills you all possess there's nothing to really worry about.”

Judging that she was being meddlesome, Rumeya brought that conversation to an end. However, until she was fully satisfied, she had them tell her of their journey.

Having taken Rumeya up on her offer, Suimei and the others decided to stay in the available rooms in the Twilight Pavilion's lodging house. After dropping off their baggage, they relaxed in their own rooms to relieve the fatigue due to their long journey from the Empire.

After having dinner, it was now nighttime. Suimei was alone in his assigned room preparing his materials. The room was illuminated by the light from his mana. It was well lit enough that it would be comparable to a room lit by electric lights. The light carried a flame's orange brilliance, so everything within was dyed a light orange, but it wasn't really something to be worried about. While he was working, Liliana, who he had called beforehand for her treatment, came into his room.

“Suimei, I'm here.”

“Aah, then take a seat on that chair.”

After entering the room and announcing herself, Suimei pointed her towards the chair in front of a desk. They were now sitting side by side in front of the desk, much like a doctor and their patient in an examinination room.

“So, please take off your eye-patch and gloves.”

Liliana nodded once at Suimei's doctor-like order and removed her eye-patch and gloves quickly. What appeared, were thin reddish brown arms covered in bubbles like they were festering, and closely packed together reddish brown scales around her right eye. On top of that, her eye was golden and her pupil formed a long and narrow slit.

While Suimei casually examined her arms, Liliana narrowed her eyes sadly. He had treated her multiple times already since she became one of his companions, but as expected she still had mixed feelings about it, whenever he looked at her altered features she always made a sad face. Let alone showing others, even looking at it herself likely pulled her into a painful mental state.

Suimei gently took Liliana's arm and began applying magic to treat it. Placing his finger on her bumpy afflicted skin, he began moving it as if gently brushing the affected region while reciting his chant.

“Buzz, Bajia, trout, Mashiya, impose, Kashiya, Sharurai, Arumarai...”

It was Kabbalah magic meant to heal things such as tumours and swelling. After continuing the treatment for a while, the demonized portion of her arm seemingly became a little smaller. Suimei then moved on to treating her right eye and the skin around it. Liliana must have been worried as she let out an anxious voice.

“How, is it?”

“The skin on your arms and hands is healing, though little by little. If we continue at fixed intervals like we have been, it'll heal completely. The skin around your right eye is the same so there shouldn't be a problem. It's just—”

“It's just, what?”

“Your eye itself has been completely done in. After being drowned in too much malice, it's no longer a human's eye and has completely changed into something else.”

Suimei gave an accurate description of the state of her right eye with a bitter groan. Saying it has changed into something else must have reminded her of the times people projected the image of a monster on top of her. This change to the outer layer of her body was the result of being taken in by the use of dark magic. Hearing Suimei's words, Liliana despondently hung her head down.

“Then, this won't heal, right?”

“Yeah, I can't heal it.”

“I see...”

Liliana's voice had gotten quite depressed. Hearing this, Suimei realized he made a poor choice of words. Due to concentrating on his magic, he was replying in a mechanical fashion. He immediately corrected himself in a fluster.

“Sorry, my choice of words was bad. It's just that I can't heal it, it doesn't mean there's nothing that can be done. Back in the other world there are specialists in spiritual healing and engineers who can manufacture artificial magic body parts. As long as we're able to go over to the other world it won't be much of a problem.”

“Is that really true!? It can be healed!?”

Liliana yelled out as the good news reached her ears. Happiness was certainly mixed into her surprised voice. It wasn't like Suimei was a specialist in healing techniques, so his knowledge in the field was not particularly deep. Back in his world there were magicians who would just laugh scornfully as they healed this level of affliction with ease. If he asked one of them, she would be healed without a problem. However, as if there was still something on his mind, Suimei made a somewhat complex expression.

“It can be healed but... It's just that the most skilled magician that I can ask for this, is that monster professor though...”

In the back of his mind, he could recall that mysterious person with a plump figure wearing a white lab coat with his ominous faint smile and his mushroom hairstyle. He was a man who lived in the basement of the old castle which served as the Society's headquarters and used incomprehensible magic to produce incomprehensible things.

Naturally, Suimei didn't have any worries when it came to the actual treatment. Among all magicians he was considered to be in the same class as the best of the best. His skills at healing were probably in fact the best, he wouldn't permit anyone to call themselves a better specialist when it came to spiritual healing. There wasn't a single ounce of worry that it would result in failure. However, to put it poorly, the probability that the monster professor would cram in unnecessary functions was quite high. Setting aside the fact whether that was good or bad, Liliana, who did not know any of this, was innocently showing her happiness.

“What a relief.”

“W-well, that's right. It'll be alright. That's why we should find a way to return—to find a way to reach our destination in the other world. Until then I'll heal your skin.”

Suimei once more began humming his spell and applied his healing magic. Liliana's expression as she quietly received the treatment was far brighter than what she showed when she took off her gloves and eye-patch.

“Alright, we're done.” “Thank you, very much.”

“Whoa there...”

Liliana clung on to Suimei with a happy expression. Having gotten used to Suimei and the others, she seemed to have developed a habit of clinging onto them. This was also the case when she clung to Lefille's arm while talking to Rumeya, but whenever she was happy or sad, she would cling on to Suimei, Felmenia and Lefille to show her emotions.

Though indirectly, he heard that she had always been ostracized by her surroundings and that Rogue did not spoil her like a child much. Since she was never spoiled by others, it seemed that when her emotions swelled up she reacted like this as her longing for company increased. As Suimei gently patted her head while she clung on to him, she closed her eyes happily.

The Saadias Alliance was located in the north western part of the continent. It was a federation of states made up of five different countries. It is said that the name was given to it by the swordsmen who drove the demons to the north and liberated the territory while carrying the hopes of the people. At the centre of those countries was the sovereign state, Miazen, where many of the swordsmen given the title of Seven Swords came from. Many of the swordsmen of the allied armies also came from there, so among the five countries in the Alliance, it was the most powerful.

Those who admired those heroes gathered there aiming to become heroes themselves as they diligently devoted themselves to the study of sword skills. Because of this, to the west of the river which split the city in two, there were many drill sites among the shops which taught swordsmanship to the citizens and soldiers. And alongside them were many of the craftsmen who created the swords they were swinging. It was a city of weapon stores.

The day after arriving in Miazen, Suimei's party of four was headed to the west side of the city. Walking over the bridge which split the city in half, Suimei put his thoughts into words.

“How do I say it, everyone seems to be enjoying themselves.”

The city was overflowing with energy. Joyful voices could be heard all over the city, it was practically revelry.

“I heard it in the morning, but it seems it is because the hero's parade is today.”

“Aah, now that you mention it…”

As they were leaving, Rumeya did mention something about the hero's parade. The reason they were suddenly holding an exhibition in Miazen was because they were spreading the news that the Alliance's hero dealt a serious blow to the demon army and defeated a demon general. And so, the people of the city were unable to contain their boiling blood.

“It seems the parade will be happening in the afternoon? What will we do? Should we go and watch?”

“Seems like a good idea. That kind of thing is nice once in a while.”

Suimei nodded at Felmenia's suggestion. This would be the first time he properly watched a hero's parade. Back during Reiji's parade he only saw him off. During Elliot's parade in the Empire, there was still the coma incident going on so he couldn't go see it.

“There's still time until the parade starts though?”

“Then as we initially planned, let's look around town until it starts.”

Everyone agreed with Lefille's suggestion and began moving. While walking around the western district looking for a place to kill time, they came across a shop with a somewhat gaudy exterior. As it came into sight, the one to raise their voice excitedly, was Lefille.

“Ooh! This store is!”

What came into sight was a clothes shop which also seemed to sell many miscellaneous goods. The goods outside the store serving as advertisement were all cute things, it was probably a store aimed towards women. There were similar stores in the Imperial Capital, but this one was in no way inferior in scale to those and they seemed to have an abundance of complete sets of items. Taking a careful look at the store, Suimei recognized it.

“Aah, this place is that right? Kind of like that clothing store from before...”

The store resembled the clothing store that was in Kurant City. Back when they were looking for clothes for the tiny Lefille, they bought clothes for small girls that were the latest model from the Saadias Alliance, so

this was likely the flagship store. To set up a branch in a foreign country in such an undeveloped world gave an indication of their profitability. The clothes that were set up here were all frilly clothing. Suimei then turned to Lefille.

“Do you, want to go there?”

“Eeh!? No I don't particularly, but...”

So she said, but her eyes were impulsively swimming towards the shop. Seeing this, Suimei put on a mean smile.

“You can't wear children's clothing now you know?”

“Nobody said anything about wearing that kind of clothing!”

“Is that right~? You can wear them if you become small again so it isn't completely unreasonable...”

“Shut up! I can't hear you!”

While the two were having this exchange, Felmenia surprisingly cut in full of excitement from behind him.

“Suimei-dono! Let's go to that store!”

“What, Menia also likes those things?”

“Yes!”

Felmenia was suddenly full of energy. As expected, it seemed that girls liked stores which sold cute things like that. The reason Lefille reacted like that was probably because she was the same.

“Well, shall we go and see?”

“I-it can't be helped. If everyone is going, I'll come along.”

After Lefille's tried to bluff them out with a trembling voice, Suimei began walking towards the store. For some reason a strange voice came from behind him.

“... Suimei-dono? Lefille? Where are the two of you going? It's over here right? Here.”

“Ha?”

“Mu?”

Hearing Felmenia's voice, Suimei and Lefille turned around. She was facing the same direction so they both thought she wanted to go to the clothing store, but they were wrong. However, in the direction she pointed towards, was a dubious store discharging an eerie atmosphere into its surroundings.

“Both of you, let's go quickly!”

On the other hand, Felmenia's entire face was smiling as she was brimming with energy. However, the building which seemed like a store did not give off any sense that it should make a woman so happy.

“H-here? Is it really here? Really? Seriously?”

“That's right. Please take a look at the gloomy atmosphere of this store which can't be found in Astel or the Empire! Take a waft of the suspicious stink of medicinal herbs! You can see numerous goods with magic words engraved on them from outside! How could you not be excited!?”

Felmenia was speaking passionately before Suimei who was looking at something weird with an expression like he didn't get it at all. After listening to her and taking a closer look at the store, magic goods—or magic tools as they call them here, were being sold by this store. But even so, he didn't nod in excitement.

“Suimei-dono? Why are you making such a strange face? Isn't it normal?”

“N-normal?”

“It isn't?”

“I-I mean...”

Judging that Suimei seemed hesitant to point it out, Felmenia changed the target of her question to Liliana.

“Lily, what do you think about it?”

“L-Liliana? It's weird isn't it? Right?”

Suimei was looking for someone to agree with him, but...

“That's not the case though?”

“Ha?”

“Just as Felmenia said, it seems, quite amusing.”

Suimei realized that just like Felmenia, Liliana's eye was sparkling.

“You see!? It is just as I thought! A person who doesn't tremble in excitement from looking at that store's appearance does not exist!”

“Is Suimei, different?”

“No, well I'm certainly somewhat interested in it....”

Suimei was also a magician. He was also somewhat interested in mysterious goods. However, whatever the circumstances may be, he thought girls wouldn't get so excited about it. While completely baffled by all of this, his shoulder was suddenly struck solidly as someone grasped it.

“It's alright. Suimei-kun's reaction is normal.”

“I-isn't it?”

Lefille was making a complicated expression like she was looking at something she could not understand. She must have been of the same opinion as Suimei. He was relieved that common sense was being protected by her.

“Anyways, Suimei-dono! Let's go inside!”

“Hurry, let's go.”

“... Alright, in we go then.”

Having his hands pulled by Felmenia and Liliana, they entered the shop. Suimei had gathered goods while he was the Empire, so he had been to magic stores before, but this magic store in the other world for some reason smelled of incense. Back in his own world, this kind of store would use incense with a pleasant smell to urge customers to come back, but that wasn't the case in this store. It reminded him more of incense

used during funerals.

The shop's clerk seemed to have no interest in actually serving customers and was just looking at them. Before he realized, Felmenia and Liliana were already looking at the shelves of goods and books and already had medicinal herbs and a magic staff in hand.

This was also the case in the Empire, but the magic tools sold in these stores had many different appearances, they were somehow aimed more towards fashion. In this world they were items to show to others after all. From that point of view, unlike the other world where they took ornaments and made them into magic goods, this world took magic goods and made them into ornaments. Well, it was only a trivial difference.

“Suimei-dono! There's something interesting here!”

Felmenia suddenly called out to him. He noticed that Felmenia was holding something in her hand while bouncing up and down and smiling at him. Looking at what she was holding, blood drained out of Suimei's face.

“A-a stuffed doll...!”

“Is something the matter?”

“No...”

Suimei groaned in front of Felmenia who was holding on to an old fashioned stuffed doll while she tilted her head to the side in confusion. Back in the other world, he had a partner who would go, 'Suimei-kun, a doll,' which ended up as a terrible memory for him. Ever since then, whenever he saw a small deformed stuffed doll, he would recall that tussle that he did not want to remember.

Somehow managing to give Felmenia a reply, he took a peek at Lefille and Liliana. Lefille, who was not very familiar with such goods looked at them with a grimace while groaning. On the other hand, Liliana was skimming through a grimoire quickly. Felmenia then shifted her attention to a glass case with accessories in it. She was probably looking at amulets and talismans. She was the type of mage to not use a staff, so she seemed

to have more interest in those goods than a magic staff. Looking closely, Felmenia had a sparkle in her eyes. She had no interest at all in the clothing shop before, but it seemed she at least had an interest in these kind of things that was more befitting for her age.

“Menia, if it catches your eye, shall I buy one for you?”

“!!”

“I-is it alright, Suimei-dono!?”

Felmenia let out a surprised voice as she agreed immediately. Suimei felt like Lefille was also pointing a surprised expression towards him, but it must have been his imagination since she was looking somewhere else when he turned to look.

“Then, um, how about this...”

“Aah, alright.”

Felmenia pointed reservedly at a brooch with a blue gem in it and Suimei gave her a pleasant reply. After calling the clerk to retrieve it from the case, he paid for it and handed it over to Felmenia. Felmenia held the brooch with both hands and was smiling with her whole face.

“A gift from Suimei-dono... Eheheh.”

“Do you like it?”

“Eheheh.”

“... Oooooi.”

Even after calling out to her, she didn't reply. It seemed only her mind was on a trip into her own little world.

“... Uuuuuh, what about Liliana? Is there something you want?”

“I, don't have anything, that I want no matter what.”

After saying that, Liliana continued to inspect the store's interior. And then— he could hear shuffling.

“...?”

After some more shuffling, he realized that Lefille was suddenly in his field of vision. While looking at her idly, she drew closer while shuffling about. While Suimei had a puzzled expression guessing she was tired or something, she then called out to him.

“S-Suimei-kun?”

“What's wrong?”

Lefille cleared out her throat. And then she spoke in a somewhat high strung voice.

“U-umm, Suimei-kun. I think it is somewhat unfair to only buy something for Felmenia-jou though.”

“Is that right?”

“That's right!”

“Do you also want something Lefi? But I bought you some clothes back in Kurant City right?”

“Th-that's true, but...”

“There's also the condition of my wallet to consider. If you want something, sorry but this time you'll have to manage on your own...”

As Suimei scratched his head apologetically, Lefille still stuck to her guns.

“B-before we left the Empire, did you not buy Lily an umbrella too!?”

“Aah, since she can't use dark magic that was too provide something to cover for that if only even a little.”

Before coming to the Alliance, taking Liliana's drop in self defence capabilities into consideration, he bought her a parasol which suited her well. While she was receiving treatment, it served the role of a magic staff and allowed her to use simple magics. Providing this for her was obvious. Lefille then looked at him with somewhat envious eyes. He didn't understand why.

“What's wrong all of a sudden? There's nothing here that Lefi would

seem to want right?”

“Th-that's not true you know? After looking I got interested. Really, really interested.”

“Ha?”

“Th-that's right! How about this!?”

While in a fluster, Lefille grabbed something that caught her eye. However that dried up object...

“Ah, oi, isn't that an animal's cock? Just what are you going to use that for?”

“? UWAAAAAAH!?”

After figuring out exactly what she was holding in her hand, Lefille began to panic in confusion. After rampaging for a while, she hurried back to where she was, and without planning on giving up, picked up something else in her hand.

“Th-then, this!”

What she had in her hand now was a sort of container for cosmetics. Suimei took it and gave it a sniff.

“... This, is probably an aphrodisiac salve.”'

“... Sorry. Please put it back.”

Lefille hung her head down. Everything she grabbed in her hand was something strange.

“Like I thought you should stop. Lefi has poor affinity with this store.”

“Ugu... Suimei-kun is a bully...”

“Why did it come to that...”

She was looking at him with resentment while speaking the same way she did when she became tiny. Suimei couldn't grasp why she wanted something so much that she would go so far. Having noticed Lefille's state, Liliana tapped on Lefille's shoulder repeatedly.

“Lefille. Next time, let's go to a different store. There, you can ask Suimei, to buy you something. Right, Felmenia?”

“That's right~ Eheheh.”

Felmenia replied completely absentmindedly. Her mind still hadn't come back from her own little world. Or rather, it was somewhat strange that as the youngest member, Liliana was the most level headed among them.

“Alright! The next store will surely be!”

On the other hand, Lefille was suddenly filled with determination as she tightened her fist. In the end, the dull-headed Suimei had no idea what was going on. Suimei then noticed that the hustle and bustle outside had gotten a fair bit larger.

“It's become quite noisy.”

Lefille drew closer to the store's window.

“The parade is probably about to start. The people are moving towards the main street.”

“Well then, shall we go look?”

As Suimei asked, the three of them each gave a reply and before long the four of them left the store and arrived at the street the Alliance's hero would be passing through. It was just about to begin. The path on the street was completely empty for the parade and on each side of the route was nothing but people, people, people, people overflowing everywhere.

“Uwa, that's a ton of people. It was also amazing in the Empire, but I guess it's like this everywhere.”

As Suimei looked in astonishment, Felmenia spoke up.

“Certainly, there's an astonishing number of people. It is in no way inferior to Reiji-dono's parade.”

“Umu. That's right. That time there was quite a lot of people too.”

Lefille was the one who spoke like she was remembering the parade.

During the parade in Astel, Suimei was holed up inside the castle. She must have seen it before meeting Suimei. While she remembered it with admiration, she was also shrinking back a bit for some reason.

“Everyone. It seems, it's starting.”

“Is that so? Liliana.”

“Yes. Over there, they're coming. The leading party is the hero and her companions, four people.”

After Suimei asked, Liliana pointed further down the street. As one would expect, she had sharp ears. Lefille also sensed their strong presence and squinted her eyes to avoid the sunlight while looking towards the hero's party.

“The noise is getting closer. They should be here soon.”

“Ah! I can see the leading carriage!”

Right after Felmenia let out her voice, a portion of the gathered masses screamed in joy. Before long, a well guarded escort carriage came into sight. Behind it, a festival float without a roof followed it. The festival float was being pulled by a cowhorn as to make it easier for the gathered masses to see. And on top of that festival float waving their hand was—

“Ah! That old man!?”

Seeing a familiar figure, Suimei yelled out in surprise. It was the tall dark-skinned man they met in the first town they came to in the Alliance, Gaius Forvan.

“That's, Forvan right?”

“Uheeeh... That old man, he was seriously one of the hero's companions...”

Suimei's surprise was completely leaking out, his eyes were wide open. Felmenia looked at him with a puzzled expression as she could not tell why he was so surprised.

“Suimei-dono. Did you not believe Forvan's story?”

“No, only half of it.”

He certainly didn't think it was a lie that he fought against demons, but he didn't really think he was one of the hero's companions. He thought he was just a soldier who fought near the hero at the most but—

“But really, that old man is really in high spirits.”

“Isn't he? He seems to be having a lot of fun... Um, like, really, a lot.”

Felmenia made a bitter smile. Gaius was unbecoming of his age and was excessively smiling at everybody. He had quite the slender face and features so it wasn't that strange, but looking at the figure of an old man overcome with excitement atop a festival float was somehow embarrassing to watch. Suimei thought the same back at the restaurant, but he was probably the type who was excited by his own confidence.

The festival float behind Gaius' then came into sight. On top of it was a person wearing a green robe with a hood. Their face was completely concealed by the hood, but from the lines made by their body it was probably a woman. She was holding onto a staff made of black wood with a large jewel at its tip and she was waving her hand in a mild-mannered fashion towards the populace.

“A mage?”

“Probably. Her robe and that type of staff are commonly used by mages in the self governed states. That's the first time I've seen such a large jewel installed in a staff though...”

Felmenia agreed with Suimei while looking at the staff curiously. However, as one would expect of the hero's party. A martial artist filled to the brim with muscles and a mage. They had all sorts of people gathered around them.

Before long, what appeared atop the next festival float was a young swordsman. He was somewhere in his teens. He seemed awfully familiar with this sort of event as he had a slight smile on his symmetrical face while responding to the people. From the fancy clothing that he was wearing, Suimei guessed he was someone of high standing. Liliana then

looked at him with a sleepy looking eye.

“The first prince of Miazen, Weitzer Ryerzen.”

“Fumu, one of the Seven Swords huh? To think he would also fight as one of the hero's companions.”

Lefille seemed to recognize the name Liliana let out.

“A hunk huh? A hunk prince who is strong and famous is just winning at life too much, what a scam.”

Suimei made a declaration filled with envy, but setting that aside. If that was the third person, then that means it was the last companion. The one riding atop the next and festival float would be the hero summoned by the Alliance.

“Now then, what kind of person will come out.”

“Gaius-dono said that she was a beautiful woman right?”

“Certainly, he said that.”

“Suimei, it's here. The last festival float.”

“Ooh, you're right..... Ah?”

After turning around when Liliana called out to him, Suimei looked at the top of the festival float, and let out a puzzled voice.

—For an instant, Suimei doubted his eyes. That's because there was a familiar person standing right where he was looking. Just like their information had indicated, the one standing atop the festival float was a woman.

However, she was wearing the uniform of a girl's high school from the neighbourhood of Suimei's house, a short skirt and a white garter belt, on her arms were scarlet armoured hand covers and the mask of a devil. She had long blond hair along her back, her hair was parted to one side and was kept up in a tuft by a ribbon. She had jade green eyes with long eyelashes which gave a sense of her youth. From the way she held herself, her strength was also apparent.

He could hear sighs of admiration from here and there which were likely due to her beautiful appearance. A long sword curved sword—what is called an uchigatana was in one of her hands as she awkwardly waved to the crowd with the other.

No matter how much he stared, all that came to mind was 'There's no way she should be here.' That girl was someone from the other world. She should not be in this world. While trying to escape from reality, Suimei shook his head right away. It was simply impossible for her to be a hero, and for him as her friend to also be summoned here. However...

“Just what kind of probability is this...”

To think that not only Reiji and Mizuki, but another of his acquaintances would be summoned to this world. It wasn't like it was absolutely impossible, but the probability that it happened was astronomically low. It wasn't something that could simply happen by coincidence.

“Suimei-dono?”

Noticing that Suimei was making a menacing look, Felmenia called out to him. But Suimei had no time to pay attention to her. Paying no mind to his surroundings, he let out a loud voice towards the top of the festival float.

“Oi! Hatsumi! It's me! Hatsumiiii! Can she not hear me in this ruckus...? Fuck!”

His voice was being drowned out by the crowd, it did not reach her—Kuchiba Hatsumi. Cursing out at the irritation of things not going his way, there was no way he would just let it go. Suimei once more tried yelling out to her and then, her eyes met his among the sea of people.

“Hatsumi...”

However, she did not notice his existence and began waving in another direction.

“Eh....?”

She was supposed to notice him and make a shocked expression. Having found a familiar face, she was supposed to call out his name. But that fleeting thought was completely betrayed. Suimei stood stock still dumbfounded before this treacherous reality thrust before him. Seeing his strange behaviour, Felmenia and Lefille called out to him.

“Suimei-dono? Just what is the matter?”

“That's quite the expression you have...”

Right now, he couldn't even properly hear their anxious voices. Why was it? Why did this happen? These words whirled around in Suimei's head for a while and occupied all his thoughts. Eventually, he came back to reality, and raised his face.

“... Aah, let's go back to the Twilight Pavilion for now. I'll explain it there.”

# Chapter 2

## Relation of the Summoned

“So the hero from the Alliance which was just in the parade...”

“Is Suimei-dono's acquaintance!?”

Lefille and Felmenia's shocked voices resounded throughout the room. After the hero's triumphant parade, Suimei and the others gathered in the Twilight Pavilion's guild master's room. Suimei was making a profoundly grim expression while seated on the sofa.

“There's no mistaking that she is my childhood friend Kuchiba Hatsumi. To think that even she would be summoned...”

Suimei answered their question as he heavily exhaled. Felmenia and the others were completely astonished at the extreme coincidence that the hero from the Alliance was his acquaintance.

“On top of getting swallowed into your friend's summoning, even your childhood friend get summoned to the same world. You've really been involved in some hapless fate there huh.”

Whether it was just unusual fate or the guidance of the stars, Rumeya simply stared in wonder with one eye shut as she smoked her pipe. It really was just as she said. There was no other expression Suimei could use to describe this other than hapless fate. It only left him with a hunch that those who were related to each other in some way were tied together and thrown into this world. Lefille then recalled Suimei's earlier actions.

“So that's why you were yelling like that?”

“Yeah. That's how it is, but... just what does it mean? She didn't react at all.”

“Could it be someone who looks similar but is actually somebody else?”

“No, if it was just her face it would be possible, but for her clothing to be the same is inexplicable. Not only that, her name is the same.”

“Hatsumi Kuchiba right? Certainly that is the hero's name, it's the same as the name you mentioned.”

“Yeah...”

Suimei was groaning at his wit's end. Liliana then put her doubt into words.

“Could it not simply be, that Suimei's voice, didn't reach her?”

“That may be the case, but during the parade her eyes met mine. She faced me and I was in her field of vision. It's doesn't make sense that she didn't notice me despite that.”

“It is also possible, that there was too many people, and she didn't notice, right?”

“Is that so... Maybe that's all it was...”

Suimei nodded as if to convince himself. Just as Liliana said, with so many people around, even if he entered her field of vision, it was possible that she did not recognize him. Nothing could be done by just obsessively arguing whether or not she recognized him or not. At any rate—

“I have no choice but to go meet up with her.”

Hearing him say that, Rumeya managed to guess what was coming next.

“You called me for a talk because of this, right?”

“Yes. As a guild master, I thought you'd be able to arrange a meeting with the hero.”

Even if Suimei was her friend, to the people of the Alliance, he was nothing but a civilian. It was difficult to imagine that he would be granted an audience with the hero easily. That's why if he asked Rumeya, who was of rather high standing, he thought he may be able to proceed forward smoothly. Contrary to his expectations though, Rumeya shook her head sullenly.

“Sorry. That will be a little difficult.”

“Difficult, how?”

“It's just, according to the royal family, that hero doesn't seem to go outside much. It hasn't been that long since she has come to this world, so it seems she isn't used to it yet. So if people were to meet with her it would be a burden, so holding an audience with her has been prohibited.”

“I see. So that is why Rumeya-dono has yet to meet the hero right?”

“That's how it is. The royal family of Miazen is quite high strung about anything related to the hero. Even if I poured all of my authority into it, they probably won't grant us an audience with her.”

“It's quite the strange story after letting her fight and making her participate in a parade.”

“Seriously. I don't know what they're thinking either.”

Rumeya agreed completely with Suimei. She must have also been considerably suspicious about this case as she puffed her pipe with a dissatisfied expression. Then, for some reason, Felmenia asked a question timidly.

“Hero-dono from the Alliance is... Um, Suimei-dono's good friend, so... Is she, on your mind?”

“Well yeah.”

As Suimei acknowledged her, Rumeya suddenly made an evil smile with a broad grin.

“Heeeh, what a lady killer. You've gathered so many beauties around you already and you're still after another woman for a new meal? You're quite sinful aren't you?”

“Ha...? Th-that's wrong! I'm not really...”

Rumeya was twirling her pipe around the tip of her finger. Naturally, Suimei didn't have such intentions and denied her accusation, but Felmenia and Lefille did not grasp this. Felmenia leaped towards him while Lefille pointed an unusually tranquil yet terrifying expression towards him.

“S-Suimei-dono!? Is that how it is!? Is that what you're intending to

do!?”

“Suimei-kun. It seems that there is a need for us to have a careful and long talk.”

“Wai-, Menia, calm down!... Eh? Lefi-san!? Scary!! That's scary!?”

Suimei reeled back at their sudden change in attitude while Rumeya laughed heartily at them.

“Well let's set that joke aside.”

“You, even after throwing that kind of bomb...”

As Suimei looked at her with a resentful gaze, while Rumeya made an evil smile like she found a new toy to play with.

“Suimei. It's quite amusing to tease you huh. Even in your own world, did you unexpectedly have that kind of role too?”

“Gu...”

“Hahaha! If you're like that it means I hit the bulls-eye. Well it's just your share of hardships though.”

Rumeya laughed as she amused herself with Suimei. While lamenting in his heart that he made a new enemy, she immediately wiped away her joking smile and made a serious expression.

“She's on your mind, because she's your friend?”

“Yes. I've known her since I was very young, I want to confirm what kind of situation she is in. I can't say for sure that she isn't being forced to fight against her will after all.”

“Fumu...”

It seemed that she did not consider this possibility. To the people of this world, they had the one sided notion that the hero readily consented to their requests. The speculation that one would be forced to fight against their will didn't really click with them. However, that line of thinking was more than common enough to consider back in Suimei's world.

Moreover, he still didn't have an answer as to why both Reiji and Elliot

had the baffling mental state that they felt like they had to fight. It was a situation where he couldn't feel relieved until he lumped them all together and took a look for himself. After calming down, Felmenia cocked her head to the side and spoke of her doubts.

“But what will you do? If we can't meet her by just approaching them directly, does Suimei-dono have a means to come in contact with Hero-dono?”

“Well, if it comes to that I do have one hand I can play out...”

While stroking his chin, Suimei shifted his focus to the window. The night, which was the time for magicians, was about to begin. If he couldn't approach her directly, there was nothing left but the more eccentric method.

★

—Kuchiba Hatsumi suddenly felt a jolt run through her body.

“Hmm...?”

As she limply woke up and let out her voice while opening her eyelids, her companion's, Selphy Fittney's face was right in front of her.

“Please wake up, Hatsumi. It's already evening.”

“Evening...?”

While rubbing her sleepy eyes, she straightened herself up and looked around. She was on top of her bed in her private room prepared for her on the fourth floor of Miazen's palace. The furnishings were kept to a bare minimum with only a dresser and drawer for clothing. It was the frugal room that she received from the royal family. A dark carpet was spread across the floor and a wide courtyard could be seen from the window. With her face still concealed by her hood, Selphy quietly showed her appreciation.

“Good work today. Hatsumi.”

“... Selphy, did I fall asleep?”

“Yes. You were sound asleep. You must have seen a good dream. Your

sleeping face was very peaceful.”

“Auu…”

Hatsumi could not suppress being bashful having had her sleeping face seen. She was blushing from embarrassment, but Selphy was being somewhat affectionate. She couldn't see her face due to the shadow, but Hatsumi felt like she was smiling under that hood.

“What kind of dream were you having? Do you remember?”

“Dream…”

She tried to remember the contents of her dream. Sure enough, the dream she was seeing—

“… It was a dream where I was a small child. In a place different from here. I was racing a boy and playing like a rascal with him.”

“The same dream as always, right?”

Hatsumi nodded back towards Selphy's gentle voice. Having lost her memories, it was a dream she often saw. As a small child, before swinging around a sword, she was playing around with a boy of the same age as her. She didn't have a basis for it, but she thought it was a memory from the past.

*(It's just—)*

It's just, partway through, it changed into a strange dream where the boy recited a good luck charm and healed her wound from falling over and of him driving away a stray dog. And at the end, he spoke.

—Whenever you're in danger, I will definitely come save you.

The boy's face was completely hazy and she couldn't remember it. However, as she remembered those words, she felt a faint desire after having lost something and her heart was somehow filled with loneliness…

Setting that aside, she only intended to take a nap but fell into a deep slumber. Astonished at herself for falling asleep like that, she then questioned Selphy.

“By the way, how long was I asleep?”

“Let's see, it's already evening after all, so you slept for quite a while.”

“Uu... So I slept that much... Before I fell asleep, I'm certain we planned to talk about our plans from now on right?”

“Yes. It was Hatsumi's suggestion.”

“Uu...”

After they had dinner right after the parade, leaving time for a short break, they were planning to gather together to discuss how they should move going forward with the demon subjugation. She had designated around an hour later randomly for them to meet, but currently it was pitch black outside the window. She had indulged herself in her afternoon nap for well over two hours.

“It has gotten quite late, so I came to wake you up.”

“It would have been fine to wake me up earlier.”

“No, you seemed quite tired, I thought it would be better not to call out to you.”

“Thank you, Selphy. So where are Gaius and Weitzer?”

“They are waiting in the next room over.”

“I see, so let's quickly—”

Before Hatsumi finished talking, she could hear fidgety footsteps from the hallway. This presence was Gaius. He must have sensed that she woke up. Just as she grasped who it was, without even knocking, the door flew open vigorously.

“Yo, are you awake? Our sleepy headed Hero-dono.”

That door must have been nothing but a single sheet of veneer to him. Along with the high-spirited sound of the door opening, a burly man covered in muscles came in with his usual affable smile. Without asking for permission, he plunked down on a chair in the room and acted like it was his own. A reproachful glint from the eye hidden under Selphy's hood

was thrust towards him.

“Gaius-shi. What are you doing entering a woman's room without even knocking?”

“Isn't it fine? She was sleeping in the clothes she usually wears anyways right? Besides if Hatsumi was immodestly dressed you would have done something about it too.”

“Yes, certainly that is true. At that time I would start by firing magic at you.”

“Haa, what a scary woman.”

While looking at Selphy reply immediately, Gaius grabbed both his shoulders and pretended to be scared. Even though he didn't think that at all, he was a droll man. On the other hand, Hatsumi did not mind Gaius' impolite behaviour at all and bowed her head lightly from atop her bed.

“Gaius, sorry. I overslept.”

“It's rare for you to oversleep huh.”

“It seems I was tired from doing something I wasn't used to.”

Hatsumi timidly said this. It came up during dinner as well, but that was her first experience with a parade. For half a day, she was riding on top of the festival float being pulled by a cowhorn while smiling pleasantly at the citizens. It was a lot more difficult than she had thought.

“Aaah, well it can't be helped. Even my wonderful self has stiff shoulders from that.”

Gaius was rubbing his shoulder while making a bitter face. Even though he was broadminded, he must not have been used to having to do that kind of thing either. She thought he seemed to be having quite a lot of fun during the parade, but it deep down that was actually the case. While talking about such things, a young man wearing high grade fabrics dressed like a knight came through the still open door. And the first thing that came out of his mouth was...

“—Gaius. Just what are you thinking obstinately going into Hero-dono's

room on your own?”

He criticized Gaius in a threatening tone with his head raised as he glared at him from the corner of his eye. It was Miazen's prince, Weitzer Ryerzen. However, without acting the least bit nervous towards that attitude, Gaius acted like he was being a nuisance while digging around his ear with his pinky finger.

“What, you also gonna lecture me...? Isn't it fine? I could hear them talking and all. I also want to get the depressing talks out of the way quickly and go drink some booze.”

“Are you saying that you place a priority on alcohol over the peace of the world?”

“Of course I do.”

Gaius revealed his intentions heartily as he struck his chest. Watching that arrogance while pinching his brow, Weitzer judged that any further conversation with this man would be unproductive. Softening his expression in an instant, he turned to Hatsumi and greeted her.

“I deeply apologize for being boisterous as your were just getting up, Hero-dono. Did you have a good sleep?”

“Yes. Thank you. Also, sorry for making you wait.”

“No, you must still be fatigued from subjugating the demons. Unreasonably making you do so is our responsibility. Hero-dono, please do not pay it any mind.”

“Un...”

He was behaving modestly as to not embarrass her, as usual, he was quite the gentleman. Now that they were moving on to a serious discussion, Hatsumi couldn't stay on top of her bed and decided to move over to a chair. Sensing this, Selphy went to lend her a hand, but for some reason Weitzer held her back.

“Selphy, leave this to me.”

“... I see, understood.”

Selphy questioned Weitzer's actions for an instant, but she suddenly realized something and gracefully resigned herself. Seeing this exchange, it was now Hatsumi who was full of questions as Weitzer then drew closer.

“W-Weitzer?”

“Now then, Hero-dono, please take my hand.”

“Eh? Ah, un... Th-thank you...”

Weitzer was holding out his hand to support her. Worrying about her, he showed a gentle expression. Hatsumi bashfully thanked him while averting her eyes. This kind of behaviour was fairly common for him, but this even time it was still quite embarrassing. Still, she took his hand and stood up and...

“Oooh? So he's gone on the offensive all at once?”

“Fufufu...”

The other two were laughing like they found something funny. Weitzer then guided Hatsumi to her chair next to the others, and began speaking.

“Hero-dono, how was your meal today?”

“U-un. The food was delicious but...”

“Was there something about it you were not pleased with?”

“That's not it, dealing with that kind of place is not my strong point. Ah, I don't mean that I hate his Majesty the King or the Queen or anything though. Okay?”

Not limited to just those two, she got along fairly well with the people of the palace. However, she was quite uncomfortable having a meal in such a ceremonious place and was unable to calm down. However, she wasn't sure how Weitzer interpreted her words, but he spoke with the air of a know it all.

“After losing you memories, I'm sure you'll get used to such feelings. While draped in such anxieties you won't be able to calm down in that sort of place.”

“No, that's not really what I mean though...”

“You'll get used to it soon. Hero-dono's manners while you sit at the dinner table are always beautiful after all.”

“U-un...”

Hatsumi replied awkwardly to Weitzer's praise. She didn't know what his deal was letting out such flattery in such a straight manner. After sitting in her chair, she could see Gaius broadly grinning. Selphy was also leaking out a stifled laugh. She didn't know what they found so funny.

“... Hey, the two of you are like that from time to time, but what is it?”

“No, it is nothing?”

“That's right, we're just being pleasant.”

The two of them seemed happy, but for some reason Weitzer was making an offended expression. However it seemed Gaius also found that attitude strange, and his smile just grew wider. Waiting for Weitzer to take a seat, Gaius then spoke to him.

“So, what will we do from here?”

“I don't think there's anything to do though?”

“Oioi there's no point in just saying that here right? Are you angry about something?”

“Not really.”

Though he said that, Weitzer did seem angry about something. Setting aside their little exchange, Hatsumi cut into the conversation.

“It's a matter of course that we'll be subjugating the demons, but how will we move from here on out?”

“That kind of thing, ain't it fine to just link up with the soldiers and march on them like usual?”

“Hero-dono, I also think that is a solid plan though?”

In a strange turn of events, Weitzer agreed with Gaius' suggestion to just keep doing things as they were. That meant that it was in fact a sound

theory. However, Hatsumi had different thoughts on the matter.

“That may be the case but...”

“Hatsumi, is there something you're thinking about?”

“Un. Since we have this kind of independent war potential, I was thinking that there was a better way to use it. I mean, we've already raised the soldiers' morale considerably with a big victory, there's no need to inspire them further right? In that case, I think it is better to leave the battlefield to the generals.”

“Ah?”

Gaius didn't quite get what she was implying, but Weitzer seemed to understand her proposition well.

“In other words, you're saying it would be better for us to move against the demons independently.”

“Yes. I was thinking that was something we could possibly do. We could make a surprise attack against the demon generals or something. Though it may be somewhat of a dangerous move.”

“That is the case isn't it? However, if it is a success then the burden on the soldiers fighting on the battlefield would be lightened remarkably.”

They had enough war potential to be considered peerless. They had three people who could fight head on against the demons and one who could support them from behind perfectly. The four of them were also well suited for covert operations. If they could take action and eliminate the demon generals and other influential demons, it would give an advantage to humanity's war effort in general.

“... Of course, that is only if everyone will fight while being aware of the dangers.”

Just as her apprehensions indicated, it was quite the dangerous plan. It would put a lot of pressure on Hatsumi and her companions. However, Weitzer spoke confidently as if the answer was obvious.

“Of course, we intend to follow Hero-dono.”

“Even if Weitzer is okay with it, you don't know what Gaius and Selphy think right? The two of them have their own countries to worry about, you can't coerce them. Don't speak like you're cutting off their way out. Besides, frankly speaking, I'm not completely decided on this plan either.”

“M-my apologies.”

After being rebuked, Weitzer panicked uncharacteristically as he apologized. The reason he was agitated was likely due to the harsh nature of her words. Next to Weitzer who was still stumped at his blunder, Gaius spoke to Hatsumi with a reliable air.

“I don't mind at all. I'm tired of getting stalled anyways, danger is just what I want.”

“I will also accompany you. I don't have any intention of abandoning my duty after all this time.”

“Thank you, both of you.”

The two of them, or rather the three of them, were rather promising. After Hatsumi showed her gratitude, Gaius looked at her like he was looking at something odd.

“In any case Hatsumi, you weren't like this before, I'm surprised you got so pumped up.”

He must have said this because she suddenly proposed such an aggressive plan. At first she shut herself up in her room from the shock of losing her memories after refusing to subjugate the demons. He was likely contrasting her behaviour to that time, but...

“You promised not to talk about that right? Geez... While we were fighting, I just thought we had to defeat the demons is all.”

After fighting the demons for a while, she reached the point where she thought that they were an evil that could not be overlooked. It was obvious after seeing the strength of their malicious intent, but she just had a feeling that they had to be defeated no matter what. Moreover, she strongly thought that she wanted to protect not only the people of this

world, but the three companions who fought alongside her. They were important to her.

“—Hey, Selphy. Do we have something that we need to do in Miazen?”

“Not really. Just keep in mind that their are evening parties that you must attend.”

“Evening parties… Why?”

She thought the parade was necessary to soothe the citizens, but she honestly didn't think that further service was necessary. After asking Selphy, Weitzer was the one to reply.

“It's because I would like us to deepen our friendship.”

“If it's all of you, then I think we get along well enough already?”

Hatsumi knew the three of them ever since her first battle. It wasn't that long since they met, but they fought together on the battlefield, saved each other, and became trusted companions to each other. She thought there was nothing needed on top of that but…

“I expressed myself poorly there. By us I mean the people of the Saadias Alliance. I believe that you must properly meet father, mother and the leaders from Miazen and the other Alliance countries.”

“That's… If we can all get along then I think that is fine, but it isn't something we need to rush in to…”

“No, it is urgent business to the Alliance right now. If Hero-dono goes right away…”

“Are you saying that I should be a dish served to put the Alliance in order?”

“N-no! That's not what I am..!”

“The demons are invading, I think that is the more urgent need though…”

She knew it was necessary, but even so, deep in her heart she was not convinced.

“That's wrong Hero-dono! This isn't about using Hero-dono for our personal means...!”

Perhaps because Hatsumi was making a complicated expression, Weitzer was frantically trying to correct himself thinking that he had offended her. On the other hand, Gaius let out his usual dauntless laugh and turned towards Hatsumi.

“Well, it's about you time you took a hint Hatsumi, right?”

“Take a hint, of what?”

“Hatsumi, it's about Prince Weitzer's good will...”

“Good will? Certainly I think that I'm receiving too much of it and feel a little bad about it but...”

After being summoned, not just Weitzer, but the other people from the palace took good care of her. Having been the ones who summoned her, it could said to be obvious, but she didn't forget her feelings of gratitude. She conveyed this to them, but Gaius let out an astonished sigh like she was off the mark.

“... How do I put it... To put it bluntly you're amazingly dense. You somehow remind me of that spindly lad I had a meal with a while back...”

“...?”

She couldn't really understand what he was saying. After calming down a fair bit, Weitzer seemed to have an idea and spoke his honest feelings.

“Certainly it is just as Hero-dono says, it would be of considerable help to the Alliance. However, after defeating the demons, for you who has lost your memories to live in peace, I believe it to be something necessary. If you are anxious, then I will support you for the rest of your life.”

“But... I don't want to cause that much trouble for Weitzer.”

“I-I don't particularly think of it as troublesome!”

“But...”

She couldn't just nod so simply. No matter the reason, she had no

intention of stealing away Weitzer's life and no intention of pushing the responsibility on him that much. Besides, she had a world to return to, and she felt that she must return to it. Yes, that boy that appeared in her dreams, she felt like she had to meet him no matter what.

"..."

She couldn't let the anxiety of her amnesia occupy her mind. If she thought of nothing of but that person that she had to remember who was concealed in the memories hidden by a misty haze in the depth of her mind, her mind would cease functioning. Sensing the subtleties of her heart from the colour of her face, Weitzer looked at her with a worried expression.

"... Hero-dono."

"Sorry. Our conversation is over, so leave me alone for a while."

"Hatsumi."

"Un. I'm alright. Thank you, Selphy."

As Selphy called out to her, Hatsumi smiled back as if to say not to worry about her. After Weitzer apologetically stated 'I don't mind after all,' the three of them left the room. A short while after they left, Hatsumi stood up from her chair and threw her body onto the bed. She then looked up at the tapestry affixed to the ceiling and suddenly leaked her thoughts out of her mouth.

"... I must return to the place that I came from."

Her companions were important to her, but she didn't want to leave her memories behind. She wanted to know who she was. Back in the place she had to return to, there may also be people waiting for her too. That's why—

"—And up we go."

While in the middle of pondering, she suddenly heard that casual voice come from outside the window. The window was wide open. Curious about the voice, she turned her head towards the window while still

sprawled out across her bed. As if just having climbed up onto the window frame, a young man was squatting there wearing green clothes with black hair.

“Yo!”

“Eh!? Eh!? Eeeeeh!?”

The young man appeared suddenly and raised his hand as he greeted her intimately. Hatsumi bolted out of her bed in astonishment.

“Wa-wait, this is the fourth floor!”

“Hm? It's not like you can't climb just four stories if you try hard enough right? You can grip onto these protrusions and climb. I didn't do that though.”

While gestures the action, the young man spoke indifferently. Certainly there was a countless number of ways to climb up here, but there was a problem that came before that.

“H-how did you get into the inner grounds of the palace!?”

“I did that with just a little something is all...”

Saying that, the young man put his thumb and index finger together and separated them repeatedly. After demonstrating that his infiltration was a simple matter with that gesture, he jumped down from the window into the room like it was natural. Just who was he? Throwing that question aside for the moment, Hatsumi grabbed the sword that she left standing nearby. And then, as if she was able to cut him down at any instant, she took a stance with the sword at her hip.

“Don't move!”

A warning. And then, as if the young man didn't understand what she was saying, he stiffened up as if timed had stopped for a while, and let out a hysteric voice.

“... Ha?”

“Ha? My ass! You trespasser! Do you want me to kill you!?”

She let out a warning once more towards the young man who was making an idiotic face. After he stood there like an idiot for a while longer, having finally sensed her thirst for blood, he started panicking.

“K-kill? Just what are you saying, kill? You're not the type to make that kind of joke right?”

“Yes, I'm surprised you know. It is not a joke.”

“I-it's not a joke, just what the hell are you saying!? Are you seriously planning to kill me!? I-is it that? Are you maybe angry cause I suddenly came into a lady's bedroom? That's certainly my bad but...”

“Wrong.”

“Then what is it!?”

Hatsumi stared daggers into him as if piercing his body. She had no idea why the young man was so surprised. Taking into account what he was doing, it should have been obvious what would happen.

“Can you not tell without being told? Some unknown person suddenly came into my room, normally anyone would be vigilant.”

“Unknown, you say...?”

“At the very least, I don't recognize you... at all.”

After coming to this world, she had not once met or gotten to know this young man. Despite that, why was he making that bewildered face like he was standing before an acquaintance? She couldn't understand it at all. However, the young man was quite shaken by her words.

“D-don't joke around. This ain't the kind of place to spout that kind of joke right?”

“Haven't I been saying that I'm not joking? I don't know you.”

“There's no way you don't! I'm Suimei! Your, Kuchiba Hatsumi's childhood friend! Yakagi Suimei!”

“Ch-childhood friend?”

“Yeah, that's it. I'm your childhood friend. I'm begging you, please spare

me these jokes...”

The young man, Yakagi Suimei, let out an agonizing voice at his wit's end. She wasn't expecting him to say childhood friend, and his attitude up until now was certainly as if he was in fact that close to her. However, his excuse had an extremely odd point.

“Just what are you saying? I'm a hero summoned from another world you know? There's no way I would have a childhood friend from this world.”

This stood in complete opposition to this young man, Yakagi Suimei's words. It was an undeniable truth. It was certainly possible that Hatsumi had a childhood friend. However since she was summoned from another world, it was absolutely impossible for her to meet a childhood friend in this world. He may have a reason for infiltrating this place and used that lie as a way to get closer to her, as far as wiles go it was far too ill-prepared. On the other hand, having that truth thrown before him, the young man was astonished as if everything he believed in had just been betrayed. Before long, he showed an expression like he suspected something.

“Oi, you, could it be, your memories... are gone?”

“Certainly it is just as you say, I have amnesia.”

“Oioi, seriously...?”

As she declared this, the young man stared in wonder as if he just became aware of a shocking truth.

In the neighbourhood of Yakagi Suimei's house, there was a kenjutsu dojo. The instructor at the dojo was a good friend of his father. When Suimei was still a young child, at his father's recommendation, the instructor moved to the neighbourhood and opened the dojo there. The kenjutsu style was named the Phantom Sword of the Kurikara Dharani, an old sword style which was passed down since long before even the warring states period in Japan. Its origin came from its namesake, a

dharani – a ritual speech like a mantra – based on the dragon sword Kurikara wielded by the wrathful Buddhist god Acala, which was used to make demonic spirits and entities capitulate. Not only was it used to cut people, it was a sword style passed down that could cut familiar spirits, apparitions and even monsters.

Naturally, the style was not only passed down in his house, the dojo's instructor also taught kenjutsu on the side and behind the scenes he also had the job of cutting down the monsters running rampant in the world. His daughter—Kuchiba Hatsumi, followed after her father, and also cut down the monsters of the world.

Due to various circumstances, she did not actually know that Suimei was a magician or that he knew of the secret work her family did but—setting that side for the moment. Her skill with a sword was quite high, it was to the extent that her father Kuchiba Kiyoshiro thought that it was a waste that she was a woman. Despite the fact that she had relatively little real combat experience in the other world, Suimei could guess that she was probably at the level of the Seven Swords. And that girl was right now in front of his eyes, pushing a choice before him.

"—So, do you want me to call other people? Or do you want me to cut you down right here?"

"I'd rather reject both option. They're both quite troublesome after all."

"I find the current situation troublesome. There's some unknown man in my room after all."

"Give me a break..."

Suimei was at his wit's end. That girl that he played with ever since she moved to his neighbourhood, that he learned to use a sword with, was now lowering her back slightly preparing to draw her sword and strike at him. The thirst for blood drifting towards him was definitely proof that she was not joking. If he did anything strange, it was inevitable that the sword would come flying towards him.

But, to think that she would have amnesia. To check up on her condition, he was prepared to take her along with him if possible, but he

had no clue at all what he should do in this situation. As long as her memories of the other world were missing, no matter what he brought up, she wouldn't believe him. Even if he relied on magic, magic to heal amnesia didn't exist. He had spells to intervene with the brain and rewrite memories, but if he took that path and forcefully pushed memories into her, there was no mistake that it would put a considerable burden on her brain.

It was completely vexing. He had no way of improving the situation. His only choice was to talk to her until she believed him—

“Suuu...”

Suddenly, he could hear Hatsumi exhaling. Her weapon was a blade about a hundred and twenty centimetres long. The grip was about twenty five centimetres long. There were some strange ornaments on it, but its shape was that of a Japanese sword or something imitating one. Within that red scabbard, the blade was likely made of special metal from this world.

And right now, he was standing only nine centimetres from where the tip of her blade could reach without moving. In other words, he was well within her range. No, in her case, even if the tip of her blade could not reach him, he was well within her range anyways.

A sword master who passed a certain threshold in ability was able to strike outside the range of the length of their sword and arm. It was impossible physically, but to put it crudely, with a horizontal slash, they could cut down anything and everything before them like a wall of clouds split by the wind. This was also possible with this girl's sword style. It was a sword which defied common sense.

“The Kuchiba School of the Phantom Sword of the Kurikara Dharani. Even with amnesia, you didn't forget your sword style right?”

As Suimei said this while wiping away some unpleasant sweat, Hatsumi showed a slightly surprised expression.

“You know of it?”

“I've been saying for a while now that I'm your childhood friend...”

“I can't believe that.”

“Why not?”

“Then why have you come in the way you have? Couldn't you just ask straight up front?”

“I did it this way cause I couldn't do that.”

“Fuu. If you couldn't do it, doesn't that mean you had something to feel guilty about?”

“That's just splitting hairs...”

Suimei spoke in exasperation. Setting aside the guards or the soldiers, he thought that at least his childhood friend would believe him.

“Then can you prove it? Certainly it looks like you know about my sword style, but it is possible to figure that out using some kind of spell like the mages and demons. So just by knowing that, it isn't proof that you're my childhood friend.”

“Gu...”

Suimei was at a loss for words. It was certainly just as she said. There was no definite proof that he could show her right away. He did have a picture on his cell phone that he took together with Hatsumi and her family, but his cell phone's battery had died long ago and he couldn't use it.

In that case, he could take her along by force. But it wasn't like her memories would return if he did that. In the first place, it would become a huge commotion if the hero was abducted. While Suimei was hard pressed thinking of what he should do, he heard violent footsteps from the hallway. Someone had sensed an irregularity. Without any time for him to use magic, a woman's voice came from the other side of the door.

“Hatsumi!? Is something wrong!?”

“Ah!? Selphy! It's an intruder!”

“Are you talking about me!?”

“Is there anyone else!?”

Along with her words, her blade flashed. Suimei jumped back towards the window to dodge it. The tip of her long blade then changed its trajectory at a right angle, and her slash turned into a thrust. As her blade cut through the air, the blade was accompanied by a sharp noise. The tip of the blade made from corroded silver was extending towards his stomach. Suimei just barely dodged it and escaped deeper into the room.

“Are you trying to kill me!?”

“I'll just skewer you a bit. Be relieved, I'll properly avoid your vitals.”

“That's so dangerous I can't feel any relief at all dammit!”

Immediately following that, the door opened with a bang. The person who came in was someone wearing a green robe. It was likely the woman who called out to Hatsumi earlier, the mage who was standing atop a festival float during the parade.

“Hatsumi! Are you safe?”

“Yes. This man is the intruder—Now give up already.”

“I don't know who you are or how you infiltrated the palace, but there's no way for you to escape anymore.”

Just as she said, she was pinning down the door and the window was now within the range of Hatsumi's blade. Even the place he was currently standing in that was outside of the reach of her blade was within her actual range. However—

“If there's no way to escape then I just have to make one!”

“Wha!?”

“—!?”

Gathering mana in hist fist, Suimei lashed out at the wall as he invoked his magic. His fist let out a powerful shockwave as he thrust it out and scattered ether wind into the surroundings. As his fist crashed into the

wall, it was blown away and reduced to pieces.

He could hear curses and groans behind him. It was likely because they were forced to give their undivided attention to protecting themselves from the shockwave. Using that opportunity, Suimei threw his body out the hole he created. The building was four stories tall. And right now he was on that fourth story. However, to a magician, there was no need to worry about this kind of height, it was a simple trifle.

In the dead of the night, Suimei could hear the sound of the wind blowing against his body from below as the ground drew nearer immediately. After landing on the ground safely using magic, for some reason, he could hear the voice of the woman Hatsumi called Selphy ringing in his earlobe.

“An intruder has appeared in the palace. It's a man with black hair wearing green clothing. After infiltrating the hero Hatsumi's room, he jumped down to the courtyard. All guards are to go to the courtyard... I repeat...”

It was a simple alarm. That robed woman was a mage, and seemed to be a wind user. The wind was carrying her voice to every nook and cranny of the palace. Because of that alarm, Suimei could hear footsteps immediately approaching him. Suimei was running to the edge of the courtyard, but soldiers carrying swords came out from every direction.

“I found him! Over there!”

“Spread out and surround him! Absolutely do not let the ruffian who infiltrated the palace escape!”

“Tch... They sure came out in force.”

He must have picked a bad place to land. He had nowhere to hide himself in the courtyard and there was quite a distance before he could reach another building he could jump down from. After being surrounded by the soldiers, the voice of a familiar man came from behind him.

“Ah? Aren't you that spindly lad from before!?”

The man who let out a surprised loud voice, was the one he met back at

the restaurant, Gaius Forvan. Pressing his back against the wall of a building, Suimei replied in a light tone without any sense of danger.

“Aah old man, we meet again. Long time no see.”

“It hasn't been a long time and I'm not an old man dammit! What's going on with you being an intruder?”

“No, there are some circumstances here deeper than the Mariana Trench you see.”

“You playing dumb? I'll give you a walloping you know?”

“No, before you can wallop me, old man, it looks like I'm going to be cut down by some other guy.”

The surrounding soldiers drew their swords and he could see a glitter in their eyes. They all seemed to be quite offended that he infiltrated not only the palace, but the hero's room. Before long, one more person arrived. The crowd of soldiers opened up and walking out with an air of composure, was one of Hatsumi's companions who was standing atop one of the festival floats. If he remembered right, this was Miazen's prince, Weitzer Ryerzen.

“Gaius, do you know this man?”

“Even if you say I know him, he's just a passing acquaintance I shared a table with at a restaurant.”

“I see.”

After confirming that, he drew his sword as he made a statement.

“Scoundrel. To not only perform the foolish act of trespassing in this Calnus Palace, but to even trespass into Hero-dono's bedroom, you understand what will happen to you correct?”

Suimei returned a grand sigh to Weitzer's quiet yet overpowering tone.

“Just so you know... I only came here to see an acquaintance of mine.”

“Your acquaintance you say?”

“It's Hatsumi. Though it seems she has amnesia and doesn't recognize

me at all.”

“...”

“Such nonsense. Hero-dono was summoned from another world. There's no way she has any acquaintances in this world.”

Gaius knit his brows together while making a curious face while Weitzer declared Suimei's words to be nonsense. Looking at the two of them, Suimei dropped his shoulders with a sigh.

“Well that's true isn't it...”

The sound of Gaius cracking his knuckles filled the air.

“Well, whatever the case. It looks like we'll need to ask you about all sorts of things. Just be obedient.”

“This isn't the kind of atmosphere where I'll be treated courteously just by being obedient.”

“Naturally. There is no need for mercy for an intruder. Just be grateful that we won't dice you to pieces.”

Gaius' attitude was fairly gentle, but Weitzer on the other hand was curt. The soldiers in the area were all prepared for battle with their swords at the ready. To escape, there was no choice but to do something about the soldiers in front of him as a well as Gaius and Weitzer.

“No other choice huh...”

Suimei lamented with a long sigh over this situation which kept going beyond his control. And then, in spite of the surrounding being directly under the moonlight, his figure sank into the shadows.

At the same time, the guild master of the Twilight Pavilion's Miazen branch, Rumeya, was at the palace. Hearing that Suimei Yakagi planned to infiltrate the palace to make contact with the Alliance's hero, she took the opportunity to infiltrate it at the same time.

Of course, the reason she did so could be summed up by simply saying

it looked amusing. She had her position to consider, but having been born a therianthrope, just like other therianthropes, she had a disposition to seek out pleasure that she could not go against. Normally, due to her fox ears and seven tails, she stood out a lot. But right now, thanks to the transformation techniques passed down by the golden fox clan, she was impersonating a palace guard.

Partway through, she lost sight of Suimei in a corridor, but eventually a voice was carried by the wind informing the palace of the existence of an intruder. As it spread through the palace, guards carrying lamps were rushing towards the courtyard while letting out angry roars.

"... Good grief, did that boy mess up?"

Rumeya grimaced. Suimei used magic from another world and seemed to possess a considerable amount of power, so she thought there was nothing to worry about, but to think he would make a blunder.

*(This'll be bad if I don't go to save him right...)*

She was well aware of his true strength after hearing about it from Lefille, but the quality of the palace guards was quite high. There was also the hero's companions present here. Even if he was a mage from another worlds, they would likely end up catching him. Since he was Lefille's benefactor, she couldn't just bluntly abandon him. Letting out a breath like it became something troublesome, she began heading to the courtyard when she suddenly noticed something change in her surroundings.

"...?"

Noticing that her surroundings had darkened significantly, she looked up towards the moon as clouds began to float by in front of it. Perhaps it was because of these clouds that the area became much darker. However, the moon still wasn't completely covered so she didn't think it was the only factor which drove the entire area dark though—

Rather, she didn't have the time to think of such things. Not wanting to waste any more time just standing around, Rumeya shook off those unnecessary thoughts and hurried to the courtyard. Spread out in the

courtyard was Suimei, the palace guards, Gaius Forvan and Weitzer Ryerzen. All actors were gathered and present. Suimei had been cornered up against a wall and the play was reaching its climax.

“Achaaa... Isn't this just the worst case scenario?”

After slipping in and blending with the guards, she made a grimace at the situation before her. If he was still being chased it would be a better situation, but the way it was it would be difficult to save him unharmed. More guards were steadily gathering and had completely formed an impenetrable semi-circle around Suimei.

Escaping would no longer be a simple matter. That mysterious mage from the self governed states, the 'Snowstorm' should have also been around somewhere. Should she barge in while the guards try to capture him?—However, contrary to all her expectations, the second act of the play began.

As the palace guards charged in to capture Suimei, just as he shrugged his shoulders while watching them, something caused the mana lamps installed in the courtyard as well as the lamps being held by the guards to begin flickering.

They were buzzing at random intervals, and eventually, as if they all broke down, light vanished from the area. In the brief instant where the guards were bewildered by the unexpected event, matching the moment the courtyard sank into darkness, Suimei's surroundings began to sway. It was like he was covered in a heat haze. Suimei himself was not moving. His face was hidden behind his bangs and his expression couldn't be seen. Despite his current predicament where he was driven into a corner, he stood completely stock still without taking any actions.

However, the moment she managed to get a good look at Suimei through that transparent heat haze, she could feel a shiver through her body... It didn't feel like the malice from the demons' power, but right now, Suimei was giving off an inexpressibly eerie feeling. It was as if a mysterious dread was right before her eyes, it felt like the darkness around her was carrying a cold moisture.

Suddenly, all the guards who went to capture him fell to the ground with a clang.

“Wha—!?”

Witnessing them all faint with no logical explanation, she let out a surprised voice. This was the same for the other guards and the hero's companions. After the surroundings darkened, they began to show their agitation. During this confusion, even the palace guards further in the back began to collapse as they lost consciousness.

All that was left was Gaius, Weitzer and a few of the guards. There wasn't any abnormality with the hero's two companions, but the other guards were dominated by that eerie atmosphere. Rumeya felt like they were all sweating profusely. While vigilantly look around at the fallen soldiers, Gaius turned to Suimei.

“... The hell did you do?”

“Just as you saw, I only knocked them out?”

“Knocked them... Out?”

Gaius was completely bewildered hearing Suimei's brief reply. On the other hand, Weitzer had much more to say.

“Doing such suspicious looking things! Without using magic! Without even touching them! There's no way to knock down a person! What the hell did you do bastard!?”

“Even if you ask what I did, it's exactly as I said.”

“Do you intend to deceive me with those words? Impossible, you're not saying that you knocked them out only by thinking about it, are you bastard?”

“Correct. It is just that impossibility you speak of.”

As his statement rang in the air without any pretense, Weitzer spoke in a somewhat disgusted tone.

“Quit speaking nonsense. You can't knock people out just by thinking about it, besides, the soldiers here are the elite among all the soldiers of

the Alliance you know? They are both physically and mentally strong, they wouldn't just fall over from something like—”

Suimei pointed an extremely bored and cold gaze from his red eyes towards Weitzer.

“What are you saying? The people gathered here are just normal people who can more or less use a sword aren't they? What makes you think that guys like that could overcome my desires?”

Right after he fired off those words, it felt like the air in the area cooled down considerably. Did Suimei do something? Or did Rumeya just feel like that after hearing such a dreadful reality from him? A freezing wind passed through which was caused by something other than just the cold evening wind itself. As the unfamiliar wind struck her body, her skin felt like it was being tormented.

On the other hand, overpowered by his mysterious manner of speech and eerie aura, the remaining guards ran away. However, it was already too late. Once more, several people collapsed to the ground. From what she could see, it wasn't like their spirits were being struck causing them to lose consciousness. Certainly, a bizarre atmosphere was wrapping around their surrounding, but it didn't seem to be the cause for knocking out those robust guards. Then was it really just as Suimei said, that they were collapsing just because he desired it? Weitzer glared at Suimei.

“You bastard...”

“The rest of you who are left, get out of the way. A simple human has no way of winning against a magician you know?”

As Suimei made that exasperated declaration, Weitzer realized something as he showed a composed expression.

“However, it seems you can't knock us down.”

“That's right. We're still all lively like right?”

Gaius also had a fearless smile as he bluntly told Suimei this. It was certainly just as they said, the two of them were the cornerstones of the battlefield in this place and there were still a few guards left. However,

why was it that they were unable to sense the danger before them? Rumeya was looking at the same man and couldn't help but be confused. If she was in their position, before this baffling phenomenon in their surroundings, Suimei's own eerie actions and the penetrating cold presence, she would tuck her tail and run away immediately. The tide was already in Suimei's favour. It was likely that no matter what plan they put in action, this would not change.

... Because of the dim moonlight, Suimei's figure fell into darkness. It was as if he was a citizen within the darkness itself as a dark shadow stuck to him.

“Weitzer! Gaius!”

Suddenly, a woman's voice rang out from behind Rumeya. It was gentle and carried concern for others, a beautifully transparent high pitched voice. A woman with a beautiful appearance soon showed up. She had long flowing hair and strong-willed green eyes. She used an awfully long sword, but this girl was probably the hero.

“Is it Hatsumi!?”

“Hero-dono!”

“This is, eh—?”

As the hero Hatsumi came running over and while replying to Gaius and Weitzer, she noticed the terrible spectacle before her eyes. After looking at her surroundings while completely baffled, she pointed a severe gaze towards Suimei.

“Did you do this?”

“Aah. But there's no need to worry. They've only lost consciousness, there's nothing wrong with them other than that.”

... A dangerous atmosphere seemed to be building up between the two of them. From Suimei's story, they were supposed to be childhood friends, but from her attitude it didn't seem to be the case at all. Did something happen? Following behind Hatsumi, the mage from the self governed states, Selphy Fittney also showed up.

“With this, all four of us have gathered.”

The hero and her companions rallied together. On the other hand, Suimei quietly urged Hatsumi.

“Hatsumi, I want you to listen to me.”

“If you obediently turn yourself in, I'll consider listening to you.”

“I don't have that kind of hobby.”

Suimei completely refused. Certainly it was a bad idea to just quietly get caught in this kind of situation. There was no way the royal family of Miazen would treat him courteously after all this. A slightly perplexed expression showed on Suimei's face along with his meek attitude. Hearing this exchange between them, Gaius turned to Hatsumi.

“He's been saying it for a while but, is he your acquaintance?”

“I don't know him. But this man has been saying that I'm his childhood friend.”

“Haa?”

Gaius raised his voice hysterically in confusion. He then turned an astonished gaze towards Suimei.

“Oi lad. If you're going to lie make up a better one will you? No matter how much you want to meet the hero, even a brat won't come up with that kind of lie you know?”

“That kind of denial right from the start is somewhat troublesome. Hatsumi has amnesia right? There's nobody here who can properly judge whether it is a lie or not right?”

“But no matter how you put it, being a childhood friend to the summoned hero is strange ain't it?”

Gaius stated his opinion, but Suimei did not say anymore. Without objecting, he simply let out a sigh like the people in front of him were lined up like immovable statues. Selphy then questioned him further.

“So, what will you do? Will you obediently turn yourself in?”

“I just said that I refuse didn't I?”

“Then, is it fine to interpret that as your intent to resist?”

“…”

Seeing his silence, Selphy then threw out more threatening words.

“I will ask you beforehand, but do you really think that you can win against us? The four of us broke the demon army and defeated a demon general you know?”

“So that's why you think you're strong? No matter how you put it, isn't that just being conceited?”

“So, do you want to test it out?”

Gaius was making light of the situation as he spoke. If he was going to resist, it would be a fight. However, Suimei then carelessly turned his back to them.

“Ah?”

“I'm not interested. I'll go back for now.”

“Haa!? Oi, are you going to run away after saying so much!?”

“I'm not interested in needlessly rampaging around. I'll come again, so you'll have to generously overlook me this time.”

Suimei looked back over his shoulder and spoke modestly. Though the situation was like this, he was unexpectedly going to quietly resign. Perhaps because his childhood friend was present, he didn't want to resort to violence. Gaius then sprang into action.

“You think I'm going to just say 'Yeah okay' at this point in time!?”

Along with his fighting spirit, Gaius lunged forward with a magnificent punch. As he leaped in one step away from Suimei, his feet gouged out the earth beneath them and his fist flew forward carrying a tremendous amount of power along with the air around it. If Suimei was struck, with his dainty body, he wouldn't be able to get off lightly. However, Gaius' punch was far too reckless.

“Fuu, compared to father's fist, this is far too slow—”

Along with a snort and an exasperated voice, Suimei stepped in towards Gaius' chest with smooth movements. That right foot which stepped in towards Gaius dug into the ground with more power than when Gaius himself let out his punch and broke the ground splendidly. After lowering his waist, a loud noise resonated through Gaius' abdomen as it transmitted through the ground and sent the broken fragments of earth on the ground flying. Rumeya felt like she could see a green magic circle coiling around his extended right arm and hand.

“What… the—”

Gaius was trying to express that he couldn't ever believe that a mage would beat him at his own game. As if to blow away his surprised voice, Suimei's yell filled with fighting spirit resounded through the courtyard.

“HAA!!”

Putting the martial arts instructor to shame, Suimei drove his fist further into Gaius' abdominal muscles. As the air trembled from the vibrations cause by the impact, Gaius' body was blown all the way to the opposing wall in the courtyard and smashed right into it. After the hearty sound of the collision, the sound of solid objects falling to the ground resonated in the air.

“Ridiculous…”

“You're kidding! Gaius!?”

Selphy and the hero's surprise rang in the air. Though he didn't raise his voice, the prince Weitzer who was standing next to them also had his eyes wide open with shock. All that was left in that disastrous scene was the broken earth like an explosion had just occurred, the remnants of Suimei's mana in the air, and the figure of Suimei Yakagi with his waist still lowered and his fist sticking out. It was like the aftertaste of that single strike flickering in the air. Rumeya could hear him exhaling profoundly, but like before, his face was being blocked by his bangs and she could not see his expression, but she could guess it was a calm one. Before long, he corrected his posture, and spoke.

“Oi old man. You alive?”

“You... weren't you... a mage...?”

“I'm a magician. It was a mistake to think I couldn't engage in close combat you know?”

Suimei fearlessly made that declaration. It seems that he more or less at least gave them some consideration. All the others seemed to regain the composure they lost from that single strike after hearing that short conversation. The mage from the self governed state, Selphy, began to move.

“Selphy!”

“Hero Hatsumi, please step back. I will corner that man with offensive magic.”

“Eh? But...”

“Hero-dono, this way.”

She must have though that the hero would get caught up in it. The hero stood there bewildered after hearing offensive magic. Weitzer then pulled her to the back. The mage nicknamed 'Snowstorm' in the self governed states, Selphy Fittney stepped forward filled to the brim with mana.

“Like I've been saying...”

“After doing so much do you think it'll end so easily?”

“Haa... The ones who started it was you guys wasn't it?”

Suimei let out a sigh while remaining still. Even though Selphy was already moving forward, for some reason he only sluggishly turned his body towards her. He wasn't gathering his mana, chanting a spell, running away, or even preparing any countermeasures. Selphy then pointed her large staff towards him.

“—Oh wind! Thou art the power of eternity, become a circle.”

She started her chant, and working together with her, the jewel installed at the tip of her black wood staff began to shine. Meanwhile, Suimei

began speaking.

“The turbulent tyrant right? Fuu? Seems the scale is quite large too.”

Just from the beginning of the chant, it seemed he grasped not only the magic but also its scale. He let out his breath briefly in admiration, but even still he didn't move. Was he just slow? Or perhaps he didn't need to hurry in the face of that magic.

“—Such is a circle of tyranny. The uncountable destruction born from the air, rush towards my enemy with your righteousness. Noise Tyrant!”

Her chant finished and her keyword was released from her mouth. With Selphy's body as its centre, whirlpools of wind burst forth. They gathered and swayed in the air as they lingered in place. The total number was ten, no, twenty. They were gathering up in even greater numbers. And then, the intense wind blew fiercely as they all rushed towards Suimei at ounce.

But at that moment, he began to mumble something and held up his hand. Several red lights in the shape of red string shot out. Drawing a perpendicular trajectory and bending many times repeatedly, they pierced through the wind at a terrifying speed. And as the red strings pierced all the way to Selphy's position, the wind vanished as if it was never blowing in the first place.

“Wha!?—Ugu!”

Selphy's surprised voice rang in the air followed by her gasp of anguish. She seemed to be surprised by the fact that the wind was completely erased instead of counterbalanced. However, the reason she was making such a severe face right afterwards was likely due to pain. Seeing that anguish, Suimei spoke up.

“You should prepare counter measures for getting a 'return over.' If you neglect it, it turns out just as it did.”

“Wh-what did, you do!?”

“I simply understood the spell. I've seen that magic before after all. And so the reason you're in pain right now, is because before you could fully establish the spell, I forcefully cancelled it.”

After saying this, Suimei raised his right arm over his head. And with that action, the earth and sand that was broken to pieces when he defeated Gaius suddenly starting blowing into the sky. Not just the earth and sand, even other objects on the ground began to peel off. Quite a large quantity of debris gathered in the air coiling into a whirlpool, and then, it all rushed in towards Selphy to pay her back.

"—Ku! Oh wind. Thou shall become a firm shield to protect me. Repel everything before that severe vortex. Vortex Obstacle."

Selphy calmly chanted her spell and wind from all directions formed a vortex before her. That violent wind repelled and scattered the debris into the surrounds.

"Magic without even chanting a spell!?"

"That right now could hardly be put on the level of a spell right? All I did was lift up some earth you know? If you had something like a bulldozer or power shovel it's simple to do without a spell."

Rumeya couldn't understand the expression he used, but she could tell from his manner that he was implying that this level of skill was nothing special. There was a brief pause in the fighting, but Suimei did not move. He defeated Gaius. If she remember correctly, that punk was supposed to be able to attack incessantly in a chain of continuous strikes regardless of magic. Nevertheless, the reason Suimei wasn't being assertive, was perhaps due to the fact that he was just uninterested in the fight. He simply stood there waiting. Even after demonstrating his power, Selphy seemed to have no intent to give up.

"Very well. I will also get serious."

"If you try that hard I'll also be troubled, but—Oh, she's not even listening."

"—Oh wind. Thou art the evil wind who receives the blessing of the frozen glacier. Blow violently, become a gust, trap my enemy within a superb cage. No one at all is permitted to crawl out of the icy prison which swoops down upon them, the baptism of the snowstorm.—Ephemerally Razed!"

It was the magic which she arrived at to be bestowed the name of 'Snowstorm'. When she used it, within an extensive range, a storm mixed with snow and ice filled with hostility took form and became a whirlpool. Suimei still remained still as he was wrapped up by the snowstorm like it was perfectly natural. The ice pebbles coiled around Suimei Yakagi like a vortex and formed a massive prison. Everything within the snowstorm had become pure white in an instant.

“It's over.”

Selphy's voice mercilessly rang through the air.

“Wait, Selphy! No matter how you put it that's going to far!”

“Please do not worry about it. I held back to the level where he shouldn't die.”

“B-but...”

“When the snowstorm clears up, that man's crawling figure will surely be there. All that's left is to capture him.”

Selphy declared that it was over. However, even after being displayed this scene, just what was causing a cold sweat to still run down Rumeya's back? And as if to validate her doubts, deep within that violent gust of wind and ice, a faint voice could be heard.

“—Fiamma. Est Lego vis Wizard.” (Assemble flames. Like the cry of the magician's resentment)

“!?”

“No way!? He shouldn't even be able to move his mouth within all that ice and snow!?”

The hero turned and looked in surprise while Selphy let out a surprised yell, and Suimei's chant did not stop.

“Hex agon Aestua Sursum. Impedimentum Mors.” (Give form to the agony of death and burst into flames, bestow the one who obstructs me with a dreadful destiny.)

Many red magic circles formed in the surroundings. At the point where

Suimei should be standing as its centre, a large magic circle was revolving. Before long, Rumeya could spot a faint shadow deep within the snowstorm, and that shadow grasped a bright flame within its right hand.

—Fiamma. O Ashurbanipal. (Shine. Oh Ashurbanipal's revolving stone.)

An explosion of fire. Fire burst out of the smaller magic circles towards the centre and a bright red flame blew up from the large magic circle which was revolving at high speed. The moment the fire from the smaller circles mixed with the bright red flame, they reacted together and detonated, blowing away the white snowstorm and dying everything within the black night red.

Including Rumeya, who was still posing as a guard, the heat waves from the aftermath assaulted the bodies of the hero and her companions. However, even that was being held back by that man. The gale born of the shockwave and the intense temperature that should have accompanied the fire decayed into nothing but a warm wind.

And then, as the crimson mist cleared away, standing there as if nothing happened, was Suimei's figure. The ground at his feet was bubbling as it boiled, it was like he was standing atop a sea of melted iron. Despite being in the centre of that explosion, the fact that he stood there perfectly composed on top of the land which was unable to endure the heat could only be described as terrifying.

“Ku...!”

Selphy let out an unpleasant groan after watching the single strike that was her life's pride get erased without any sense of jeopardy. Towards that woman, Suimei began speaking like he was praising her.

“You're called Selphy right? You're quite the capable mage huh? The amount of mana loaded into that magic was quite substantial, and it's destructive power was good. It has the power to restrain the target and even seal chanting. Among all the mages I have met so far, you're quite good.”

“... Is that supposed to be a compliment?”

“Not at all. Even so you're not at the level of Menia as she is now or that dangerous princess from the Empire. You've still got a long way to go before you reach us—”

A short time after Suimei finished speaking, he seemed to be playing his next hand. Suddenly, the fallen bodies of the palace guards began to move.

“Wha—”

Shortly after Selphy's surprised voice rang in the air, the floating bodies of the palace guards soared towards her.

—The guards were her allies. Being conscious of that fact, her judgment was dulled. The few seconds she spent trying to decide how to stave off her unconscious allies proved to be fatal.

As a result, choosing to escape instead of using magic, she could only throw her body to the ground. Selphy rolled on the ground in an attempt to evade. She dodged one, then a second body. Selphy's movement weren't particularly graceful, but because the flying bodies weren't all the fast, they didn't hit her.

“Do you think such an attack would be able to defeat...”

“Aah, I don't think it at all. This isn't an attack.”

“Eh—?”

After dodging and dodging, Selphy made it all the way to Suimei's right flank. However, the place she reached was still within the range of his trick. As if he was guiding her escape himself, Suimei thrust out his right hand in her direction. His right hand was shaped just like he was about to snap his fingers. And then, just like that, without even looking at her, a snap rang through the air.

Suimei's middle finger brushed against his thumb, and a benevolent sounds resounded throughout the nighttime courtyard. The air in front of Selphy's eyes exploded. Perhaps due to the vibrations shaking her head, she collapsed in place as she lost consciousness.

“Selphy...”

Seeing her trusted companion completely defeated, Hatsumi held her breath. She was seized by the surprise for a brief moment, but she eventually turned a sharp gaze towards Suimei and stood in his way. Seeing her turn her sword towards him, Suimei's cold expression that he had been wearing up until this point suddenly turned bitter.

“I said that I don't want to fight you.”

As if weighed down by a difficult problem, Suimei put his hand to his brow and grimaced. Without sympathizing with his sentiment to respect his childhood friends' safety, Hatsumi spoke to him filled with anger.

“Do you think I'll stay quiet after my companions were defeated?”

“That just now? That was self-defence right? They were the ones to start fighting and their attacks had a considerable amount of killing intent behind them. I was just trying to leave you know?”

“That's... But!”

It seemed she did sympathize with portions of what he said, but perhaps because the fact that her companions were defeated resonated more strongly within her, Hatsumi once more pointed a severe glare towards him. However, this time Suimei did not seem to be able to keep silent, and his troubled expression changed to a stern one like he was rebuking an unreasonable child.

“So, you'll kill me? Even though the sword you're wielding right now does not have a hint of that unshakable path of righteousness? If Instructor Kiyoshiro saw that sword wielded in direct opposition to the Kuchiba School's teaching, you'd be punished immediately you know?”

“Uu... But, I am...”

“Do you intend to use amnesia as an excuse? Stop it, the you that I know isn't that kind of woman.”

Was she overpowered by Suimei's spirit, or was she just unable to say anything back? Hatsumi's face warped like she was in pain. At some point

she even pulled back her stance. As she did, Weitzer forced himself between Suimei and Hatsumi.

“Silence. A mere intruder has no right to instigate Hero-dono.”

“I'd like the outsider here to be quiet though, seriously...”

As Suimei stated this with exasperation, his strict attitude crumbled slightly, but in the next instant he gazed at the hero and Miazen's prince sharply. However, just as those in the surroundings guessed, it seemed that it would be somewhat difficult for him to continue.

—The time to force their way out was about now. Judging this was the perfect opportunity, Rumeya leaped out from the group of guards.

“Excuse me for a bit.”

“Who's—Ku!?”

She ran in with a flash. While running she swung her sword out to restrain Weitzer. As he kept his distance, Rumeya took a position like she was in opposition to the hero and the others. Weitzer's angry voice immediately rang through the courtyard.

“You're not a palace guard! Are you also that bastard's companion!?”

“I wonder~?”

“What!?”

Rumeya shrugged her shoulders as she clowned around and teased Weitzer. She then locked eyes with Suimei.

“Oi... Ah?”

He looked at her with bewilderment, but it seemed that he more or less realized who she was. Looking at her like he was asking why she was here with a surprised expression, she then cut straight to the point.

“Step aside Suimei. I'll buy you just five seconds. While I hold them back get up on the roof and skillfully pull me up. You can do it right?”

“... Understood.”

After Suimei obediently nodded, Weitzer lunged towards them in no

time at all.

“You think I'll let you!?”

With an angry roar, he unleashed his sword with skill that was appropriate for one given the title of one of the Seven Swords. However, his single vertical slash was strange. Despite having only one sword, after a brief pause, the lines drawn in the air by his sword multiplied as they swooped in. Vertically, horizontally, diagonally, slashes came in freely from all directions. A normal swordsman would not be able to even react and would only be able to sadly have their neck depart from their torso, but with a forty year age gap, Rumeya was also one of the Seven Swords.

“What an aggressive sword… Yoh! Hou!”

Letting out a voice like she was fooling around, she carefully parried all the strikes from his attack. And then, as if to pay him back with exact change, she struck back with the exact same number of strikes with the exact same trajectories.

“Ku! Such an underhanded sword style.”

“That sounds good coming from you who is called the Cloud of Death—HAAAAAAAAAA!”

Letting out her fighting spirit, in a complete change from her sword handling filled with finesse up until now, she used the physical prowess of a therianthrope and unleashed a strong strike at Weitzer. The man known as the Cloud of Death was unable to parry the power of the blow straight from the front and his sword drew a blue arc in the air and landed exactly where Rumeya pictured it would in her mind.

“Ridiculous… Bastard, just who are you?”

Weitzer was unable to conceal his surprise at having his sword flicked away by a mere soldier. Unable to believe what occurred before his eyes, he was looking at both his sword in the distance and at Rumeya while keeping on guard. As he did, it seemed the preparations were complete, Suimei's voice came down into the courtyard from the rooftop with the moon to his back.

“I'm pulling you up.”

“I'll leave it to you.”

After giving a casual reply, Rumeya's body began floating. An invisible power pulled her all the way to the rooftop. Weitzer's voice immediately chased her from below.

“Wait!”

Pretending not to hear him, Rumeya turned her head. And then, just before jumping to the next roof and parting with them, Suimei turned around just once, and looked down at Hatsumi in the courtyard.

“Hatsumi, I'll come again. At that time, don't try to kill me like you did today, alright?”

“I'm...”

“See ya.”

After saying his farewell in a worried manner, Suimei jumped to the next rooftop. Following after him, Rumeya also jumped. While still running along the sloped roof to exit the palace grounds, Suimei gave his thanks to Rumeya.

“Rumeya-san, you have my gratitude for providing your assistance... However, why are you here?”

“It's because it ended up with talks that you were going to infiltrate the palace. It looked amusing so I came to watch.”

“... Are you making fun of me?”

“Call it supervision. It's paints my respectability poorly if you treat me like a rubberneck.”

“What are you saying after just admitting it yourself...”

Suimei let out an astonished voice as he grimaced. The reason his face had gotten so bitter was likely because of the years of unreasonableness that had piled up on him throughout his life. Having caught a glimpse of his worries up to this point, Rumeya brought up what she had just heard

earlier.

“But really, just as I was thinking that you had failed, to think it was amnesia.”

“Yeah, I was careless. I didn't think it would turn out like this.”

“So, what will you do from here? Even though she doesn't have any memories, you can't just leave it like this right? Or rather, doesn't the fact that she has no memories just increase your worries?”

“Yes. But, like I thought, the only thing I can do is talk to her. There's also something else that I'm curious about, I'm thinking of investigating it before coming back here.”

“I think it'll be quite difficult to get back in though?”

Rumeya warned him as if she was threatening him, but Suimei replied like it was nothing at all.

“That's probably true, but none of them seem to be able to handle a magician, if all they do is increase the number of guards, then infiltrating again won't be difficult.”

“That's quite the confidence you got there... Well, after being shown the way you fight, I can't help but just nod back.”

“I can't really fail at entering these grounds when there doesn't seem to be the presence of even a single trap.”

As Suimei declared that he wasn't just being prideful, he added on a short 'my dead father would be shocked,' quietly like it was something he had to do. Before leaving the grounds, Suimei turned back to the courtyard one last time. He must have been regretful. He gazed at the opposite side of the roof like he was reminiscing.

“You're quite fixated huh. Even if she's an acquaintance, she's just a friend right?”

“Is it weird?”

“Well, it's not like I don't understand a solid friendship, but it seems to be weighing on your mind significantly is all. It's not like she's your

special lady, so I'm just a bit curious.”

Seeing that she was simply curious, Suimei made a complex expression and explained it to her.

“Hatsumi, is my cousin.”

“I see, so she's family... Well in that case it's normal to worry huh.”

“Yeah...”

Suimei's figure as he cast his gaze downwards didn't give off a sense of a boy his age like when she saw him in her office. In the shadow behind those sorrowful narrowed eyes was a pitiful image like an old soldier who had lost their hometown. For this man who was unable to return to his hometown, this wasn't far off the mark. However, while she admired the back of his head as he shook off those thoughts and began running once more, she felt compelled to call out to him.

“Hey?”

“Yes?”

“Aren't you, living a bit too recklessly?”

Hearing her words, Suimei came to a stop and turned around.

“It's not to the extent that you have to question it. For the sake of protecting what I want to protect, isn't it logical that I would only fail if I didn't live recklessly?”

“... That's right isn't it... I of all people threw out quite the foolish question there didn't I?”

As she laughed it off, Suimei leaped into the darkness.

★

—The young man who suddenly intruded in Hastumi's room went on to defeat a large number of soldiers, Gaius and Selphy. And then, with a person who she assumed to be his companion, he vanished from the palace grounds into the darkness of the night.

After that, Hatsumi had nothing she could do herself, and returned to

her bedroom on her own. From her window, she could see the mana lamps and fire sconces illuminating the courtyard as palace guards and government officials restlessly moved around on high alert. It was an unheard of situation where over half of the palace guards were knocked out by an intruder while still being unable to prevent him from escaping. From top to bottom, everything was turbulent, even now she could hear angry roars from her window.

They had to replenish the fallen guards and engage in the pursuit and search of the intruder. They were likely all going to stay up all night to do so. After the escape, Gaius and Selphy quickly regained consciousness and received magic treatment. It seemed that there was nothing serious. However, it seemed both of their hearts—or more appropriately their self-respect took considerable damage. The instant he was healed, Gaius ran off despite it being the middle of the night while bluntly saying he was going to go train. As for Selphy, after witnessing the difference between the pride she always held and the results born of reality, she seemed to have lost a large portion of her self confidence as she remained still with a disappointed expression for a long while.

As for Weitzer who got away safely, he went to report to Miazen's king about what had happened. The king was famous for being a gentle person, but as one would expect even he held quite the sense of an impending crisis at the uproar this time around. He severely reprimanded the one in charge of the palace's security and gave out a strict order to strengthen all of their defences even more.

An hour had passed since then, but there were still no reports that the intruder had been located. However, that was probably not all that unreasonable. For someone who infiltrated the strictly guarded palace and possessed an ability that could be put into a completely different dimension from Selphy's, if he was trying to run away then there was no way they would find him. And even if they did it was almost impossible they would be able to capture him.

From what she heard from Weitzer, that young man evaluated the palace guards before him as simple humans. At the worst, if she and the

others didn't move, it wouldn't even be a battle. But—

“A person from the same world...”

He had certainly said so. That the relationship between him and herself was that of childhood friends. That would make him a person from the same world. That would make him one of the people lying beyond the horizon of her memories. That would make him one of the people that she was absolutely unable to remember. She couldn't tell if he really was one of those people. She had her doubts, however, he knew her name. He knew her sword style. He knew names that she herself didn't know as he admonished her with strict eyes.

And he conveyed all of that in a tone that seemed somehow nostalgic. But right now, she had no way of verifying any of it.

“...”

Hatsumi threw herself backwards onto her bed. Honestly speaking, she couldn't remember the time she was summoned very well. When she came to, she was lying down on top of her bed as she was now, surrounded by furniture she had never seen before in an unknown room.

On that day, as she lay there with a head in a daze in an unfamiliar place, the door to the room opened, and Selphy walked in. At that time she began to explain right away, that she was the one to summon her, that Hatsumi was a person summoned to this world from a different one.

But even after listening to all that, the haze inside her head would not clear away. Just who was she, what kind of person was she? Unable to answer even those simple questions about herself, the only thing that she managed to remember was her own name.

Unable to remember anything but her name, at that time, she greatly lost her composure. Weitzer was also present with Selphy at the time, but she could remember Selphy making a calm expression and feeling concern for her.

After that, she wasn't left with any particular impressions. After hearing she couldn't return, other than the times she had meals with the royal

family and talked to Selphy, she was always in her room. After that had gone on for a while, news of the demons invading came to the palace.

Looking at the ceiling, she recalled what happened that day. On that morning, Weitzer visited her room. He came to greet her every day. Since he had his own schedule, the time he did so wasn't predetermined, but on that day he came in the morning and talked to her about something absurd. After that talk finished, she remembered what Weitzer asked her quite clearly.

“—Hero-dono, are there an inconveniences to your livelihood?”

Sitting on a chair, Weitzer showed his concern as Hatsumi laughed and replied.

“It's alright. The housemaids are all doing well after all, there are no inconveniences.”

“I see. However, if anything happens, please let me know immediately. Hero-dono is a state guest. There is no need to be reserved.”

“Then I'd like you to stop calling me Hero-dono.”

“Eh...?”

He likely never thought this would be the first thing she wished for. Weitzer showed her an astonished expression.

“That's... Um...”

That way of calling her was likely a title of great honour to him. As royalty, he was able to throw out formalities with most people, but having said that he was unable to show disrespect to a hero. Thus he would call her so. Feeling like it was a bit mean to continue, she dropped the subject.

“Got it. I'll let you think about it.”

“As you will.”

Towards her vague suggestion, Weitzer lightly bowed down his head. As opposed to behaving modestly, his attitude was more one of respect. Not knowing who she herself was, Hastumi could not take on an attitude like she was a hero unconditionally. It just didn't sit well with her. And then,

she suddenly asked him something else.

“Hey. Is it really true, that I'm a hero?”

It was a question with no significance. But even so, he replied with a composed expression.

“Yes. Under the supervision of the Salvation Church, by holding the ceremony of the hero summoning ritual deep within the palace grounds, Hero-dono was summoned. There is no mistaking it.”

“Even if you say that...”

Even if they called her a hero, it was too abstract. Certainly she was able to grasp that she was summoned with the goal of defeating the demons, but even after being told that she couldn't just nod. Weitzer then spoke.

“I've heard that the hero summoned by the summoning ritual receive divine protection from the Goddess.”

“Even if you call it divine protection... What is it specifically?”

“From the legends, it is a power that cannot be reached by human intellect. There are probably exaggerated portions, but there should be some change to your body.”

“U....n”

“Is there nothing?”

“I can't make any comparisons to how I was before. But—”

“As expected, there is something?”

“It's only a guess, put I feel like I can move around better than other people. Also, I feel like I'm strong.”

Saying this, she stuck out her hand to Weitzer like she was asking for a handshake. Following along with her action, Weitzer grasped her hand, and she squeezed back.

“... This is....”

Weitzer showed a surprised expression from the unexpected strength she squeezed his hand with. He was likely surprised because it wasn't the

grip strength that a normal girl could produce. However, he immediately made a comprehending expression because he likely found this to be proof that she was a hero.

“This is likely a boon from the power of the Goddess' divine blessing.”

“Honestly I have mixed feelings.”

“To us it is something to be delighted about.”

That's because she was a hero. To them, she was probably like a saint sent by the heavens, but her own mental state was delicate. While thinking of that, Weitzer made an expression like he he was considering something.

“—It's just, personally, I am somewhat disinclined to have someone like you head to the battlefield.”

“... Un.”

Sensing it from her expression, it seemed that in his own way he was taking her into consideration. In the end she wasn't able to give him a pleasant response. Weitzer's expression became rather tense. This was the face he made before going in the direction of official business.

“Hero-dono. I must apologize for today, but I would like to have you inspect the training of the soldiers.”

“That's what you were talking about yesterday right?”

“Yes. The officers and men who are the pride of our army would like to show Hero-dono the state of their training without fail.”

Of course, it wasn't just to show her their training. There was the purpose of inspiring the soldiers, but more than just showing her, they were aiming to trigger something in her as the hero. The king seemed to have no interest, but apparently he was pestered into this inspection by his surroundings, or so Selphy said. However—

*(... Are they saying they want to show that to a woman?)*

It would be better to show that to a male hero, it was difficult to think that seeing that would trigger something in a woman. Because she had no

will to fight, it could be said to be their last resort, but it still seemed like their line of thinking was off. By any chance, it could simply be that they wanted to show off their cool side to her though.

“What about Selphy?”

“She has other business to take care of, though it may be presumptuous, I will accompany you.”

This was unexpected. Normally Selphy would be the one accompanying her, but today it would be him.

“Is it fine to do that? You're a prince after all, don't you have something else to do?”

She was wondering about his official duties. Yet Weitzer shook his head at that question.

“This is what I should be doing. It is far too great an honour to serve as Hero-dono's escort—Of course, I do not do it only out of obligation.”

He was likely being considerate. It's not like it was his responsibility to do so, but he had integrity.

“Thank you, Weitzer.”

“There is no need to express your gratitude. I will do something of this level as many times as you want. If it is for Hero-dono's sake I would follow your commands without regret.”

“That's saying too much.”

“No, that's not really—”

Just as he tried to speak, restless footsteps could be heard outside the room in the hallway. They footsteps steadily got closer until they stopped right in front of the door.

“I wonder what's wrong?”

“... It's taboo to run in the palace unless it is an emergency. Which means...”

“Something urgent happened?”

Weitzer nodded with a grim expression and headed towards the door. Just as he did, a knock came on the door. Following right after it, the voice of the guard outside the room could be heard. Following those words, Weitzer opened the door and talked to the guard while whispering... Eventually, his conversation had ended and the guard left. He then fell to his knee before Hatsumi.

“Hero-dono. I apologize it is so sudden, but I will have to excuse myself for a moment.”

“Did something happen?”

“No, it is nothing that Hero-dono needs to be concerned about.”

“... I see.”

Though he said that, it was certain that something had happened. She was interested, but she didn't really want to pry and saw Weitzer off just like that. However, the guard's grim expression weighed heavily on her mind, and she took chase after Weitzer after he left.

While asking the housemaids where Weitzer went, she followed after him. And the destination she arrive at—was the audience chamber. After lightly greeting the guards in front of the door, suddenly an angry voice could be heard...

It seemed someone was yelling loudly, but due to the door she couldn't hear them clearly. However, she could at least here that the inside of the chamber was in an uproar. She decided to ask the guard what was going on.

“This is?”

“That's, we can't really say it ourselves...”

The guard showed her a troubled expression. Seeing that the guard had no intention of getting to the point, Hatsumi stepped forwards.

“Open it.”

“B-but right now is!?”

“Please.”

The guards ended up opening the door look it couldn't be helped. As one would expect, he did not seem to be able to refuse the request of a hero. After passing her gratitude and apologizing for being unreasonable to the two door guards, she entered the audience chamber. Inside, a dark-skinned muscular man was frantically appealing to Miazen's king.

“—While we sit here and do nothing, Larsheem is being assault!”

“I understand. However, even if you tell us to deploy the army right away, there is no way I would just say yes.”

“That's why I came here bowing my head to you!”

The man was full of vigour like he was ready to lunge at any moment. The situation must have been just that much of an impending crisis to him. He was speaking quite disrespectfully to a nation's ruler, but perhaps because they understood his circumstances, nobody there said anything. Even the king had a troubled expression, but even so he took on the strict attitude befitting a king as he replied.

“Forvan-dono. I sympathize with you sentiments. However, do calm down a bit.”

“Then!”

The man seemed to be asking for something, but the king did not nod. But even so the man did not withdraw, and continued pleading with the king. Among the officials and generals, Hatsumi spotted Selphy's figure and quietly headed towards her.

“Hatsumi!? Why are you here!?” “Weitzer had to leave my room because of some unavoidable circumstances, so it caught my interest.”

After giving her the gist of the situation, while Selphy was still gripped by surprise, Hatsumi asked her about the situation.

“So, what's going on Selphy?”

“... It seems that the demons have invaded Larsheem's territory.”

“The demons...”

To the north of the Alliance, there was an empty belt of land that was

neither demon or human territory. They were invading Larsheem which lied at the north end of the Alliance, but the demons were supposed to have shown no signs of movement after invading Noshias.

“It seems they were pretending to be docile while moving their troops all the way to the Alliance.”

“And, who is that?”

“He's one of the officers from Larsheem. With just the soldiers from Larsheem and the neighbouring countries, they won't make it, so he came here looking for reinforcements.”

“But, it looks like the king isn't giving him a favourable reply.”

Selphy returned a nod. The man earnestly made his request repeatedly. The reason the king told him to calm down was likely just to distract him. However, was it really alright not to send reinforcements?

“The Saadias Alliance was formed by the countries in the north to cooperate with each other, in other words, a collective community. Is it really alright not to send help at a time like this?”

“It's just as you say. In the case that another country falls into a crisis, they must go and help. However, an army isn't something that can be moved that quickly.”

“I see...”

She was implying that Miazen wasn't any different. Because what had to be moved was a large organized armed force, their movements would be rather slow... However, even so, the man still yelled as he appealed to the king. Weitzer was also in the audience chamber. In contrast to that voice which was like a roar, he thrust forward a composed tone at that man.

The man was begging them to save them by lending a hand. He was covered in injuries. He had bandages wrapped all over his body. Right before coming here he was likely fighting.

“Ah...”

Suddenly, the king and officials turned towards Hatsumi. She felt like

the reason they looked at her was because they were hoping to cling to her, but they immediately looked away. Because they knew of her circumstances, they likely concluded that she was unreliable. The man continued to appeal to the king. The palace guard attempted to stop him, but due to the large difference in size and muscularity, they were unable to make him withdraw.

“Uu...”

His angry roar jolted her head. It was as if he was yelling directly inside her head. It resounded heavily and reverberated like a an enormous temple bell. This was the exact time that she had a vision.

“Eh...?”

As if she had vertigo, Hatsumi's field of vision shook and all she could see was an image of a grey backdrop engulfed by a black sandstorm. Before she noticed, she lost her sense of peripheral vision and could only see what was in front of her. Before long, the television like sandstorm stopped, and her sight was restored.

What she saw wasn't the scene of angry roars flying around the audience chamber, but what looked like a funeral service in another location. She was unable to move. While in that state where she could only move her eyes, she watched the situation before her unfold.

Every single person was wearing black clothing and had a depressed and meek attitude. The funeral service was being held in a western style. Many people of Japanese and foreign descent were there, and many people were loathe to part with the deceased. Even now, Hatsumi did not know who that was.

However, one thing that stood out to her was the person reading a memorial address before many people. It was an older version of the boy she saw many times in her dreams. Parting from that person should have been more painful for him than anyone else. While he read the memorial address, she could hear the word 'father', and 'only family,' from his mouth. In that case, he must have been in the throes of grief. The pain of losing all his blood relatives at that age could not be expressed plainly.

But even so, that person looked forward. Since he would be walking forwards alone from here on out, he could not hang his head in shame. Even that memorial address showed no signs of being interrupted by any sobbing and weeping due to sadness. Looking at the grey and cloudy weather, were a pair of resolute black eyes. It was just, after everything ended, in the living room of some house, that person muttered these words in his sleep.

—I, must keep going forward, in order to find the dream father preached to me, without fail. If I stop, it will end right there. That's why, I have to go save them.

Perhaps this was why he did not show an ounce of weakness in that place of mourning filled with sorrow. He looked forward, and walked resolutely. After making his resolve, he quietly feel back into a deep slumber. The funeral, the service, making the rounds of all the people who came to mourn the deceased, all these things happening in a chain must have tired him out. Peering at that peaceful sleeping face, she could spot a single tear going down his cheek...

Now was this flashback one of the memories that she should possess? After another vision of that black sandstorm, all sound eventually returned to her. She could hear the angry roar of the man who came from Larsheem, and she could see the figure of Weitzer forcing his way through. It was the same audience chamber as before.

“Ah...”

“Are you alright Hatsumi? What's the matter?”

“Y-yeah. Un... I'm alright.”

Probably because Hatsumi had lost track of her surroundings, Selphy raised a concerned voice towards her. However, from the exchange between Weitzer and that man, she could tell that the time she spent watching an image of another world all happened within a second. But even within that one second, Hatsumi had made her resolve. Splitting up from Selphy, she stepped forward and walked up to Weitzer and that man.

“—I will go.”

“Ah? Who the hell are you?”

The man was showing a puzzled expression to the woman who suddenly cut in on his conversation. And then, without even having the chance to name herself, Weitzer let out her identity in a surprised voice.

“Hero-dono!?”

“Ah? Hero-dono you say?”

“Yeah. My name is Kuchiba Hatsumi. I seem to be the hero summoned by the Alliance.”

As she said this, the man's expression turned grim and he snorted like he was making light of her.

“Fuu? If I remember right, that summoned hero was a coward who wouldn't move a tick after being summoned right?”

“Bastard! Watch your manners in front of Hero-dono!”

“Ha! It's the truth ain't it? If it wasn't then there's no way she would be here during this kind of crisis right?”

“Th-that's, Hero-dono has certain circumstances...”

Weitzer's tone weakened significantly from the point that man made.

“Cowardice... huh.”

It was certainly just as he said. Even if she was placed in an unreasonable situation, even though there was something that she should be doing, she didn't do anything. She stayed in a safe place and did nothing but wait for all the unpleasant things to just end. Even though that person was different. Even though that person stood firm and faced forwards. In that case, if that person saw her right now, he would conclude simply that she was gutless. Facing the man's gaze, an irritated tone came back at her.

“What? You got a complaint?”

“Yes, of course. Whether I can fight or not, would you like to test it right

now?”

“Hatsumi!?”

“Hero-dono!?”

“You punk...”

On one hand Selphy and Weitzer raised their voices in surprise, on the other the man bared his teeth. After coming here straight from the battlefield and flaring up at the king, he seemed to be quite stimulated.

The man shook off the palace guard around him forcefully. From the beginning they were insufficient to pin him down at all and they were flicked off with ease. Hatsumi started to walk towards that man at a generous pace—and drew the sword hanging at Weitzer's waist. She slowly got in stance in front of that man before her. It was a stance where she pointed the tip of his sword at her opponent's eyes. Just with that, the way to swing a sword, to use one, was revived within Hatsumi's head.

“Wha—!? My sword is...”

And belatedly, she could hear Weitzer's voice. After seeing the light from the mana lamps reflecting off the sword, he finally realized that his sword was taken from him. Even he was unable to realize how, while walking slowly, she quietly and quickly drew his sword.

He couldn't stop her. The man before her, from that event that happened in an instant, was also completely bewildered. Seeing that he had no intention to get in a stance, she leaped forwards towards his chest in a single step. Having closed the distance in an instant, the man's eyes opened wide in surprise.

However, the blade she swung to the side did not catch the man, it only cut the air. That's because after jumping in towards the man's chest, she stepped further forwards past his right side.

“Is this fine?”

As she asked, the man ground his teeth from being unable to see through those continuous actions.

“You're saying I would have died from that just now? As expected of a hero, but—”

Was he trying to give her some candid advice? In the middle of speaking, a heavy sound resounded behind him. To his back, the stone pillars that were put up to hold the decorative flags near the entrance to the audience chamber, were split clean in half as they crumbled to the ground. And then, the name of that skill came back to her mind.

“—The Phantom Sword of the Kurikara Dharani, the Long Sword of the Morning Sun.”

Everyone in the chamber was at a loss for words from that delayed sound. The stone pillars that were well outside her range were cut clean in half without ever touching her blade after all. It was only reasonable to be surprised.

“Th-the pillars!”

“Impossible, from that one swing...!?”

She could hear their voices of disbelief as they held in their breath. Hatsumi then casually questioned that surprised audience who were all misunderstanding what happened.

“Those are the monsters that I must defeat correct?”

Just then, the sound of stone collapsing filled the audience chamber. When they turned to look once more in that direction—there was a single grotesque figure that was cut to pieces. It had an ugly form practically right out of a tale of demons and ogres, a living being. It had horns, its skin was red, however the blood flowing out of it was also red. It's white eyes were peeled back, it was dead.

“A demon!?”

“To think they would have spies all the way over here...”

Weitzer yelled out in surprise while the man looked bitterly at his own negligence. Eventually, Weitzer spoke.

“When did you realize?”

“I knew once I took hold of the sword. Weitzer's sense also sharpen once you hold onto a sword right?”

“That's true, but...”

Even so it was a little extreme. While Weitzer was still gripped by bewilderment, she turned to the man and questioned him.

“So with this, are you still unsatisfied with my abilities?”

“... No. As one would expect of Hero-sama. I'm amazed. I completely take back everything I said earlier.”

All the hostility he was carrying with him vanished with a sigh. And so, Hatsumi turned to Weitzer, who was still standing there in a daze, and turned the hilt of his sword back towards him while showing him an apologetic expression.

“Sorry for drawing it without asking.”

“No, Hero-dono! It was a magnificent skill, no, divine skill! I am completely humbled!”

“Saying divine skill is going a little too far...”

“That is not the case! Without using magic, to be able to cut such a large stone pillar with a single ordinary swing is not something that can be done no matter what one does.”

Weitzer was unusually extremely excited as Hatsumi just started talking on reflex.

“What are you saying? A swordsman who can only cut things within their range is...”

“...?”

“Eh? Ah...!”

Before she realized it, her mouth was just moving on its own. If she continued, she felt it would probably be quite bad. After she started speaking but abruptly stopped halfway, Weitzer looked at her curiously.

“Is something the matter?”

“U-uun. It's nothing. Setting that aside.”

Stopping again, Hatsumi began to contemplate things. Was it really alright for her to step into this battle of her own accord? Did she have any regrets? She began questioning herself in her own mind. And then, remembering those words she heard in her dream, she spoke once more.

“—So, where are those people that need to be saved?”

On that day, those words echoed across the audience chamber which was silenced by shock... That was, the beginning of the fighting for she who had lost her past— Kuchiba Hatsumi.

After remembering those words that came out during her dream, she began to walk forwards. So that the next time she meets with that person, she would have nothing to be ashamed of. It was absolutely necessary that she advance. Just like that person did. Suddenly at that time, she realized a certain truth.

“... I see. Those words.”

What she remembered was the young man who intruded into her room that day. The reason she felt somewhat nostalgic from his tone of voice, was because the way he spoke was exactly the same as the one who spoke in her dream.

★

—Currently, Suimei and the others were gathered for a light meal at a restaurant that was like a tea house. That being said, not everyone was present. It was only Suimei, Felmenia and Lefille. Liliana was running late for the predetermined meeting time and was not yet there. Suimei then spoke to Felmenia who was sitting next to him.

“So, how is it on Menia's end?”

“... There was not any particularly useful information.”

“Thought so. Well, after spending only two or three days on it I guess I can't help but call that obvious...”

Hearing this, Lefille also knit her brows as she joined in on the

conversation.

“I also didn't hear anything about an insurgent infiltrating the palace. It's the same regarding the hero, everyone just talks about the same things.”

The day after Suimei went to Miazen's palace, he had Felmenia and the others help him with gathering information regarding not only Hatsumi, but also regarding affairs in Miazen in general. To confirm Hatsumi's situation, it was already a done deal that Suimei would once more infiltrate the palace, but before doing so he wanted to finish doing what he could. Most importantly, he was concerned about her circumstances.

That evening, she had mentioned her amnesia during their conversation. Suimei concluded that it was necessary to investigate why that had happened and if it really was amnesia. They had spent two or three days investigating and gathering information, but in the end, they couldn't find anything useful.

It was almost like there was a gag order surrounding information involving the hero, everyone they asked could only say that she was a beauty or other simple facts, none of it was of any use. Suimei limply put his chin on the table making a dejected expression.

“But to think we wouldn't hear anything at all...”

“Seriously. In general there should at least be someone with something at the level of gossip but...”

It was strange. To this world's citizens, the heroes were the saviours who would save the world, they were individuals who should spark great interest in them. For that reason, almost everyone should be trying to gather information about the hero, but just as Felmenia said, there wasn't even gossip about her.

It was the same as news regarding the infiltration of the palace. It seemed that the information control around it was tight. The people of the city didn't seem to know about it at all. It was a scandal where an insurgent was permitted to not only infiltrate the palace, but even get away safely. They probably didn't want news to spread of that. The

number of soldiers patrolling the city did increase exceptionally though.

While Suimei and the others were in the middle of talking about this, the tea house's doorbell rang. The three of them all turned towards the tea house's entrance, but there was nobody there. Following the presence they could sense, they were able to establish the identity of who opened the door. Just as they focused on their eyes on the presence, the sound of a chair being pulled out could be heard, and Liliana took her seat.

“So you're back.”

“Yes. Just now. Also, the notebook Suimei gave me, was very useful.”

The emotions showing on her face were faint, but Liliana was both surprised and in admiration. Before they split up to gather information, Suimei handed each of them a notebook filled with white paper, it seemed that it came in handy.

“How was it for you three?”

After Liliana asked, everyone answered in turn.

“I didn't manage to find anything beneficial. In the end today was also no good at all.”

“Same for me.”

“I did get some people to talk to me, but... It was mostly nothing but rumours with poor credibility and stories which were erratically dramatized. Getting information from the Salvation Church was my last ray of hope, but the information there was also pretty poor, I had to give up on it”

Every last response was unfavourable. However, it seemed like Liliana was able to produce some results.

“I also didn't hear to much, but I have a bit.”

“Really?”

“Yes, I've gathered, all that was necessary.”

After Suimei asked her, Liliana gave a simple nod. After answering

without any concern showing in her expression, she stiffened up and took out her notebook and began relaying the information she gathered.

“—As expected, there isn't much information going around town about the hero Hatsumi Kuchiba. I'm sure all of you got that feeling too though...”

“It's strange isn't it?”

“Yes. Just as Suimei said, the fact that no information about the hero is going around is baffling. It is possible that the citizens have information but are unwilling to share it, but it is very improbable that the church has no information about the hero. In general, most heroes have a person from the church attached to them, in the case where they aren't, someone with deep relations to the church will follow them and report their activities to the church in detail. Because of this, the Salvation Church holds a lot of information regarding the heroes. There is Reiji-san's circumstance which is a bit of an exception, but I believe in this case, the royal family of Miazen is monopolizing information regarding Hatsumi Kuchiba.”

“The country is?”

“It's probable that they don't want the church to interfere while they raise their achievements as quickly as they can. Miazen's motives are transparent huh.”

This would explain why Felmenia, who usually brought back solid information, came back empty handed. Setting that aside, Suimei found that Liliana was talking unusually smoothly today. Normally she spoke like she was tottering along, but perhaps this was normal when she was giving a work related report.

“Then moving on to Hatsumi Kuchiba, she seems to be someone who in unable to use magic, though I believe Suimei know this, she seems to possess quite a substantial amount of skill with a sword. Her sword style was... the Phantom Sword of the Kuru-ri-ku-kara, Dhara... rarara?”

Unable to find the words, Liliana was frowning while making an odd face and wrenched her neck two or three times while going 'Un? Un?'

“The Phantom Sword of the Kurikara Dharani.”

“That's it. Also, just as Suimei said, I also believe Hatsumi Kuchiba doesn't have amnesia.”

“Did you catch what was behind it?”

“It seems that the soldiers who fought alongside her often heard her show concern about her memories to her companions. It's no mistake that there is a problem with her memories. Just as Suimei said, it may be best to look at the possibility that she is being brainwashed, but it is difficult to imagine how someone could use magic to brainwash the hero which received the Goddess' divine protection.”

“I bet it is. To do something using magic against the hero who was given power on a higher order than magic would be impossible if you think about it properly.”

Liliana returned a single big nod. Suimei then casually let out something that he doubted.

“At any rate, I'm surprised the soldiers talked to you.”

“I heard the heroic tales the soldiers were telling about how they defeated the demons. Fundamentally, the ones who want to talk about that are anywhere you look, once they start getting heated up talking about it, they'll start to talk about other things more easily after all.”

“I see. They talked after being stirred up.”

“They're also less vigilant towards someone my age. I had to be tolerant of them reeking of liquor though.”

Liliana declared this with a composed face. To use her own physical appearance like this, it seemed she was already completely a first rate spy. She was quite the terrifying little girl. Thinking that this was more than enough on that front, Suimei thanked her and she moved on to the next point.

“Then, next is the information regarding each of Hatsumi Kuchiba's companions. First off is the martial artist from Larsheem, Gaius Forvan.

From the beginning, his name was already quite well known, I'll leave his abilities for later. A little while ago, when the demons invaded Larsheem, he went to Miazen's palace to directly appeal to the king to dispatch troops. At that time, the king did not give him a favourable reply, but Hatsumi Kuchiba offered her support, and ever since then I heard he was a good companion of hers. The second one is the mage from the self governed states, Selphy Fittney. There are many mysteries surrounding that woman. She was the mage called over from the self governed states to summon Hatsumi Kuchiba. Her specialty is wind and ice magic and was given the second name 'Snowstorm' in the self governed states. Also, this is my own personal opinion, but from the fragments of information I procured, I believe she may be a half elf. The way I distinguished between an elf and a half elf is based on the Colonel's style, but I'm not completely certain on this fact."

"..."

There really was a whole lot of information pouring down in large drops from her. Or rather, in this case, it would be more appropriate to say that investigation was her specialty. At any rate, Suimei, Felmenia and Lefille all had their mouths open in astonishment and were unable to say anything.

"—The third person, and the last of her companions, is Weitzer Ryerzen. He's the first prince of Miazen and the first in line to succeed the throne. He is one of the Seven Swords and given the second name of 'Cloud of Death.' At last year's Seven Sword King Festival, he is famous for being the swordsman to defeat her Highness Titania Root Astel in a fierce battle. According to the rumours, he was charmed by Hatsumi Kuchiba's skill with the sword and has been following her around like an attendant."

Suimei was surprised that Liliana had gone as far as investigating information about Hatsumi's companions.

"... So you even investigated things like this?"

"I believed it to be necessary."

It was something he already knew, but it really was as one would expect

of someone formerly associated to the intelligence branch. Though it was a little late, he was beginning to understand the reason why she was named one of the Elite Twelve.

“That's about it right...”

“Sound about right.”

Suimei and Felmenia thought that was all the information she was able to gather and were tying things up, but Liliana shyly raised her voice once more.

“No, um, there's still more but...”

“Ah, is that so? But what kind of information is it?”

“Yes. It's about the state of affairs of the palace's security.”

“Ha...?”

“EH!?”

Felmenia made a surprised voice, and Suimei made some weird noise in shock. On the other hand, Lefille was half astonished while making a difficult face towards Liliana's tremendous abilities.

“... L-Lily, you even gathered that kind of information?”

“...? Isn't this the most important information?”

“... Th-that's right. That's certainly right.”

Lefille, at the very least, did agree with her. But everyone was at a loss for words. They had assumed it wouldn't be information they would be able to get and planned to just tie things up, but to think she would really investigate it.

“As expected, after Suimei entered the palace the other day, security was tightened. During the day, every location's guards were increased by two. In the evening it is increased by three and they change shifts frequently. It's a countermeasure to prevent a suspicious person from mixing in with the guards. The patrols around the palace were also increased. At night, it seems they deployed quite the number of skilled

swordsmen and mages. Though I think they are all worthless to Suimei though...”

“Well, I'll manage one way other regarding that.”

“Yes. And then there's the information regarding Hatsumi Kuchiba's personal security. Ever since then, it seems she is being escorted at all times.”

Both Felmenia and Lefille nodded as it was pretty much what they were expecting. It was something predictable after that night's failure.

“It's become a bit troublesome huh.”

“Hasn't it?”

Suimei let out a groan and Felmenia shared the same opinion. If she had bodyguards attached to her then they couldn't let their guard down. Suimei only wanted to go have a talk, but because the other side was treating him like an enemy, there was a possibility that he would be attacked immediately on sight. Suimei didn't really want to resort to violent methods, so it could be said that the degree of difficulty to hold a conversation had gone up considerably. And then, as if to emphasis that the next point was the most important, she narrowed her amber left eye.

“It's just that, I don't know the reason for it, but for some time now, it seems that Hatsumi Kuchiba ends up on her own late at night.”

“Is that seriously true?”

“At least from what I've heard, if you go along those line, would it not be possible to encounter her without anyone around?”

“That could be it...”

Certainly, in the case, he could safely begin a conversation upon meeting her. Of course it was possible that she herself would end up resisting, but the probability that it would end in a fight would definitely be lower like this. But even so—

“...”

“... Is something wrong?”

Finding Suimei just staring right at her to be rather strange, Liliana asked for the reason he was doing so. However, it was Suimei who wanted to ask the questions. He was clueless as to how she even managed to get this kind of information.

“No, I was just thinking that it is just as one would expect from a professional.”

After giving her a compliment, Felmenia chimed in as well.

“From now on should we leave this kind of thing to Lily?”

“Sounds good. Liliana, do you want a drink?

“Yes. It's been a while since I talked a lot, so my throat is rather dry...”

She really did talk a lot more today than usual. Not only from talking to Suimei and the others, but having to gather so much information, she was probably quite tired. While Suimei called the shop assistant over and ordered some honey water, Liliana questioned Suimei in a mild-mannered fashion.

“Umm, Suimei, was I helpful?”

“Yeah, it was way more than we could ask for. Thank you.”

“Thank, goodness.”

While Liliana expressed her happiness, her honey water arrived. After Suimei and the others spent some time relaxing within the shop, they dealt with the bill and left. As they left, the sky was dyed in red and the setting sun shined intensely down on them. And then, they began returning to their lodgings before the day was completely over, while chatting pleasantly and walking down the street, they suddenly spotted two familiar faces.

Lined up side by side in front of them, was a feline therianthrope woman dressed in religious clothing with pink hair, and a girl, about the height of Liliana and Lefille when she was tiny, with bright blue hair and a line running from her cheek down to the scruff of her neck that looked like a tattoo.

“Eh?”

“Oh my?”

Suimei and the therianthrope nun's eyes met. And at the same time, they let out a strange voice at the completely unexpected coincidental encounter. One woman was the sister he met at the Salvation Church in the Empire, Clarissa and the other was the dwarf, Jillbert Griga.

“Well if it isn't Clarissa-san.”

“Well well Suimei-sama. What a coincidence to meet you in a place like this.”

“It has been a long time.”

After Suimei gave her a light bow and a polite greeting, he looked to her side.

“And the little... I mean, Jillbert is with you huh?”

“Hey, oi, you devious pedophile punk. Were you in the middle of saying something else huh? And what's with dropping the formalities with me? Aaaah?”

Being quite displeased with Suimei's manner of speaking, Jillbert began to glare at him. Acting like he was sensitive to her smoking, Suimei waved his hand in front of him.

“Yeah yeah, shut up, shut up.”

“Isn't your interaction with Clarissa way different?”

“It's cause you go about calling someone a pervert all the time. So? What are you doing all the way out here?”

“It ain't any of your business. The hell are YOU doing here?”

“Aah?”

“Ooh?”

Suimei and Jillbert began staring daggers at each other. Setting aside their little scuffle, Felmenia greeted Clarissa.

“It has been a long time, Sister. You were of great help the other day.”

After thanking Clarissa for helping with the arbitration she provided back at the Twilight Pavilion in the Empire, Clarissa replied gracefully.

“Not at all. It really has been a long time as well, silver haired one.”

“I am called Felmenia Stingray. Sister Clarissa. It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

In stark contrast to the two who were continuing to glare at each other, this side was the very definition of a peaceful exchange. And then, Suimei wondered what was suddenly wrong as Jillbert's eyes became perfect circles. Her gaze seemed to be pointed at something behind Suimei—

“Le... fille?”

“... U-un. It has been a while, Jill.”

Lefille greeted Jillbert with an awkward smile. Now that Suimei thought of it, they didn't actually meet these two since a little before the incident in the Empire was over. Clarissa also noticed and cocked her head to the side like she saw something mysterious.

“Oh my? My oh my oh my?”

“It's been a while. Sister.”

After Lefille greeted Clarissa, Jillbert yelled in disarray at the shocking truth thrust before her.

“Y-you're really Lefille after all!? What does this mean!? When did you become so big?”

“U-um, you see...”

“Lefille-chan. In the short while I haven't seen you, you've grown quite a lot huh.”

“No, Sister, it's not really like that you see...”

Clarissa was playing the fool as she clapped her hands and rejoiced over Lefille's growth. Lefille was troubled on how to deal with her while Jillbert cut in with a quip.

“You stupid cat! This ain't a matter of just growing right!? No matter how you look at it she's gotten way too big dammit! Or rather, Lefille, just what is this...”

“There were certain circumstances behind this... Or rather, Jill, I think I talked to you about it a couple times before?”

“Hm? Hmm... Aah! Now that you mention it you said something about

your original form or something like that right? I thought it was just a child's nonsense and ignored it though...”

Remembering what she heard from Lefille, Jillbert trailed off with a blank look. Ignoring it entirely was quite appropriate, but seeing her nonchalant attitude without a hint of timidity, as expected, Lefille dropped her shoulders while crestfallen.

“You're also quite cruel huh...”

“Don't worry about it! Isn't it a good thing that you returned to your original form...!? Well, from my perspective I'm a little worried about Lefille becoming bigger though...”

Jillbert went from a cheerful attitude to a frankly despondent one in an instant.

“Why is that?”

“Haa... I mean, my cute Lefille has become bigger than me you know...? To think I won't be able to savour that inexplicable sensation of holding you...”

“Despite calling others a pervert you end up saying that kind of thing...”

Suimei quipped at her in an astonished voice. Ever since they met, she had been flagging him falsely as a pedophile, but to think that she was blind to her own wicked desires. Jillbert's face then changed to something like a Hannya mask.

“Shut up you big pervert! It's fine if it's me. My heart isn't tainted like yours is after all... Besides, Lefille! Become tiny like you were right now! And then hug me tightly!”

“Jill! Don't be unreasonable!”

“It's not unreasonable! Just do it already!”

“J-Jill...”

As Jill was raising a fuss while making an unreasonable demand, Lefille let out a voice like she was going to cry and seemed quite exhausted. It was rather pitiful. On the other hand, Liliana, who was hiding behind

Suimei, looked at her like it wasn't her problem at all.

“Lefille, has it quite bad huh…”

As she did, it seemed that Clarissa noticed her presence and cocked her head to the side as she peeked at her.

“Oh? Is that not…”

“Ah, umm, she is…”

Suimei couldn't find something clever to say right away and was at a loss for words. Since she also spent time living in the Empire, he was having problems coming up with an excuse, but unexpectedly, Clarissa already seemed to be familiar with her.

“Your are the daughter of Colonel Rogue from the Imperial army correct?”

Seeing that she guessed right, Liliana opened her eye wide.

“Do you, know me?”

“Your father always came to pray with a serious look, so I am aware of you.”

“Colonel did…?”

It seemed that Liliana also did not know about his prayers. Now that Suimei thought of it, when he first went to the church in the Empire with Lefille, he remembered seeing Rogue's figure there. So she likely knew because of that relation but—

It seemed that Jillbert also knew about Liliana and the incident. Seeing that Liliana was troubled by what was going on, she talked to her with consideration.

“Aah, how do I put it, the incident was quite the misfortune huh.”

“No…”

“I also lived in the Empire after all. If I can be of any help, just ask me frankly.”

“… Thank you very much.”

Perhaps Jillbert sympathized with her. After she slapped her shoulder, Liliana showed her gratitude with a light bow. After the somewhat awkward exchange ended, Jillbert looked up at Suimei.

“So? Why are you guys in the Alliance?”

“We're sightseeing. Since the incidents calmed down, we ended up all going out to relax.”

“Heeh? It's quite admirable for a proposal coming from you.”

“Every single time you talk...”

Jillbert raised the corner of her mouth like she was making light of Suimei, and he returned that look with irritation as his forehead twitched. He was thinking that this woman had quite the forked tongue with everything she said. Lefille then joined the conversation.

“Why are Sister and Jill here in the Alliance?”

“We have work on top of sightseeing.”

“Me and Clara have been close since a while back. I have dwarf acquaintances in the weapons store district, so we ended making rounds to greet them.”

“I have an inspection to do of the Salvation Churches in the Alliance, so since our circumstances lined up, we came to visit Miazen together.”

“Is that so...”

Hearing their explanation, Lefille let out a breath of admiration. After some idle chatter at the roadside, the two of them parted with Suimei's group and headed north. Seeing them off as they walked away into the evening, Suimei showed a surprised expression to the others.

“Well... That was quite the strange coincidence huh.”

“Wasn't it? I couldn't possibly think that we were fated to meet the two of them in Miazen.”

Felmenia gave a nod to Suimei's statement. As she did, Lefille looked up at the eastern sky which began to darken.

“We should also be heading back. It's already dusk.”

“Okay.”

Right after Liliana's reply, Suimei and the others hurried back to the lodging house before it was completely dark.

After separating from Suimei and the others, Clarissa and Jillbert went deep within the weapons store district where scrap metal was being temporarily stored and were now in a vacant plot of land far away from the streets.

When they separated from Suimei, the sun was already setting, so it was now twilight when they arrived. It was right on the boundary of whether lights were still on from within the buildings and when the mana lamps outside were sporadically turning on here and there.

Feeling an indescribable sense of nostalgia while looking up at the obscured indigo night sky, Jillbert climbed up onto an empty box which smelled of iron and took a seat.

“Hup!”

Finding a good place to calm down, Jillbert let out a smile in a good mood. Without thinking of anything, she gazed at the black smoke gushing out from the chimneys of the smithies. Eventually, she shifted her gaze over to Clarissa, who for some reason, twisted her face into a gloomy expression.

“... This place is not very comfortable.”

“Is that so? I really like it though? You can hear the sound of metal being struck and of the bellows after all.”

“I'm sure that this is a place that you are familiar with, but that is not the case for me.”

Saying that, Clarissa covered her ears and curled up her tail. The sound coming out of the smithies as they struck metal constantly must have been far too noisy for the good ears of a therianthrope. Witnessing the

rare scene of Clarissa curling up her tail, Jillbert giggled lightly before showing her a relieved face.

“I'm glad about the Lonely Figure's daughter.”

“... Yes, you're right.”

“Earlier you suddenly started pretending to only suddenly notice her, you noticed her right from the beginning and were playing dumb weren't you?”

“Naturally. Please to not underestimate the eyes of a therianthrope. However, I'm a little relieved to see her being somewhat cheerful.”

After Jillbert happily talked about Liliana's safety, Clarissa showed a surprised expression for an instant before smiling back with relief. As she did, Jillbert's happy smile turned into a wicked one.

“What's that? Were you feeling guilty?”

“Like you should be talking, earlier when you were talking to the darkness—to Liliana Zandyke, you were talking like you were trying to atone weren't you?”

“Fuu. We caused her trouble due to our carelessness, and in the end we didn't do anything about it. I'll at least do that much...”

Jilbert cast her eyes down timidly. Originally, during Romeon's case, Liliana was never meant to go through that kind of suffering. In a way, the two of them could be suitably blamed for that happening. It was somewhat convenient to only talk about the sins the were carrying after all this time, but that was about all they could do. Clarissa then returned Jillbert a nod.

“Certainly. However, our concern is probably just needless anxiety now.”

“Oi, are you maybe saying that because she's together with that punk?”

“Yes.”

As Clarissa pleasantly nodded at her, Jillbert glared back like she just remembered something.

“Or rather, why is the Lonely Figure's daughter together with that asshole? Did you do something behind the scenes?”

“No, I did not do anything.”

“So why?”

“According to the Lonely Figure-dono, Suimei-sama was the one to strike down Romeon.”

“Ah? That guy? That's a joke right? That kind of punk that you can find absolutely anywhere did?”

“Yes.”

Clarissa replied back without hesitation. Like she found it absolutely unbelievable, Jillbert made an enormous frown. A voice suddenly came out of nowhere towards them.

“—Hou? You met the human who brought an end to that uproar?”

The voice was that of a young man. When they looked towards the source of it, a dragonnewt was standing at the entrance to the vacant plot. His bright green long hair was blowing in the gentle breeze. Behind his ears were two silver horns. He was wearing white clothing that looked like traditional Japanese attire and his arms were hidden within his long sleeves.

“You always just show up out of nowhere huh. But setting that aside, you're late.”

As Jillbert looked at him critically, Eanru cheerfully laughed like he wasn't feeling sorry about it at all.

“Aah sorry sorry. I had some minor business is all—So about what you were just talking about.”

“About that punk?”

“Just as Clarissa said, I'm sure the Lonely Figure said the man from that case was named Suimei... or something like that, right?”

“Dragonkin. Is that really true?”

Jillbert narrowed her eyes and looked at him at full attention. Eanru nodded back to her.

“If it is as the Lonely Figure says, then yes. From what he said, it seems that man saw through all of Romeon's spells and called down the stars from the heavens to defeat him and the darkness covering him. The Lonely Figure didn't talk about any more details than that though... It's a shame I was unable to participate in your fortunate chance meeting with him.”

After hearing the abridged explanation of what happened, Jillbert's admiration showed on her face.

“Hoou... That punk defeated Romeon when he went berserk you say? Just from his appearance he looks totally unreliable though.”

“That is not true, Jill. Even back at the Twilight Pavilion in the Empire, when Suimei-sama confronted the hero from El Meide, he completely overwhelmed that hero after all.”

“He did that to the hero from El Meide? That hero, if I remember right, he was quite capable wasn't he? Wasn't there talks that right from the beginning he was fighting and beating up those damn demons?”

Remembering Elliot's prowess on the battlefield the moment he was summoned, Jillbert looked at Clarissa like she couldn't believe her at all.

“Oh my, Jill, are you doubting my eyes?”

“The hero has the divine protection from the summoning ritual right? There's no way there would be people who have power which surpasses that.”

“Oh? In that case what does that make us?”

“Exceptions.”

“In that case it isn't that strange for there to be other exceptions correct?”

“...”

Jillbert grimaced at her sophistry while still refusing to believe her.

Clarissa then shook her head and continued.

“The mana filling Suimei-sama's body far exceeds what the hero from El Meide possesses. There is no mistaking the fact that the power he possess exceeds that of the hero from El Meide.”

Clarissa asserted this with a unwavering gaze. Thinking that her words sounded like she was somehow praising Suimei, Jillbert suddenly realized something.

“Hey, Clara. Could it be, that's the guy you were thinking of pulling in as a companion earlier?”

“Yes.”

As Clarissa nodded telling her she was right on the mark, Jillbert pressed her hand to her face.

“Oi... Really, that punk...?”

“Having defeated Romeon who was taken in by the power of darkness, do you not think that there are no problems with his capabilities?”

“That's... I don't have any objections with that, but...”

“I don't mind at all if it's a strong guy.”

Eanru was a simpleton, but Jillbert was still not convinced. Her expression was still quite grim. She was making a face like something was stuck in the back of her teeth. Looking at her make that expression, Clarissa continued talking.

“Jill, do you hate him that much?”

“It's not really to that extent, but he gets along well with Lefille and right now he's taking care of the Lonely Figure's daughter right? If something happens, I would feel sorry for those guys.”

“Oh my, you're quite kind aren't you?”

“Th-that's not really how it is.”

As Clarissa smiled and pointed that out, Jill was in a fluster as she banged on the crate she was sitting on and looked away while turning red.

And then, in a complete turn, she made a restless and doubtful expression before questioning Clarissa.

“But Clara, why do you recommend that punk so strongly? To do what we must do, just strength isn't...”

“Of course, I first had my eyes on him after the matter with El Meide's hero, but my recommendation was also based on other factors. Just as Jill just heard, it was Romeon's incident. In the end, I only learned this after the incident had concluded.”

Using that as a preface, Clarissa went on to explain her reasoning.

“When Suimei-sama first got involved in that incident, it was to protect the small Lefille-san from the inexplicable expectations of the Goddess. For that purpose, everything would have ended cleanly if all he did was capture the culprit behind the incidents, Liliana Zandyke. But Suimei-sama was not seduced by the short-term benefits and did not lose sight of his own sense of justice. He gazed at what he should be doing, regardless of the path of suffering that he would have to endure, and saved that girl who was also a victim. Honestly speaking, I was surprised that kind of method even existed in this world.”

“Well, certainly I do find that quite admirable but...”

“Are you saying that seriously?”

Clarissa's chilling tone caused Jillbert to hesitate to continue. The cold words she threw before Jill were implying that she had holes in her eyes.

“Jill. Did you not feel it? When Suimei-sama and the others were walking straight towards us, they all had a gentle appearance. Lefille-san, Stingray-san and Liliana Zandyke were all smiling. When I saw the way they were, it looked dazzling to me.”

“That's...”

That impression contrasted completely from Jill's first impression of that man. However, exactly because there was such a contrast, there were certainly parts that she empathized with. Earlier, Suimei and the others were walking together while having a pleasant conversation. Because they

were only talking about trifling matters, it was as if they were living a completely peaceful life.

That casual scene could be said to be anywhere one looks. However, after all the suffering they faced in the Empire, could it definitively be said that it was a result that could be brought about? Jill was not one who would just nod thoughtlessly after being asked such a question.

Within that circle of smiles, there was a young girl who should have been tormented by darkness. From what she heard, that young girl had spent her time since infancy in a way where it wouldn't be strange for her to be completely swallowed by darkness at any moment. Then just why was she able to smile the way she did at that time?

The smile they saw from her was one that she could not possibly make unless she was at peace at the very root of her heart. It was something that was impossible as long as darkness lurked within her body, a smile which saved the heart.

It was probable that her smile lied at the end of a single thread of hope among the many lines of fate buried underneath the darkness. Without exaggeration, all other threads should have lead only to despair. However, that man reached that thread of hope as he struggled. He won a victory over the Goddess which could be comparable to a miracle.

They were completely ignorant of the technique he used to accomplish such a feat. However, the reason why she was so entranced by that man, was because she thought his back as he walked into the evening sun appeared much more dazzling and priceless than the sun itself.

“... But even so, I still don't think it's a good fit.”

“Even after understanding fully?”

“It's because I do, Clara. I understand that that punk is not someone who really acts in the open. I also get that he is like us in that he's a guy who resides on the other side. But you know, that he has a part that is fundamentally different from us. He's too dazzling. If we're the darkness of the world, then he is the light within the darkness. Because he is in the darkness, he shines even brighter, an extremely dazzling light. How can

you say someone that you and me feel that way about is the same as us? That punk, is standing somewhere that should never mix with people like us.”

“That… Certainly may be the case.”

The reason she agreed, we likely because she shared the same premonition in no small amount. As if pouring water on their little exchange, Eanru cut into the conversation.

“There may be no need to worry about it so much you two. Those who are strong mesh well together. Having been involved with you two and having defeated Romeon, he may already be rolled up in it all.”

“Don't say that kind of crap, dragonkin. You really can't read the atmosphere huh.”

“I only spoke of the possibility.”

“That's what I'm saying is crap.”

“In that case should I just not talk?”

“Don't go to such an extreme dammit.”

One was dead serious and the other was exasperated while they had a small exchange. Clarissa then cut in as if to push them on to the main issue.

“By the way Eanru. How is that matter we talked about?”

“Hm? Aah, now that you mention it, we've been ignoring her.”

“Ah?”

“The one right behind me is the hero who was summoned in Thoria. Red Pain brought her along this morning and handed them over to the Lonely Figure.”

After a brief explanation, Eanru took a step to the side. As he did, a woman shallowly wearing a light brown robe appeared behind him. It seemed that she was standing there the whole time. Matching up with what Eanru said, her appearance matched the characteristics of the hero

summoned in Thoria. Seeing this, Jillbert spoke up playfully.

“That damn Red Pain, doing this kind of crap behind the scenes. Did you not hear about it, Clara?”

“I was told of it just before we left the Empire.”

It seems she was a little irked about not being told beforehand. Looking back at Clarissa reply to her obediently, she jumped off the box and took a look at the fourth hero's face.

“Disregarding their actual intent, bring in all the heroes huh… So, which one is this?”

After Jillbert asked whether she came along willingly, Eanru gave a brief reply.

“This woman refused, so it seems she is one who had her consciousness stolen.”

“I see. You're quite unfortunate huh.”

Jillbert looked at Thoria's hero with pity. However, because the hero's actions were all under control, she remained completely silent. Sensing that it was meaningless to try and talk to her, Jillbert let out a dissatisfied idle complaint.

“But you know, if we're going to be doing stuff like this, I'd prefer to be told beforehand. We just happened to have two heroes together back in the Empire right? It would have been faster to do something about them first… But I guess it was possible to make more powerful enemies other than just the two heroes…”

“But in the end it all worked out didn't it? I hear the man who defeated Romeon is a very close friend of Astel's hero. If the hero summoned from another world and that man were dutifully bound together, we would probably end up coming into conflict with that man—Personally that would be exactly what I want though.”

“Yeah yeah, I get it.”

Jillbert averted her gaze as she apathetically agreed with Eanru. But he

did at least have a point. Of course, this was not about wanting to face off against those three. Both Clarrisa and Jillbert thought that following their strategy in the Empire would have become quite difficult if Suimei decided to help Reiji out. Naturally, they wanted to avoid coming into conflict with the many powers surrounding those two heroes at the time.

“Well, even without telling you two it seems like you'll make a move anyways.”

“Is that sarcasm?”

“I'm saying you're quite skilled. If it was such a trifling matter, you two would accomplish it with ease right?”

“Well now that you say it, I can't deny the possibility.”

Clarissa also agreed with Eanru's opinion. Securing the heroes would be a small sacrifice to the two of them towards a great cause. If they could, they would rather accomplish this tidily and innocuously though. Eanru then spoke up like he suddenly remembered something.

“There's also one more report from the Lonely Figure. Astel's hero departed for the self governed states.”

Jillbert then raised her voice hysterically.

“Haa!? Wasn't that hero supposed to stay put in the Empire?”

“That was supposed to be the case, but it seems he began to move. It looks like something beyond our expectations occurred.”

“Is that really okay?”

Jillbert was grimacing, but Clarissa was not affected the same way.

“On the grand scheme of things it likely will not be a problem. At that level, I believe it is well within the margin for error.”

“Or is it that, Jillbert? Do you not believe in that person?”

Seeing Eanru poke fun at her, Jillbert looked back at him uncomfortably.

“That's not what I mean...”

“That person finds it troubling to explain things to others. His head is made entirely different from our thoughtless selves—No, it may be better to say it is from an entirely different dimension.”

“I get it. You don't have to say that after all this time.”

“If so, that is fine—So, Clarissa, I'll leave this woman to you.”

“Eanru, where are you headed to?”

“Next is the Alliance's hero after all, I need to go get ready.”

Leaving behind Thoria's hero, Eanru left the vacant lot in the weapons store district.

Beyond the mountains where human territory ends, even further north than the precipice to the north which is so tall it could pierce the heavens, in the rugged polar regions, there was a castle which could not possibly be built by human hands.

It had an outrageously enormous and majestic appearance. It was made with sensitivity and filled with details that would be impossible for humanity no matter what they did. Something thick was surrounding the area around the structure as it wriggled and wrapped around it. Currently in that place, was the current Demons Lord. It was the castle that served as Nakshatra's main headquarters. Within a single room of the Demon Lord's castle, crowded around a single square table, several living beings made of heterogeneous parts shaped like humans were holding a meeting.

At the head of the table, looking down at all those gathered there, was a young girl's figure wearing pompous clothing with black hair and dark brown skin. Standing at her back, was a man with golden forelocks hanging over his face. And then around the table in order. There was a man with long white hair, red eyes and a slender contour. A blooming young woman with jet black bat-like wings growing from her back. Perhaps unable to sit in a chair, an object like a lump of flesh large enough to monopolize the entire width of the table with arms and legs

sprouting out of it. And seated opposite of it was a darkness clad in a robe in the shape of a tall human figure. Finally, the black haired young girl sitting at the head of the table opened her mouth with arrogance.

“—It seems Mauhario was defeated, Vuishta?”

Vuishta was the darkness wearing a robe seated opposite of the lump of flesh. Hearing her question, that form that didn't look like it was made of any substance turned the portion of darkness where its face should be towards her and answered.

“Ha. It is exactly as Nakshatra-sama says. Mauhario-dono died in action in the recent fight against the Alliance's hero. Only my own and Moolah-dono's armies remain within Alliance territory.”

A young man's voice came from within the robe. The voice reported their defeat to the young girl—Nakshatra, but what followed that was a fearless tone which did not give off any feeling that he was even thinking of the companion who was just defeated.

“However, please be completely at ease your Majesty. I have already arrived at a method of defeating the Alliance's hero. Soon, thanks to my plan, I will definitely be able to deliver the head of that hero to you.”

“I see. If you have a plan then it is fine. We will leave that matter to Moolah and yourself.”

“Ha.”

Perhaps intending to bow down to Nakshtra, the upper portion of the robe inclined forward. Because confidence could be heard in Vuishta's voice, a doubtful voice rang in the air suspecting he was overestimating himself.

“But will it really go that well I wonder?”

“... Lishbaum-dono. What do you mean by that?”

Vuishta turned towards the man standing behind Nakshatra, Lishbaum who replied back to him.

“No, it is just that there was the case of his Excellency Rajas, I just

remembered something to be anxious about. In the current situation where there are four heroes, we don't know where we'll have the carpet pulled out from underneath us.”

“I am absolutely sure of my plan. Using Moolah-dono's large army as a diversion, we will attract their main forces and pull in the hero and her companions when they split off, then annihilate them.”

“But will the hero get caught by that scheme so easily?”

The one to asked was the lump of flesh. After it asked of the credibility of his plan in a grating voice, Vuishta fired back with a voice filled with self-confidence.

“The hero and the soldiers of the Alliance are likely so happy from annihilating one of our armies that they cannot keep their feet on the ground. I'm one hundred percent sure they will fall for my trick.”

“I see. Do you mean to say that while the enemy is making merry, you will make use of that vigour?”

“That is exactly what I am saying. Lishbaum-dono.”

After Vuishta confirmed his intentions, the white haired man with red eyes—Ilzarl spoke with contempt.

“To use the dead Mauhario... is it? No, Vuishta you bastard, did you use Mauhario as bait?”

Hearing those words that were meant to criticize him, Vuishta leaked out a joyous stifled laughter like his plan was being praised.

“Don't be absurd. All I did was relay Mauhario-dono's desire to fight the hero in personal combat over to Moolah-dono.”

“I see. So that's how that damn Mauhario ended up as a good sacrificial stone.”

“His Excellency's desire was granted after all, I'm sure he was satisfied to fulfill that role.”

“I bet.”

Ilzarl replied in a flat tone. On the other hand, listening to their exchange, Nakshatra looked at Ilzarl with a cold gaze.

“Fumu? Ilzarl, it couldn't be, do you have a complaint about Mauhario's fate?”

“Myself? That is indeed impossible, Nakshatra. Mauhario lost because he was weak. There is nothing more than that. Just what were you trying to confirm with that question?”

“Fuu, then it is fine. We were just a little flustered that you may have been carried away by some damned emotions.”

“Simply impossible.”

Ilzarl snorted like he wasn't amused at all. While the master and servant were having such a meaningless conversation, the woman with bat wings growing out of her back looked at Vuishta doubtfully.

“I understand what you're planning Vuishta, but in the end, how are you planning to defeat the Alliance's hero?”

“Are you belittling my power, Latora?”

“The Alliancess hero is a woman isn't she? If it was me I could do something amusing you see? Was it Noshias? Just like the little cutie from there. Mmm~fufuu~”

Saying this, Latora suddenly showed a lewd smile. On the other hand, perhaps because he was reacting to what she was talking about, the lump of flesh opposite of Vuishta's spat back at her with a grating voice.

“The Shrine Maiden of Spirits? It would have been fine to kill her right away.”

“That's no fun right? Aaah, Rajas was so open minded about things like this~. He had the belief that an enemy's heart should be smashed to pieces before killing them.”

Latora spoke with disappointment, but the lump of flesh sank into silence and had nothing to say back to her. Cutting into their conversation, Vuishta turned to Latora.

“There is no problem. The hero's attacks will not work on me. Hehehe, not on me who has stolen Lishbaum-dono's technique.”

Perhaps because that laughing voice rubbed it the wrong way, or perhaps it was the way Vuishta was speaking, the lump of flesh gave its candid advice to him.

“You sure can bark about a technique you're borrowing.”

“Well it is indeed borrowed, but I have sublimated the technique and succeeded in making it something powerful. In that case is it not my own technique?”

“Fuu.”

Finding his words impudent, the lump of flesh let out a noise like it was snorting and sent out a metal shard flying from its body. But Vuishta did not take any action to dodge the metal shard. It looked like the shard struck him, but it kept flying out behind him.

“Hehehe...”

Setting aside Vuishta who had been letting out a creepy laugh, the lump of flesh turned to Lishbaum.

“Lishbaum, are you fine with this?”

“I don't particularly mind. If it is helpful for his Excellency, then it is just as I desire.”

Lishbaum bowed to Vuishta. His expression was hidden by his forelocks, but he seemed to be pleased. Vuishta's creepy laughter only grew strong as he saw this. Eventually, Vuishta decided to bring an end to this conversation, and turned to Lishbaum.

“That is everything about my plan. Lishbaum-dono. Are you more convinced of it now?”

“All is as you will, your Excellency. I thank you deeply for the compassion of putting to rest my needless anxieties. Well then, your Majesty.”

“We're done with this topic right? Then Vuishta, go.”

Hearing Nakshatra's command, Vuishta bowed down deeply as he stepped back and vanished into the darkness. Nakshatra then moved on to the next topic of conversation.

“Now then, we will give you bastards our orders from here on out. Latora, Grallajearus, you two will link up with Striga. And was it called Nelferia? You will open a path up to there. Vuishta and Moolah's armies are in the Alliance, so getting that far should be a simple matter.”

“Yay~. The summoned hero of the country on the way there was a woman right? I'm looking forward to it~. Just how should I torment her I wonder~?”

“All is as you will. Please look forward to a favourable report.”

One replied with their canines showing and a delightful voice, while the other replied quietly in a grating one. Latora and Grallajearus excused themselves from the table and vanished into the darkness. And then, there was only one left who had yet to receive any orders, and he raised his voice suspiciously.

“Oi Nakshatra, what about me?”

As Ilzarl questioned her with doubt, Lishbaum was the one to answer him.

“My apologies. Your Excellency Ilzarl will be handling another matter.”

“You're planning to have me take on independent action to fulfill your damn scheme?”

“Yes. Your Excellency, from here I would like you to head to the self governed states, and retrieve the weapon left behind by a hero.”

“A weapon? Isn't it fine to leave something like that alone? The ones who received divine protection from the Goddess are one thing, but whatever they are holding on to aren't really a threat.”

“Ilzarl. This is Lishbaum's request, and it has our authorization.”

Hearing Nakshatra's words, Ilzarl's eyebrow twitched. And then, he steadily faced Lishbaum.

“... It's an unusual request. Is it that much of a threat?”

“It is an object called a reality phenomenon armament. Its main purpose is used for something else entirely, but it is likely that it is one part of a means for a human to directly oppose our God Zekaraia.”

“Hou? Now that is interesting. Fine then. I will go along with your damn scheme.”

“My humble thanks.”

Lishbaum bowed down respectfully. However, Ilzarl could sense that there was no feeling behind his words and that he was simply being flattered as he let out a snort. And then, as he was on his way out of the room, he stopped walking.

“Your Excellency?”

“—Lishbaum. I just remembered that I had one thing I wanted to ask you.”

“What could that be?”

“What kind of person defeated Rajas?”

When Lishbaum heard this question, a faint smile floated up on his face.

“Among the humans, it is said that the hero from Astel defeated him right?”

“That's wrong.”

“Why do you think so?”

“Intuition.”

“You jest.”

Lishbaum replied to that question in a way that could be considered as not an answer at all while still maintaining his smile. Ilzarl then continued speaking while oozing out a serious aura.

“... For someone like Rajas who received so much of Zekaraia's divine protection, there's no way he would lose to a hero who was just

summoned and had yet to become familiar with the Goddess' power.”

“If it was someone who already possessed a significant power, then I do not think it would be impossible?”

“There's no way.”

“Why can you declare that?”

“From experience. From the heroes who fought against Zekaraia's will up until now, it takes a certain amount of time before they can fight on the level of you bastards after all.”

“So that's why it is strange for his Excellency Rajas to be defeated by the hero?”

“That's right. No matter how you put it, it's too quick.”

“But even so, there's no point in asking me... Oh dear, how troublesome.”

So he said, but Lishbaum did not actually look troubled at all. Even though there was an existence out there that was capable of defeating a powerful demon general, his appearance did not give a single hint that he considered it a dangerous situation. Or rather it seemed like he was wearing a clown's mask while speaking of the situation.

“You sure are composed. As I expected, don't you know who the guy who defeated Rajas is?”

“Impossible. It is currently under investigation.”

“With that kind of faint smile? You're the one who should be keeping your jokes in check.”

Lishbaum's sycophantic attitude still did not break and Ilzarl glared at him with a cold gaze. Seeing that he had no intention of averting that gaze, Lishbaum let out a sigh like he was giving in, and peeled back his fool's skin. As he did, the temperature in the room dropped. As the room became cold enough to freeze anything and everything, a sound like something was cracking began to fill the air. In the brief moment when this unusual phenomenon happened, an atmosphere spread around the

room which would leave even a demon feeling unpleasant.

—What was being spread in the atmosphere of that room in the Demon Lord's castle, was none another than the spirit type cold fired off by magicians.

“Pardon my words your Excellency, is it not reasonable that the one who defeated his Excellency Rajas was the hero after all? From what your Excellency said before, even if it was someone who possessed a substantial amount of power beforehand, his Excellency Rajas would be impossible to defeat. Also, a hero who received the divine protection from the Goddess would be unable to do so.”

“Therefore… Fumu, certainly that is implying a hero would be unable to defeat him at all.”

“—That is correct your Excellency. It is a bit of a inconsistency.”

“… Then, I withdraw my words from before. Even without the Goddess' power, there are means to defeat him.”

Those were the words Lishbaum wanted to hear. He made an ominous smile that Ilzarl had never seen before, and gave him the reply he wanted.

“—The name of the one who defeated his Excellency Rajas, is Yakagi Suimei. He is a modern magician affiliated to the Magician's Society revived by the magician king Nestahaim. His rank is classed as high grade. Among the magicians, the magic systems that he can uses covers a fairly wide range. Among those, he can use holy lightning which comes from divinity which exists on the same plane as our god Zekaraia, a blue cleansing blade which can kill what is called an apparition of the apocalypse in a single strike, a golden shield which has endured the roar of a red dragon, and magic which calls forth falling stars to blow away anything and everything without a trace. With these four great magics filled with astounding power, he has defeated numerous magicians. The magic which defeated his Excellency Rajas was without a doubt the holy lightning holding the power of a sacred guardian angel. Against us, that is the most effective.”

“… You bastard.”

“Along the way, do be careful if you happen to meet that man. If it is your Excellency, then your affinity against him is quite good, but that man is one who will stand up as many times as he has to so long as his dreams are not shattered. Unless the merciless reality that he can never return is made apparent to him, he will only be repeating my failures.”

Within those words Lishbaum fired out were feelings that he recalled of his extraordinary destiny. It wasn't just resentment, and was not just anger. It wasn't quite admiration, but had some joy. After his voice filled with a flood of emotions went silent, the remaining demon general vanished into the darkness and melted away.

# Chapter 3

## On the Evening of the New Moon

As the stars faintly shined in the heavens above, a circle floated in the sky with a faint blue light tracing its edges like a tray painted with lacquer.

—On the night of a new moon, never compete against a swordsman.

As a magician, Suimei's father had come onto the brink of conflict with sword masters, he was reminded of the warning he was told to absolutely keep in mind. A sword was something that reflected the moonlight well. Thus, when moonlight was plentiful, it would show a strong glimmer of the swordsman's killing intent. This would allow one to see with their own eyes the line drawn by the sword at just the right moment when the swordsman went for the killing blow. However, on the evening of the new moon, it was a different story. Light from electricity does not reflect killing intent. Neither does light born from mysteries. Due to this, the killing intent of the sword master becomes hazy to detect at best.

Naturally, in this world where there isn't much light during the night, one can easily predict just what would happen on the new moon. Hoping that crossing Hatsumi once more would not end up turning into a conflict from a misunderstanding, Suimei looked up at the deep dark sky gloomily. On this evening of the new moon in Miazen, Suimei was once more infiltrating the palace on his own.

Descending from the tall spiked wall, he softly and lightly stood on a thicket. After looking at it once more, he realized the palace grounds were actually quite enormous. There was the main building, three separate annexes with gardens, the barracks for the guards and a chapel separated by some woods. To take a tour of the entire grounds would take a considerable amount of time.

Just like the other day, it would be nice if his destination was fixed, but

tonight it was different. He was also worried whether or not she would be alone tonight as well. Due to the incident last time, she should have gotten more vigilant. It was possible she wouldn't be alone. Suimei could only verify it for himself.

“At night, she's alone and goes to a watering hole, huh...”

This was the information Liliana brought back to him. If it was correct, it wasn't that difficult to confirm. However, because the palace went to great difficulty to create two different watering holes, Suimei was forced to investigate both of them.

While thinking to himself, Suimei half hid himself behind a tree. It didn't have much meaning since he was using magic to make his presence hard to perceive, but it was only human to act out the appropriate action which matched the atmosphere.

There were soldiers posted as guards sporadically around the water well and a house maid was currently drawing water from it. It seemed this one was used by many people. That's why Suimei quickly excluded it from the list of possibilities. If she was planning on being alone, it would be hard to imagine her coming to a watering hole where may people came by. However—

“A watering hole huh... Just what is she doing in that kind of place?”

The first thing that came to mind was coming to get a drink, but as long as she was receiving the hospitality appropriate for a hero, going to get water would be something left to a servant. Just like he saw now, it was work for a house maid to do. Therefore, if there was something else he could think of—

“Using water for sword training... maybe?”

Suimei wasn't too familiar with the principles of the sword, but it wouldn't be weird to require water to do some sort of training. It was possible to think of using the difficulty of moving in water to train after all. Moreover, if one was required to hide their art, it was obvious to be alone. Suimei was convinced this was the case. But if it was...

“If I'm careless she'll strike at me with that sword... It's finally the chance to be just the two of us too...”

Letting out words that could easily be interpreted in another way, Suimei jumped up onto the roof. Using flight magic, he quietly landed and moved along the rooftop while focusing his gaze downwards. He continued to distance himself from the main complex and headed towards a place near the chapel which was only permitted to be used by the royal family.

There was a tall grove of trees surrounding it as if to hide it from the other places in the palace. It had a desolate atmosphere. The patrols in this area were scarce, it was the ideal place to be alone. All that was left for Suimei was finding the watering hole in this area...

“Oops, looks like they're at least coming here too huh?”

Suimei spotted a single female guard headed in that direction. Just as he jumped down from the rooftop, he hurriedly concealed himself. He thought to put her to sleep at first, but he concluded that a single person patrolling around such a large area wouldn't really matter if they were left alone, so he passed on using magic for now. However, around the area he landed, there wasn't any sort of watering hole nearby.

“Which means it's behind the chapel?”

Suimei muttered to himself while keeping his focus on the guard. As he went around the building, there was a stone wall made quite differently from the chapel itself. Perhaps it served as some sort of partition, however, since the side of it was completely open, if it did serve that kind of purpose, it was an awfully careless setup.

From the other side of the partition, Suimei could hear a much larger amount of water than he thought he would find. He could hear the sound of a sufficient amount of water splashing around. The interval was irregular, but there was no mistaking that someone was using it for something.

After confirming that nobody was nearby, Suimei slipped in to the other side of the partition. On the other side of the stone wall was what he

believed to be a water drain made of stone paving. There were objects around it which took into consideration multiple people using the watering hole at once. Above it was a bucket hanging on a metal fixture. And right next to it was—

"... Eh?"

"Eh...?"

—Kuchiba Hatsumi, stark naked.

After letting out a boneheaded voice, Suimei was unable to move like he was completely bewitched. Her un-Japanese golden hair, which was due to her genetics skipping a generation, was wet with water, by sight, he could see most of her healthy looking skin was dripping wet. Her body drew bewitching curves which were poison to his eyes, her feminine figure left a strong impression on his mind. While still matching his gaze, she made a completely dumbfounded expression with a bucket of water still over her shoulder.

—Thinking about it properly once more, this was also reasonable. Because this was behind the chapel, it was absolutely necessary to keep in mind that there would probably be facilities to be able to purify one's body.

In this world, the culture of bathing only spread in a single region. Because of that, when people washed themselves it was usually just with a sponge. But for people like them who were used to washing their bodies in a bath, it just didn't feel right. It was easy to consider wanting to come out and bathe like this.

"Um, you know, this is, um..."

Though completely incoherent, Suimei attempted to make an excuse right away. He wanted to say that he wasn't intending to peep on her. Naturally it wasn't his intent, but in the end Hatsumi did not interpret it that way, and he realized she was about to scream.

"—You per..."

"W-wait a sec!"

Wanting to prevent people from coming over after hearing her, Suimei ran towards Hatsumi. And then, after warding off the bucket she threw at him, he grappled her.

“Uguu!”

“W-wait, please quiet down! I'm begging you!”

Suimei skillfully went around to her back and held her down by holding her from behind. To prevent her from raising her voice, he sealed her mouth with his right hand. Due to the sudden event, their balance broke and the two of them fell backwards onto their butts, but Suimei wasn't paying any attention to that. More importantly, because there was still a guard patrolling around the area, his full attention was on trying to prevent a woman's scream from filling the air.

If she screamed here, the guard would definitely come running. Other guards would definitely gather as well. In that case, it would just be a repeat of last time. It would make a big mess of his only chance. He wanted to avoid it no matter what. Naturally, Hatsumi resisted. She was squirming to try and get out of his arms. Suimei tightened his left arm to strengthen his hold. His magic was devoted to trying to form a barrier, so he could only pin her down using his own strength.

“Mmm! Mmmm!”

“Like I've been saying, just spare me the violence...”

—Chomp!

“Mm! Hyamu...”

“Shit! Just a little more...”

In a complete panic, Suimei invoked his magic. It was careless of him not to use it in the first place. But there was no point in regretting it now. It was necessary that he deploy the Phantom Road immediately.

... Forming the barrier took most of Suimei's concentration, when it was finally completed, Hatsumi seemed to have calmed down a bit and her violent vigour had subsided. As he finished the barrier which isolated

them from the outside world, Suimei let out a breath of relief as he let go of Hatsumi's mouth.

“Sorry 'bout that. I had no...”

“What do you mean you had no choice!? Pervert!”

While still being held by Suimei, Hatsumi turned her teeth towards him with the same vigour she had just used them to bite him with.

“E-even if you say that, I didn't think at all that you would doing this kind of thing...”

“Enough, just let me go! How long are you planning on grabbing my breast you idiot!!??”

“Eh—?”

Grabbing her breast. Hearing those words, Suimei finally realized just what it was that he was doing. Of course, his entire focus was just on holding her down, so he didn't realize at all that his left hand was perfectly gripping onto her breast.

A few seconds after being told. A few seconds to put his thoughts in order. Realizing that he was reacting far too slow, Suimei turned completely red and let go of his hand and jumped back. Now that he though about it, when he strengthened his hold on her, he remembered squeezing onto something soft.

“S-s-s-s-s-s-sorry!”

“It's not just sorry right you pervert!? First you enter someone's room arbitrarily and now you barge in on them bathing and grab their breast!? Isn't that completely the act of a degenerate pervert!?”

“Heee!! I-I don't have anything to counter that...”

Suimei replied in a hysterical voice, and in an unusual act for him, he meekly got on his hands and knees. On the other hand, Hatsumi was finding it hard to remain vigilant while hiding her body. Using only her arms and hands, she was unable to cover herself completely and seemed to be suffering. Her arm was wrapped around herself, but it seemed she

didn't notice that a pink tip was peeking out on both sides above her arm. Looking at her bashful face as she became bright red while glaring back at him, Suimei finally realized.

“... U-umm, please take this.”

Suimei humbly went to get her clothes that had been hanging nearby and handed them to her. His head was completely pointed downwards and all he could see was the ground, but even so Suimei shut his eyes with enough force to to wrinkle his face. Hatsumi took her clothes from him while remaining completely vigilant.

Before long, after judging that he could no longer hear the rustling of clothing, Suimei raised his gaze. At worst he could be cut down right here, but it seemed like she didn't have her sword on hand. It may have actually been fortunate that she was bathing. As he looked up at her, she seemed to have noticed something and suddenly looked around her surroundings dubiously.

“I screamed quite a bit but, people aren't coming...?”

“This region has been isolated with magic after all. Even if you scream and go on a rampage, the sound won't leak out, nobody will come.”

“In other words, I've been caught by you?”

Hatsumi looked at Suimei with a sharp gaze like the blade of a knife. Even her tone was considerably sharp. Looking at her like this, Suimei raised both his hands in the air to show that he had no malicious intent.

“Aaah, eeeh, you know. I don't have any intention of harming you?”

“... I think you've already done quite a bit of damage just now though.”

“I'm sorry I apologize please forgive me it was completely out of my control.”

Suimei prostrated himself and gave an earnest apology as many times as he had to. Seeing that atmosphere which was completely different from the last time he infiltrated the palace, perhaps because she was considerably taken aback, she let out a tremendous sigh.

“... So? What did you come here for today?”

“Like I said last time, I came to talk.”

“That thing about being childhood friends?”

“That's right.”

Suimei nodded with a solemn expression. However, she pointed out what she had brought up the last time they spoke once more.

“I believe I denied that the last time didn't I? Why is a childhood friend from another world coming to visit me?”

“Because I was also summoned to this world. There's no other possibility except for that right?”

“Just what kind of probability is that... In other words, are you also a hero?”

“No, I was caught up in Reiji's... A friend's summoning and ended up getting stuck here. Did you hear about an accident happening during the summoning ritual in the Astel Kingdom?”

“Now that you mention it, that sounds familiar...”

“And that's why I'm here right now.”

Suimei spoke like he was fed up with the whims of the stars. However, Hatsumi still looked at him doubtfully. Seeing her act like that, Suimei made a grimace as he continued to talk.

“Then just what should I say for you to believe me? Your family members' names? Your specialties? Your hobbies? The things you like...? Other than that, I can also talk about the secrets that you refuse to tell people or your embarrassing past?”

“What do you mean embarrassing!? Embarrassing!? How do you even know the secrets that I refuse to tell people!?”

“I've been hanging out with you since we were brats after all. You're my cousin that lived in the house right next to mine you know?”

“Eh? Cousin...? is that true?”

Suimei nodded back at her after she showed her surprise at him being family. After seeing Suimei sincerely confess that they were related, a portion of her obstinate doubt crumbled, but her expression was still slightly uneasy.

“Like I thought, you can't believe me?”

“... Do you think I'm in a position to carelessly believe anything?”

“Well you have a point...”

Right now, she was a hero with amnesia. She was in a position where there was an obvious danger that many influential powers were aiming to use her. It was only natural that she would be strongly vigilant. There was no way she would believe anyone just because she was told to. Because she was lacking the materials with which to judge others, she must have been going through quite the hardships.

Suimei dropped his shoulders and scratched his head like he was troubled. If it wasn't possible from talking to her, he didn't have any other ways of proving it to her. If he couldn't convince her by talking to her about anything and everything, he could only pray that her memory returned. While thinking of this, Suimei folded his arms and groaned as Hatsumi stared at him fixedly. Before long, she let out a somehow resigned voice.

“—Got it. I'll believe you. If you were planning to bring me down, you wouldn't go about it in such a roundabout way.”

“Is that fine?”

“It doesn't seem you have any intent to harm me after all, besides, you know things that only I know and things that I do not. Also... That's it. Could you say my full name?”

“Kuchiba Hatsumi.”

“And your name is?”

“It's Yakagi Suimei?”

“Yakagi, Suimei...”

“What's up?”

As Suimei made a confused expression, Hatsumi muttered out his name separately while looking like she couldn't help but approve of him now.

“... It's reversed.”

“Eh?”

“When you say it, it is reversed. When the people of this world say my name, they seem to be saying something that is easier for them to pronounce too. Also your name is easy for me to pronounce. Above all, the movements of your mouth match the words I am hearing. Also it seems evident that we're the same race. When I think of it properly, there's an overwhelming number of things that make it easier for me to believe you than to not do so.”

After a short pause, she continued talking.

“What I was suspicious last time, was that you seemed to know too much, which is why I couldn't accept it right away. Also I was completely surprised at your sudden intrusion.”

She certainly had a point. It was something quite difficult to just up and believe someone who was trespassing. However, having finally reached this stage, Suimei let out a sigh of relief. He was finally able to move on to the main point he originally wanted to talk about. But Hatsumi once more looked at him with a strict gaze.

“—But it's not like I plan on letting my guard down around you.”

“Ah?”

“Isn't it obvious?”

“Ha... Haa!? You believe me now right!? Why!?”

“Isn't it obvious? Even if you're an acquaintance of mine and even if you are showing me your favour, I still don't know whether or not you're trustworthy right?”

She was right. Even if they were acquaintances, friends or cousins, she still did not know whether he was someone she could trust. It was

perfectly reasonable that she was still cautious. Hatsumi then questioned Suimei in a somewhat aggressive tone.

“So? Why did you do something like infiltrate the palace? Wasn't there another way to visit me?”

“That huh? It seems like it isn't so simple to arrange a meeting with the hero. It was impossible even by trying to use the guild master of the adventurers' guild known as the Twilight Pavilion as an intermediary.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah. It seems the royal family won't allow any meetings.”

Watching Suimei shrug his shoulders like it was troublesome, Hatsumi knit her brows as if she still found in dubious.

“... The king and the others are all good people though.”

“I don't know anything about that. But—”

As he said this, Suimei made a pensive face and hesitated to continue. He was wondering whether it was really alright to say it here. What he wanted to inform her of, was the fact that the royal family was likely using her. He wasn't positive, but it was also definite that they were protecting her, so he was hesitating on whether it was essential to inform her of this.

“It's not like I don't have a clue. I do feel like they are using me somewhat.”

Perhaps she read what he wanted to say from the subtleties of his expression, Hatsumi put in words what Suimei was worried to bring up.

“But if you say that, the hero summoning is the most extreme example of that. If you try putting it in words, there won't be an end to it.”

“That's true. Well, because of that, I could only resort to this kind of method.”

After Suimei simply stated the reasons for his actions, Hatsumi suddenly changed the topic.

“... Hey, were you worried about me?”

Hearing her ask this, Suimei made a face like he was questioning why she was asking something so needless as he replied.

“Isn't it obvious? We're family.”

“Family...”

Even if they were related by blood, they were still only cousins. The sense of distance between such people depended on the household, but even so, for Suimei who had no immediate family, having a blood relative who lived nearby and who he kept company since he was a child was the same thing as immediate family. Whenever he was in Japan, Hatsumi's parents would always worry about whether he was eating properly and had him over. Hatsumi would also cook for him, though only once in a while. Suimei could not possibly coldly leave someone like that alone. Perhaps because he used the word family, Hatsumi was standing there blinking in surprise.

“What is it?”

“N-nothing! It's nothing!”

After he asked, Hatsumi shyly turned away. And then, after her embarrassment subsided to an extent, she turned back to him and questioned him in a timid tone.

“... You say that I'm family indifferently, but do I have other family?”

“Yeah. Your father is Instructor Kiyoshiro. Your mother is Yukio-san. And you have a little brother called Haseto. After you suddenly disappeared, I'm sure they're all worried.”

“... That, that's right isn't it...”

After hearing that she had family, as one would expect, it was difficult for her to bear. Because she didn't know that there was anybody waiting for her to return, it was true that she didn't have such needless anxieties. She was probably quite worried now. Seeing her like this, Suimei stuck out his hand.

“Hatsumi, come with me.”

“With you?”

“That's right. I'm currently looking for a method to return to our world. The reason I came to Miazen was also for this purpose... If you come with us, you can return the moment we find the way back. That's why.”

That's why, he wanted her to come. That's what he was trying to say. But, Hatsumi didn't take his offer. As if she was turning her back on his kindness, she awkwardly averted her gaze.

“But, I have to fight the demons...”

“There's no reason why you have to fight them right? They summoned you arbitrarily and told you to fight, you don't have any responsibility to do so.”

“...”

This did not apply only to Hatsumi. It was something he could say to every hero summoned to this world. They didn't have any responsibility to fight the demons. In Hatsumi's case where she lost her memories and having already fought the demons, it could be said to apply doubly for her. Suimei was worried whether or not her will had been tampered with. However, if she wasn't forced into this but was unable to agree with him, it would be...

“Could it be, you're unable to turn your back on the comrades you've fought together with until now?”

“That's also true... But it isn't just that. It can also be said that this was a fight I started, so I can't cast it away partway through.”

“You started it yourself? What do you mean?”

“Just as you said, I don't have any memories, I don't have any reason to fight. That's how it was at first, I had always shut myself up in my room. But, when I heard the demons were attacking, after hearing someone begging to save the people, I thought it was something I had to do.”

Hatsumi fluently cut to the main reason, and Suimei closed his mouth. The reason she gave him was somewhat similar to what Reiji told him

before.

“After that, I fought together with the people of the Alliance, Selphy and the others and pushed back the demons. Everyone was happy. Not because I fought, but because I saved many people and their families. That's why...”

—She was unable to cast it away partway through. It was a fight she started, cutting it off and throwing it away after hearing she could return was just being selfish.

As if it was the first time she ever spoke her mind from the depths of her heart, she said it all at ease. However, in the end, it was something unavoidable. Taking advantage of her conscience, she was stuck with having to fight as they were being pressed back. In that case, it wasn't her own fight. Suimei could only think of it as her getting swallowed into the fight of others. As Suimei was about to admonish her for this, Hatsumi suddenly began speaking.

“Hey? I don't know when it was, but was there a funeral? You had the role of the chief mourner, and had just lost someone important.”

“A funeral... Three years ago, was my father's funeral. The chief mourner was supposed to be Instructor Kiyoshiro, but since I was the closest blood relative, I ended up doing it.”

Suimei was wondering whether she was able to figure something out. As if she had just found something that she wasn't supposed to find, she let out a sigh like she was resigning herself.

“As I thought...”

“Rather, how do you know about that? Don't you have amnesia?”

“I had a flashback. The people I saw in that vision had hazy faces though. The images flowed through my mind fairly quickly.”

While Suimei was thinking of how that kind of thing actually happened, she continued speaking.

“And so, after that funeral ended, you were there. You said, that you had

to keep going forward. That you had to go save them...”

“I did?”

Suimei unintentionally turned her question around. When he tried to remember, he didn't have that kind of memory.

“You don't know...? I see. It's probably because you were tired and dozing off. So I think you don't remember it. The context was strange too. But at that time, it felt like you had something you had to do no matter what. That's why, I thought it must have been some sort of dream.”

Many things happened at that time. His father died. After that was settled, he had to protect the last promise he made with his father, it was without a doubt the time he made his determination to walk forward on the path of a magician. It wasn't that strange for him to let out that kind of thing unexpectedly when he was dejected at the time.

“When Gaius stampeded into the palace asking for reinforcements, that memory came back to me. That's why I started fighting. That person in my memories marched forwards without breaking down after all. That's why, I also couldn't just stand still... Though finding out it was you, I'm a little peeved.”

At the end, she trailed off shyly and added that on. That last part didn't sit well with Suimei, but even so, pinching his brow, he couldn't help but feel anguish over his helpless feelings boiling up. He never though that his own words would be one of her reasons for fighting. He could only describe it as some kind of karma. Because of the things he said himself and the fact that she did not want to neglect them, right now she was unable to take the hand he was extending her. Suddenly, Hatsumi continued speaking like she realized the reason why Suimei was at his wit's end.

“It's not like I'm saying it's your fault...”

“... I know. Even if you didn't have amnesia, there's a possibility that you would fight. I won't say whose fault it was.”

Declaring that bluntly, Suimei was unable to wipe away his feelings of

guilt. If it was Hatsumi before she lost her memories, then it was considerably possible that she would fight the demons. The style of sword she studied was a technique used for nothing other than fighting evil after all. Seeing her like this, Suimei quietly asked her.

“... You're going to fight here?”

“Yes. I started it after all, I can't stop partway.”

“I see...”

The reason he was only able to squeeze out those words, was because he was worried deep down in her heart. Fighting the demons couldn't be taken halfheartedly, she would likely go through many hardships from here. It was also true of her bonds to other people. As long as she held the position of a hero, there were things beyond her control. On top of that, she was fighting while having lost her memories, it was to be expected that he would be anxious. However—

“Got it.”

Saying this, Suimei stood up. Just because he was worried, it didn't mean he could make light of her determination. And even if he did take her along forcefully, he would just be pressuring her with his own worries. To comfort his own heart, he couldn't have her give up on her own desires. And then even for himself, he couldn't give up on the things that he had to do. Therefore...

“I'd like to go along with you, but I have to find the spell to return us to our world. When I find it, I'll come to let you know.”

“Un.”

“I'll be in the lodging house of the Twilight Pavilion in this city for a while, if you need anything don't hesitate and come and ask. Though you may be reluctant to meet with me.”

After saying this gently, Suimei suddenly remembered something as he clapped.

“That's it!”

“What?”

“The next time you meet some important guy, tell them this for me. If they're planning to continue messing with me despite being the hero's friend, my goal will change. Next time, whether it be ten or twenty thousand of them, tell them to come at me with the resolve to be annihilated.”

After Suimei informed her of this in a slightly joking manner, he left Hatsumi behind.

It was the day after Suimei once more infiltrated the palace. Kuchiba Hatsumi was now in the garden of Miazen's palace. In a corner of the spacious garden was a circular gazebo where Hatsumi was seated, and before her was the king of Miazen. Flanking the king was the first prince Weitzer, surrounding the gazebo were the cabinet ministers, generals, and of course Hatsumi's companions Gaius and Selphy.

After judging that the king had finished with his government affairs, Hatsumi proposed to have an unofficial conversation with him. The royal family had taken heed of Hatsumi's circumstances, and because they had to put up a front that all business with the hero was official, they chose not to hold the meeting in the formal atmosphere of the audience chamber which in itself could be considered a foreign enemy—but setting that aside.

Sitting across from Hatsumi at a marble table, Miazen's king was looking at her with a gentle smile. That expression was likely his way of telling her not to humble herself in this place. Miazen's king had a mild character. His personality was completely opposite from his son Weitzer. He was a person who was the very picture of a gentle king right out of a story book. He was sometimes strict, but because he was always took into consideration those around him, he was idolized as a king. After their preparations for their little session had finished, the king spoke to Hatsumi.

“—Hero-dono. What was it that you wanted to speak of earnestly with

myself?”

“Yes. It is about the actions from here on out that we agreed on the other day, as well as a report.”

Without particularly abasing herself, she answered gracefully. The king spoke back to her in a slightly joking manner.

“Hohou. So you discussed that kind of thing already? It is a good thing to be thinking of the demon subjugation during your time of rest, but if you were to do so I would also have liked to participate.”

“My apologies. Your Majesty is a busy man, though it may be presumptuous, we decided to only talk among ourselves.”

“I see I see. My apologies for causing you concern. But Hero-dono, as always you are a quite the humble hero. Without being proud, you are still dignified. I am proud of you as the king of this country who calls you hero.”

The king laughed with a broad smile, he was showing his face as a king who loved the people. Though she wasn't sure whether it was a good or bad habit to give praise to someone at every opportunity. As Hatsumi casually took at glimpse in Gaius' direction, perhaps because he found the king's loose tone to be tedious or perhaps because he didn't like his excessive praise, his mouth was shut tight in a frown. The king eventually moved the conversation along while still smiling as he was.

“Well then, what was the contents of that discussion?”

“From now on, as much as possible, I was thinking of taking on the actions that were originally planned for a hero. Of course, this is only after the remaining demons in the northern parts of the Alliance are defeated, but I was thinking of linking up with the other heroes and fighting in various places with them.”

This was the duty of hero that she had heard from Selphy before. Around the areas where the demon attacks were fierce, they would find opportunities to do aid each region as they could. Due to the demon invasion currently being sluggish, the other heroes were doing so and

moving around with the goal of inspiring the soldiers and citizens of the world, but she was thinking it was about time that they started moving towards the fight.

“Umu... You certainly have a point. However, I think it is a little hasty to be talking of this though? I'm sure you have heard of the activities of the other heroes, but I think it is vital to focus on what is right before your eyes without rushing it.”

“Thank you for your consideration.”

Despite the king's consideration seeming to be somewhat optimistic, Hatsumi bowed her head.

“My goodness. Rather, I couldn't really bring myself to have a young girl your age fight in battle. Hero-dono, do you not also wish to live a peaceful life? If you desire it, you could stay in the palace hereafter and live a life unrelated to battle.”

“Eh...?”

He was implying it was fine for her to ignore her duties as a hero. Hatsumi was darting her eyes about. Despite summoning her over to defeat the demons, it wasn't something that he should be saying no matter how she thought of it. She believed it to be a suggestion taking into consideration her amnesia, but the reason why she didn't feel like she was being deluded must have been because of that smile he always had. She didn't want to distrust them but... As Hatsumi was processing her thoughts deep in her heart, the king spoke once more.

“What do you think? Hero-dono defeated the demon general, I believe you've accomplished your duty sufficiently just from that. Even if you alone withdrew from battle, I don't think anybody would blame you?”

His favour made her think of it like a devil's invitation, but Hatsumi did not nod back to him.

“No, I cannot resign myself from the battle. I will gratefully accept only your feelings.”

“I see... In that case there's no helping it. I believe that your battles with

demons will only increase exceptionally from here on out if you take on such actions. We will also offer you all the support we can, but Hero-dono, do be careful.”

After acknowledging her request, the king moved his gaze over to Weitzer.

“Weitzer. Take care of Hero-dono.”

“Understood.”

Weitzer lightly bowed his head. The two of them were being overprotective. Judging that this part of the conversation was over, Hatsumi moved on to the next topic.

“Also, there is one more thing I'd like to talk about with your Majesty.”

“What is it?”

“Yes. It is about the case of the intruder who came into my room the other day.”

As Hatsumi replied to him while he was still smiling, but the king then immediately grimaced.

“... I can do nothing but apologize for that matter. I am expecting to be able to give you a favourable response regarding that case, but that nefarious bandit has yet to be caught. The soldiers are patrolling around, but I hear even after searching the entire city they have yet to find his presence at all. From here the search will extend to other towns and we will devote all our efforts to capturing the bandit, so I would like you to wait just a little longer. Though the security around you will be quite boisterous...”

“No, about that, I'd like you to stop fussing over it.”

“... What do you mean?”

“Because last night, that man came to visit me once more.”

“What!?”

“Oi! Is that true!?”

“That man again!? No, but just where did he...”

Hearing Hatsumi's confession, the King's complexion changed in an instant, and forgetting where they were, Gaius and Weitzer became agitated. Though calm, Selphy also showed a surprised expression and was astir.

“There's no need to worry everyone. I'm okay after all.”

After she told them to be relieved, the king questioned her while still unable to shake off his agitation.

“H-hero-dono. Are you really alright?”

“Yes. If he came to me with ill intent, then I wouldn't be able to talk with your Majesty here after all.”

“That is true but... Just what were the palace guards doing?”

The king had a slightly angered attitude, and was making a deliberately sour expression. This was now the second time the palace security was breached. As one would expect, it wasn't something a king could be calm about. Looking at the surrounding soldiers trembling though, Hatsumi could only feel sorry for them. And then, though belatedly, the king seemed to have understood her intent.

“However Hero-dono. What do you mean by overlooking the intrusion?”

“Last night he came to visit me, and we talked. As expected, it seems he is one of my acquaintances.”

“I have also heard that the intruder claimed to be Hero-dono's good friend. However, Hero-dono is from a different world, I don't believe one of your friends could possible show up, just what does that mean?”

“He said that he got dragged into the hero summoning in Astel.”

“Fumu... In that case it is possible, but I do believe it would be rather difficult to believe? Why do you believe that man's words?”

“It's the movement of his mouth. Even when I talk to your Majesty as I am now, the words I hear from you are changed into the words that I use.

What I hear and the movement of your mouth is different. But his words and the movement of his mouth coincide perfectly with the words I use.”

“... I see. In other words that bandit... No, that man who calls himself Hero-dono's good friend uses the language from your world. In that case there should be no mistaking it.”

“Other than that, he told me many things about myself. It seems that he is somebody who knows me well.”

“Umu...”

He was a king known for smiling no matter the situation, but right now he was making a face like he just ate something very sour for some reason. While he was showing this unexpected behaviour, Weitzer cut into their conversation with an unusually perturbed attitude.

“I-Is there no mistaking it?”

“Yes, without a doubt. There are far fewer factors that would lead me not to believe him.”

Hearing her say that, he showed a completely dumbfounded expression, on the other hand, the king showed her a very serious one.

“However, Hero-dono's friend has performed the crime of infiltrating the palace. I also do not want to charge your acquaintance with such a crime... But there is also nothing that can be done about it.”

“But he said that he had no choice but to do so. He said that there was no way of meeting with me by approaching the palace directly, is that correct?”

Due to the subject matter, Hatsumi's tone was unexpectedly somewhat reproachful. Perhaps because the king was not expecting her to ask him like this, he made a slightly dismayed face.

“U-umu. That was to protect Hero-dono. We believed that preparing a place to have a conversation would be a hindrance for you who had lost your memories.”

Due to his agitation, she could only hear it like he was making excuses.

Perhaps it had something to do with what Suimei was trying to say at that time. While Hatsumi was speculating about this, she continued to ask for the suspension of the search.

“Then, is it fine to look at is as something irrelevant?”

“Even if you say that, I also have my authority to think about... Allowing the palace to be infiltrated does not sit well with me as royalty.”

Hatsumi could tell that the king was reluctant to agree with her. However, after witnessing Suimei brave danger to visit a friend only to have him branded as a criminal, it did not sit well with her. In that case, Hatsumi changed her tone and spoke bluntly.

“Understood. If your Majesty insists on it no matter what, I do not mind. It's just, before he left, he told me to leave you these words. 'If you plan to continue messing with me, be it ten or twenty thousand of you, come at me with the resolve to be annihilated.' In this situation where we must fight against the demons, I don't believe you have the leisure to lose your soldiers over such foolishness.”

“Muu...”

Partway through, the way she spoke became more threatening. The king hesitated to reply. Suimei's way of speaking was quite haughty, but because the king knew of the hero's strength, he must have thought that even without divine protection, someone from the same world would be quite strong. On the other hand, Weitzer couldn't suppress his anger at Suimei's words.

“Ten or twenty thousand... Such a boastful claim.”

Weitzer was also present at the time, but he did not actually fight with Suimei. He probably did not think there was much difference in their strength. He saw both Gaius and Selphy defeated, but the two of them had their guard down and they were planning to capture him. He didn't know whether or not they were being serious, so he didn't think there was such a large gap in their abilities. However, the same thing could be said of Suimei who was just trying to leave peacefully.

“I do not necessarily think that he was just acting brave. The palace guards weren't able to oppose him at all. Both Selphy and Gaius also think that he's quite the formidable foe right?”

“That's right. Even if I was looking down on him, I got taken down in a single shot after all.”

“... As I am now, no matter how many times we fought, I don't feel like I could ever win against that young man.”

Gaius snorted with spite, while Selphy quietly replied. During that fight, Suimei greatly impacted their self-confidence. There was probably subtleties about him only those who fought against him knew about. Hearing this, the king made a bewildered expression and Hatsumi once more urged him.

“So that you do not incur more damages, I don't believe there is any other choice. Is it still not possible to ask this of you?”

“But you know, Hero-dono...”

Seeing that the king was still being indecisive, Hastumi grew impatient and took on a frank attitude.

“Then let's do this. If you plan on causing him harm, I will take his side.”

“Wha!?”

“That man braved danger just to meet with me. In that case, it is only proper that I also take the risk—to carry the burden of danger in response. How about it?”

“U-umu... Understood. I'll comply. If Hero-dono says it would only be proper...”

Her intimidating bluff worked perfectly, and the king consented with a painful expression, and then spoke once more.

“So did he come to Miazen to meet Hero-dono?”

“No, he said that he originally came here to look for a means to return to his own world. It's likely he only realized I was here after arriving in

Miazen.”

“A means to return?”

“Yes. I don't know the full details, but he said that if I went with him we would be able to return the moment he found it. From the way he spoke, I think he may actually find one.”

Hatsumi conveyed the impression she got from their conversation the other day. Magic was outside of her area of expertise so she was unable to see through his abilities, but just as she said, from the way he spoke, it made her think that he we certainly confident of the fact. After he heard this, the king showed a far more perturbed expression than before and leaned forward to ask his next question. He spoke as if it was a matter which affected national affairs greatly.

“Hero-dono! Is that really true!? If it is, how did you reply!?”

Sweat was forming on his brow and he had a tense face waiting for her reply. The people in her surroundings were the same. Despite the king asking her this, having lost his patience, Gaius suddenly came into the gazebo.

“Oi, you're not going to say you're going with him are you!?”

“I'm not. Didn't I just say it earlier? I have to defeat the demons.”

As she replied, the frozen atmosphere thawed out in an instant. They all felt relieved at once.

“Don't scare us like that. It's bad for my heart.”

“Sorry.”

Hatsumi apologized for the way she spoke as if she was insinuating something. And then, she took a look at the faces of everyone around her. After they all calmed down, she forced the topic to another thought that she was holding on to.

“However, after they are defeated, I'm thinking of returning to my own world.”

Partway through, it wasn't something she expected to be able to do. But

if there was a means to return, anybody would want to do so. Selphy and Gaius both had faces like they were unable to calm down as they looked at her clearly. While everyone was at a loss for words, the first one to talk was Weitzer.

“H-Hero-dono, are you seriously...”

“Un. I was told that I also have a proper family, also I can't just leave my memories like this.”

“But...”

“Sorry. I feel bad after having been attended to so thoroughly, but I can't stay like this. My family is probably quite worried too...”

That's why she would go back. And then, seeing Weitzer's attitude like he was clinging on, she thanked him deep within her heart. Hatsumi then turned to her other companions who had yet to speak.

“What do you two think?”

“For me, if that is what Hatsumi wants, then...”

“That's all up to you. Personally I'll be lonely, but it can't be helped.”

“Un.”

Selphy was hesitant to say it, but on the other hand, as one would expect of him, Gaius showed the dignity of an adult and sympathized with her situation in an unusually sullen and serious attitude. It seemed that Weitzer was feeling quite bitter as he was making a somewhat flustered expression. She was a little worried about the king's complexion, but the two of them must have felt the same.

Nobody spoke anymore, and it happened just as that awkward silence spread out. A soldier suddenly came rushing into the garden. It was not a palace guard. From his clothing, he was a soldier from Larsheem. The way he stumbled over the lawn was somewhat like a humorous puppet show, but it must have been just that important a matter. While being helped up by the palace guards who were running behind him, he approached with exhausted steps.

“Oi! What's wrong!?”

“Ha!!”

The soldier replied to Gaius vigorously, and knelt down before the gazebo.

“I have a report to make to his Majesty the King with haste!”

“What has you panicking so much? You are before the hero.”

“M-my apologies!”

The soldier lowered his head and apologized. Seeing him like this, the king once more asked him.

“So, what happened? Seeing the state you are in, it isn't something trivial.”

Even without asking, everyone realized that something had happened. While in the tension of waiting for an answer, the soldier who was out of breath finally spoke.

“The demon invasion has restarted!”

And so, the hero Hatsumi's brief period of rest came to an end.

Currently, the demon territory was looking out over Gaius' native land of Larsheem. Between what was originally the demon territory and Larsheem, there was a large boundary region which was not influenced by either race. However, when the demon army first invaded Larsheem ages ago, because it was quite the large scaled advance to cover so much land, simple fortresses were placed in this region to stave off the demons' advances.

After Hatsumi and the others pushed back the demon army, these fortresses now served as the front line and was the site where they were gathering. It was a four day trip by foot. Hatsumi and the others left with some reinforcements ahead of the others and arrived at the main headquarters in the wastelands at an astounding speed.

In the area of the main fortress, they were hurriedly bringing in supplies into tents in a panic. Preparing for a large scale decisive battle, the Alliance soldiers from each of the affiliated countries were restlessly moving around. Looking at this situation from atop their horses, Hatsumi and the others dismounted in front of a tent, and went inside.

Generals from each Alliance army were already inside, all the staff officers were present and discussing strategy for the upcoming battle. They were all people she knew from the previous battle and the battle before that and they were also informed of her arrival beforehand, so none of them were surprised at the hero's arrival.

As a hero, Hatsumi took the seat of honour, and Weitzer was next to her. Because Selphy was the one to summon her over, she was standing behind her. After everyone was seated, Weitzer questioned the staff officers of Miazen's army.

“What's the current situation?”

“Ha! Currently, the Larsheem and Miazen armies are forming a linchpin with soldiers deployed on both flanks. We believe the demon army intends to attack head on and are deployed to face them with layered defences.”

“What's the situation of the fortresses in the border region being attacked?”

“The northwest, north-northwest, north and north-northeast fortresses are under attack. The reinforcements are moving over there now and are fighting bravely, but the attack on the north-northeast fortress seems to be particularly severe, the situation there is not very good.”

Gaius let out a groan after hearing the staff officer's restless report.

“There should have been a sufficient amount of forces left behind though.”

“The number of demons far exceeds the number of deployed soldiers. Because of that, it was decided to send reinforcements to the pivotal points.”

The staff officer went into further detail, but after Hatsumi put together the situation...

“It's a poor strategy.”

“As expected, does Hero-dono think it is a diversion or dispersion strategy?”

After Hatsumi evaluated the situation, Weitzer asked for confirmation on her thoughts. After she nodded back at him with a knowing look, Selphy also nodded.

“It is likely that Hatsumi's prediction is correct. While the main demon is facing down the Alliance forces, several detached forces could be employing diversionary tactics. Or perhaps they are planning to draw in the Alliance soldiers—the hero, out on their own, and split our forces.”

“It's just—”

“It can only be said to be a poor strategy, right?”

“Yes, anybody would be able to easily tell that would be what they are planning.”

Hatsumi nodded back towards Selphy. Anybody who saw this would be able to see through that plan and evaluate it as a poor strategy. However, this also became the main factor to think that there was some other intent behind their movements. Gaius then turned a severe expression towards the staff officer.

“What is the scale of the demon armies attacking each fortress?”

“Other than the north-northeast fortress, the number of demons about double the number of deployed soldiers. It seems forces are continuously pouring onto the north-northeast fortress and we estimate there is around three or four times the number of demons there.”

“That's a lot...”

Because the Alliance soldiers were fighting from a fortress, it was possible for them to put up a fight despite being outnumbered. They had the composure to hold out for a while. However, the number of demons

attacking the north-northeast fortress was enough to overthrow it. There was a need to send a large amounts of reinforcements there, to crush the attack they would need to concentrate a considerable amount of effort into it.

“... In other words, those guys are simply planning to disperse our forces huh. It's simple, but effective. It's usually their plan to look like they have a plan but not to really have any particular plan in mind. It's a deception.”

“Yes, I believe the same if we are thinking about it normally.”

Hatsumi agreed with Gaius' conclusion. From their current information, that was the only conclusion they could make, they were not in a situation where they could determine whether or not there was a grander scheme in action. The staff officer then showed a bitter expression.

“... Right now they are holding out, but it is only a matter of time before the north-northeast fortress falls.”

“It'll be bad to leave it like this huh.”

“Un. There would be a hole in the defences, and the demons would pour in through there with force.”

Judging that the conversation on the enemy's movements had ended, Weitzer questioned the others.

“So, what will we do about the reinforcements?”

“Ha. Our main plan is to once more send reinforcements from here. And our secondary one... My apologies, but we would like Hero-sama to prepare to head to the fortress and lead the reinforcements.”

The staff officer who proposed to plan was standing at attention. The reason they proposed the main plan first was likely to appeal to the hero reservedly. By all means, it was the best hand to play, but a mere staff officer or general was unable to directly order the hero into battle. Sensing their intent, Hatsumi resolutely nodded to them.

“We cannot afford to stay still. The number of reinforcements we can send to the other fortresses is limited, so that we're ready when the main force of the demon army moves, we can't spare too many of them.”

“Then that means that.”

“Since it is easy for us to move and we possess a significant amount of war potential, there's no choice but for us to do so.”

“Is that enough talking? We'll move out once preparations are complete, please take care of the arrangements.”

Hatsumi deprecated herself and bowed her head, and the gathered generals became flustered and bowed back.

After their military meeting, Hatsumi and the others took action quickly. Without taking the time to relieve their fatigue from marching all the way here in a hurry, they left behind the forces they took with them and spearheaded the group of soldiers prepared by the generals and headed for one of the fortresses in the boundary.

They arrived at the fortress where the demon attack was fiercest. In an open and slightly elevated position between the mountains and forests, a defensive wall made of wood posts cut out of black wood stood tall. Watchtowers were put in place in all four directions. It was far from the image of a firm stronghold, but even so, because it was put in place to perfectly block the path, it held to the reputation of a fortress well.

However, unlike the main headquarters fortress in the north which stood before a large wasteland, they had previously lost this one and retaken it. So the destruction and restorations on the fortress were piling up and it was not in great condition. The sturdy black wood wall had great scars here and there, and a section of it was missing. At a glance, it was unreliable.

Currently, this boundary fortress was much quieter than they imagined. It seemed that the demons' assault had stopped for the moment. They could see the fortress in a flurry from recovering after a battle, but at

present they were not being attacked. Leaving the forces they brought with them to Selphy, Hatsumi went ahead with Gaius and Weitzer into the fortress and ascended the main watchtower.

The fortress' commander was overlooking the situation from the watchtower himself and was in the middle of giving out orders from above. From the shoulder pads he was wearing, he seemed to be an officer from Larsheem. As they approached the commander, he stiffly fell to one knee. After Gaius ordered him to be at ease right away, he cut to the chase.

“How's the situation?”

“Ha. The battle with the demons has currently fallen into a stalemate. It seems those demons are also at a loss on how to continue and loosened their attack. We're currently hurrying with tending to the wounded and repairing the fortress.”

The commander gave his report in a slightly excited tone. He was probably still filled with the exaltation over the battle from the previous day. Seeing him like this, Gaius showed him his characteristic smile.

“You held out huh. You did good.”

“Those words are more than I deserve. General Forvan.”

The commander lightly bowed his head and showed his gratitude to Gaius. Hatsumi then questioned him about the situation further.

“So, are those the demons?”

The commander gave her a nod while still in an excited state. From the top of the watchtower, they were able to look down at the foot of the hill. As Hatsumi shifted her focus to it, the commander pointed out where the front was, and the demon army was there. As if they were laying siege to the fortress, they were set up in a battle formation spread out at the bottom of the hill.

It wasn't like they were carrying out their business like a human army would, but they dug trenches in the ground and placed makeshift walls of wood. At the very least, it looked like a military encampment. She

couldn't get an extensive view of it, but it looked like they laid waste to a considerable amount of the outskirts. It was likely that they did so when they retreated as a means to slow down any pursuing forces—But setting that aside for now.

“That battle formation looks like they're showing off.”

“As long as they're not attacking us then it's a good thing, they've just been pressuring us like that. Once in a while they'll raise their voices or lay waste to the land. They're likely aiming to exhaust us...”

Before Hatsumi arrived, there weren't that many soldiers. If they were being messed with in that state, it was possible to bring them down without even attacking. They were aware that reinforcements were coming, but the time spent waiting chipped away at their morale. Unexpectedly for the demons, they built up the anxiety in the fortress that the attack could occur at any time forcing them into a fight. However—It was strange.

The movement of the demons could be described as strategically respectable. It made sense. However, it was uncharacteristic of the demons. Demons had a disposition where they would lunge in for the kill the moment they spot a weakness. So it was irregular for them to be simply applying pressure even in the situation of assaulting a fortress. It was possible that they were waiting for reinforcements before attacking, but Hatsumi felt that it looked strange regardless. While she was thinking of such things, Weitzer spoke to her.

“Hero-dono. Is something the matter?”

“Let's rout them. As always. But it's just... Aren't the actions of the demons strange?”

“I don't believe there is any important information other than what was just reported. There are no other demons in the area.”

“Then there doesn't seem to be a problem.”

Immediately after making her decision, Selphy's voice came from the bottom of the watchtower.

“Hatsumi, a message came.”

“What happened?”

“It seems the main force of demons has moved. The Alliance army is currently moving in response.”

The time had come, those in the area were astir as tension ran through the air. Weitzer then spat out in an unpleasant tone at the report.

“Like we thought, it was a plan to disperse our forces. How insolent.”

The demons had determined the timing that they would separate from the Alliance forces and moved in to attack the main force all at once. In the end, they went right along with the enemy's plan, but now they were definite that the demons before them were a decoy with the purpose of splitting their forces.

“Let's defeat them quickly and return. Also, Weitzer, when this is over, hand over the soldiers we brought along to this fortress.”

“To compensate for the defences right? All is as you will.”

As Weitzer humbly agreed, Gaius looked to Hatsumi for her decision.

“What do we do?”

“I'm planning to sally out and meet them from here. We'll quickly charge in and render them helpless, then quickly turn them back. I think that's the best way, how about it?”

“I'm in favour of that.”

“Well, there's no other way after all.”

Just as Gaius said, this was the only choice for them. They didn't have the leisure to take their time, so they were unable to do something more intricate like lure the enemy into another place where they could ambush them. It was possible that they would pile up casualties from attacking head on, but in that case it would just be up to Hatsumi and the others to cover for that. After confirming their plan, Weitzer turned towards the commander.

“Commander, what is the status of the soldiers remaining in the fortress?”

“Many of the soldiers are wounded or exhausted. If it were a defensive battle, we could put three quarters of them into action, but in the case of an offensive one, it would only be about half of them.”

“Selphy, how are the soldiers we brought with us?”

“They had sufficient rest interposed during the march, so there will be no problems having them participate in battle.”

“Then have them prepare for battle immediately. Against the demons' forces, we will split our forces into three units. The left and right flanks will protect both sides while the main unit led by Hero-dono will cut into the demon army. After forming up in front of the fortress, we will attack immediately!”

As Weitzer let out his orders, all the soldiers began moving. He was royalty and the fact that he was the hero's companion was well known, all the preparations would be flawless. Meanwhile, Hatsumi called out to Gaius.

“Let us go right away as well. Gaius, are you ready?”

“Damn right. I'm itching to go.”

Gaius struck his palm with his fist as he replied. Watching him descend from the watchtower, Hatsumi placed her foot on the railing and descended by kicking off of it. Normally this act would cause the soldiers to boil with excitement, but right now, nobody had the leisure to watch her. Passing through the soldiers who were taking formation, she dashed to the front of the gate.

Waiting in front of the gate, the preparations to attack the demons eventually finished, and the signal to open the gate resounded through the air. And as the gate opened, she turned around to face the soldiers forming ranks. She could see the faces of soldiers brimming with excitement before fighting together with the hero. She did not a give a single word for the soldiers who were about to face the demons.

Their high morale was likely due to her consecutive victories against the demons. Exactly because of that fact, everyone present was certain of their victory. She had to live up to their expectations. This feeling welled up within Hatsumi's chest. Biting down on those emotions, she passed a gaze over all of them. Weitzer then took a step in front of all the soldiers.

“From here on out, we will strike at the demons who are besieging the fortress! Including our reinforcements, our forces number fewer than those damn demons, but we have Hero-dono with us who holds the strength of ten thousand reinforcements! As long as she is fighting with us, we will never lose! Be honoured that you fight alongside the hero who was given the Goddess Alshuna's glory! Everyone, take pride in facing this battle!”

As his speech filled with an unusual amount of zeal ended, the soldiers raised a remarkably loud war cry. As the cry came to an end, Weitzer and Gaius immediately lined up at Hatsumi's side. And then together with Weitzer's command, the soldiers sallied out of the fortress and immediately ran down the hill. Keeping some distance between them and the demons, they quickly took formation and came to a stop.

“... It seems the demons noticed our intent and have begun moving.”

“Since we're forming up in the middle of the hill, it's easy for them to tell.”

After Weitzer's explanation, the commander's voice rang out from behind.

“The formation is ready! We can attack at any time!”

Hatsumi looked at her companions and gave them a single nod. As she did, Weitzer yelled out his orders.

“Mage units, prepare to chant!”

—In a collision on level ground where sheer numbers proved effective and there wasn't any strategy in play, it was an established tactic to use magic units to strike a preemptive blow. After they fired magic all as one, they would be followed by volleys from the archers and a charge from the

cavalry and foot soldiers.

“After the magic volley ends, we're charging! Vanguard, gather your courage!”

Right after Gaius' voice rang in the air, they could hear an ominous wail from the demons' side. Weitzer then called out to Selphy.

“Selphy, after the preemptive strike finishes.”

“I'll take the unit around and provide support from the flanks right? Understood—Mage units, prepare to chant! Use fire and wind magic to deliver the demons a blow!”

After confirming that she knew what to do, Selphy ordered the mage units. As the sound of their chanting in unison filled the air, fire magic fanned by wind magic flew towards the demons all at once. The first strike crashed into the demons spreading out at the foot of the hill. After the second and third strike following that, the thundering rumble of the flames rose in the air.

“Wind users keep the wind's direction in check! Keep our forces upwind at all times, don't be negligent of the adjustments!”

Selphy's orders came out once more. Meanwhile, the left and right flanks continued to fire magic at the demons, slowing their advance. Seeing the demons directly in front of them march through the fire, the swordsmen took action. The vanguard prepared to draw their swords, and Weitzer lifted his own to the sky. Just as sunlight reflected off the tip of his blade—

“Alright, all at once—”

And just as he was about to give the order to charge. A screaming report came in from the right flank.

“Your Highness! Demon reinforcements from the right side!”

“Wha!?”

“With this timing!?”

Weitzer and Hatsumi's surprised voices piled atop each other. Gaius'

angry roar then fired off towards the messenger.

“That side is a mountain! What's going on!?”

“They're flying demons! They're coming at us from the skies!”

“Did they prepare an ambush...?”

“But the commander said it didn't appear that way...”

He said that there didn't appear to be other demons in the area. Just what did that mean? As Hatsumi spun her thoughts around, Weitzer looked at her with a severe expression.

“There's no point disputing it now. There's no other choice other than splitting off some of the soldiers at the front—Soldiers! Advance immediately and support the vanguard! The mage units at the front! Hurry and go around to support the right flank!”

Just as he hastily gave his orders, another soldier came bearing a report as if dealing the final blow.

“A message! Demons have appeared on the left side to the north! Their number far exceeds the ones here!”

“Wha—How can that be?”

“Ridiculous! Just at this time as if they've seen through us...!?”

“That's can't be. Just where were they stationing such a large army...”

Gaius groaned in bewilderment. Reinforcements came in from both sides and only appeared just as they were about to attack themselves. The timing was so good that it was as if the demons read their movements completely. At this rate, their force would be encircled from the front and both sides by a bulky demon army. Weitzer panicked and let out an angry roar rang through the air.

“Our response!?”

“Th-there's too many of them! They originally doubled our numbers, and with the reinforcements it's now several times that! If they all collided with us, our army will not be able to withstand it!”

Because there was a forest on the left side, they weren't able to confirm the approaching demons themselves, but the demons from the mountain were now visible.

“You're kidding, that many...?”

There was enough demons flying in to cover the mountainside with a dark red wriggling mass. There was too many of them, the soldiers currently on the right flank would never be able to defeat them. From the left flank, the messenger also reported a vast number of them coming from the forest... But it was a mystery. Right before they were about to attack, it was impossible for them to call in reinforcements. It was impossible unless they already had an ambush prepared laying dormant. But with such a large army, they should have been able to overthrow the fortress by brute force. There was no meaning in laying out the ambush to begin with.

But even so they lured in the Alliance army perfectly, which meant that they were expecting reinforcements to come, but even that didn't make any sense. There was no meaning in doing this much just to beat down some reinforcements. Gaius then yelled out.

“Tch! The demons didn't just have the detached forces attacking the boundary fortresses and the main force!?”

—Hearing Gaius spit those words out, Hatsumi suddenly got a hint.

“I see, a detached force...”

Hatsumi's voice was drowned out by the screams in their surrounding. She could hear Weitzer's orders coming from right next to her.

“All forces maintain the formation. If our ranks break now the demons will take advantage of it! Hurry!”

Maintain the formation. In other words they were planning to hold and fight. However even if they maintained the formation and fought defensively, it was obvious that there was nothing they could do before this number of demons. This was the crossroads to make a decision. After discerning that they couldn't defeat the demons no matter how she

thought about it, Hatsumi yelled at the top of her lungs.

“Run away!”

“Eh?”

“Hero-dono!?”

Bewildered voices were raised in her surroundings. It showed the most on Weitzer and Gaius' faces. Hatsumi turned to the two of them and passed down her command.

“Everyone retreat! All units that just advanced, shift positions!”

“However Hero-dono, if we do that the line of defence for this fortress will crumble!”

“That may be so, but there are too many of them! If this continues, even if we fight we'll only be annihilated!”

“H-however, if we retreat so easily then the effect on morale would...”

Certainly, after continuous victories, the morale of the entire Alliance army had swelled. On top of that, if the forces led directly by the hero retreated so easily, then it was only naturally morale would plummet. However...

“I don't think it's okay to suffer casualties just to maintain morale.”

As Hatsumi bluntly stated this, Weitzer gave up on clinging onto the battle. He likely also knew that it would be foolish to continue fighting such a lopsided battle.

“... Understood. Then hurry up and form up the rear guard, we'll use the defensive capabilities of the fortress to...”

“No, have all the soldiers in the fortress withdraw as well.”

“The soldiers in the fortress will also retreat?”

“Oi, then what will we do about slowing them down?”

“If there's no rear guard we can't even run...”

It was just as Gaius said. It was indispensable that a unit was there to

slow down the pursuit so that the remaining force could run away. Because Hatsumi also understood this, she shook her head.

“Of course we will assemble a rear guard. However, that rear guard will only be composed of those with spare strength and ourselves. Without barricading ourselves in the fortress, move with the premise of abandoning it.”

“Abandoning you say...”

“There's no meaning in throwing away people's lives to defend that fortress right?”

Hearing her words, the two of them kept silent, but they were likely of the same opinion. It was true that this boundary fortress was an important base for keeping the demon invasion in check, but at this rate, even if they went to defend it, the present condition would inevitably lead to its capitulation. That's why it was vital to give it up and retreat.

“And so, about the rear guard, if the two of you dislike it I don't mind if you don't do it.”

Hatsumi presented them the choice that she was not coercing them into this. However, just as she expected, the two of them didn't say they disliked it. Both Weitzer and Gaius, though their faces were covered in sweat, gave reassuring nods that they would support the retreat of the soldiers. Even at that time, another screaming report came from behind.

“The right flank! They can't take it anymore! The left flank is also about to collapse!”

“That's fast...”

“We were lured in. Completely. We didn't even have time to draw our swords.”

They were completely caught in the flow. It all went exactly as the demons intended it to. The situation had become relentless to the point where there was nothing they could do to push back. At this rate, they couldn't even properly perform a retreating battle. Selphy, who was leading the mage units, then came running over.

“Prince Weitzer, what is the situation here?”

“We just decided our plan.”

“To hold our ground?”

“No… We decided to retreat.”

Weitzer and Selphy bit down on their lips bitterly. As their exchange ended, Hatsumi spoke up.

“Weitzer, Gaius, Selphy.”

“Ha.”

“What's up?”

“Hatsumi.”

“From here we'll disperse and fight. After buying some time, everyone scatter and run away. Each of you lead a unit and retreat. I will move independently on my own.”

“Independently… You…”

“Hatsumi! You cannot do that!”

Selphy denied in a strong tone. She was probably worried. However there was a reason Hatsumi had to do so.

“I have the divine protection from the hero summoning ritual. That's why I have more endurance than everyone else, I'll manage one way or the other.”

“Even so, no matter how you put it, for you to be alone!”

“If I imprudently take soldiers along, it would only weigh me down. Isn't that right?”

“Th-that's… Certainly true.”

Unlike Gaius who was at a complete loss for words, Weitzer put on a serious expression and shook his head.

“No, Hero-dono. I will accompany you.”

“You can't. If we do not split up, who will protect the soldiers?”

“I was ordered by his Majesty the King to help you. Also, I would like to help—”

“Weitzer.”

“Hero-dono...”

Calling her by that name, he gazed at her eyes. Complaining with a firmly determined look, he had no intent of yielding. Seeing this, Hatsumi played a cowardly hand.

“I will be fine on my on. That's why Weitzer will join the rear guard and retreat all the way to the main force. If I say it is an order from the hero, will you listen?”

“Hero-dono!? That's!?”

“Hatsumi...”

“Oioi, that's...”

He had no choice but to agree if it was a hero's order. They were words that Hatsumi never wanted to use. If she did, his choice would vanish just like that.

“... Ku... All is as you will.”

It was painful for him to agree. She felt like he was wasted on a woman who was only called a hero. After hanging his head for a moment, he firmly raised his head, and yelled as he faced the soldiers.

“From here our army will retreat! Abandon the fortress! Those who have strength remaining for a rear guard come with us. Everyone else hurry and retreat all the way to the main force in the wastelands!”

Along with that command, the commanders of each unit embroiled in a free-for-all fight on the battlefield relayed the orders. Hatsumi then noticed, that an unpleasant cold sweat coiled around her and dripped down the back of her neck.

★

After Hatsumi and the others were scattered by the demons' offensive,

Weitzer made it all the way back to the main force, and without taking a moment to rest, immediately took command of the battlefield from the centre.

“Preserve the right flank! Send a messenger to Valvauro's army and have a portion of the left flank come around to the centre! While the main force endures their pressure, have the right flank push them back!”

By the time he returned to the main force, the demons set up in the centre were already advancing and crashing into the four armies of the Alliance which composed the main force deployed at the plains before the wastelands. The Alliance army increased the number of soldiers there to begin with, so it looked like they outnumbered the demon force at first, but because the invading demon army as a whole was much larger in scale than they imagined, the front line had fallen into a stalemate.

“Ku… Even after getting back to the main force, in this situation we're still in a difficult position…”

After giving out orders from a location where he could see the trend of the battle, Weitzer bitterly grumbled to himself. As he did, a staff officer from the army respectfully to gave a report.

“Your Highness! The current situation is about fifty-fifty, but the situation is not favourable enough for us to overturn it! We should pull back the line here and rally.”

“Don't be foolish! Are you saying we should fall to the rear of the fortress!? If we do that then Hero-dono will have no place to return to! Until she returns, we will hold this position!”

“H-however… Then the army will…”

Even if they weren't wiped out, they would suffer considerable casualties. However, the staff officer was unable to say so.

“If we lose Hero-dono, then that in itself will be a major blow to the Alliance army. We would lose the power bestowed to us by the Goddess Alshuna you hear?”

The staff officer was unable to object to Weitzer's words. On the

battlefield, the hero's power was tremendous. Hatsumi's own abilities was one thing, but the effect of the divine protection from the hero summoning ritual was also immense. In all the battles up until now, she had never once lost her stamina, willpower or concentration. This was common knowledge among the army, the staff officer was unable to easily weigh out on a scale whether the hero or the army was more important.

“I understand what you are saying. In a normal battle that would be the proper judgment. However, your statement as it is cannot stand in this situation. For the reputation of our army and my own mental health. Record keeper! Do not write down the statement the staff officer just said!”

The record keepers nodded to Weitzer's command. A fluttering green robe then came into his sight.

“Prince Weitzer.”

“Selphy? What is it?”

When Weitzer linked up with the main force, she was also able to return. Currently she was organizing the mage units on the right flank into three regiments and fighting a hard battle, but if she separated from them and came all this way, something must have happened.

“Just now, Gaius-shi has returned from the west along with his unit.”

“So he's returned! And, is Hero-dono with him!?”

“That's... The survivors of the unit he brought along were unaware of Hero-dono's location...”

“Ku...!”

His faint hope didn't reach the heavens as he bit his lip. A man's voice then cut into their conversation from afar.

“Oi Weitzer! What the hell is the situation!?”

“Gaius-shi! I told you to withdraw!”

Gaius did not withdraw to the back and pursued Selphy. The staff officer and her own scream piled atop each other. However, on the other

hand, Gaius and Weitzer didn't pay them any mind and came together to confirm the situation.

“Oi!”

“It's not good.”

“What about pushing back those shithead demons!?”

“We're taking actions to somehow manage.”

Knowing that the main force was facing a difficult battle and that Hatsumi's rescue was getting further and further away, Gaius kick the ground like he was trying to blow away his irritation at the situation.

“Even though she insisted on going into a different forest from us...”

“Don't say it. If Hero-dono says so then we can only obey.”

Gaius dropped his shoulders and sat on the ground as Weitzer tried to persuade him that it was inevitable. They knew of Hatsumi's abilities, and knew that she had power beyond what they knew of. If she told them she was going to be alright, they could only believe her. They had no choice but to follow a hero's orders.

“Gaius-shi, fall back! Even if your wounds are healed, your stamina has its limits! Now quickly, go with the other survivors.”

“I get it, but I can't do that in this kind of situation. I'll wait here for Hatsumi's return.”

“But...”

In complete opposition to Selphy who was still trying to persuade him, Weitzer spoke with the authority he was bestowed with.

“Do as you will. But if you get in the way...”

“Ou! You can just leave me the hell behind. Don't mistake what's important.”

They had come to a mutual understanding. Seeing the two of them like that, Selphy calmed down and let out a tired sigh. As she did, a soldier then came running and panting from the rear.

“A message! Just now, guild members from the Twilight Pavilion have arrived to provide assistance!”

The runner came to inform them of reinforcements. However, to Weitzer and the others, such information was still not particularly good news.

“Even if they arrive now...”

It wasn't like the situation would change for the better. As long as it was nothing more than support from the guild, they would be unable to move anything on the scale of an army unit. In that case, against these numbers, it would be overwhelmingly insufficient.

“However, along with several high ranking member, Camellia Sasanqua the Empress of the Sword Dance is with them. I expect they'll be able to preserve the front to a certain extent.”'

“Certainly, if that is the case...”

“However, the demon army's invasion has vigour. I don't think it will—”

Go so smoothly. Selphy had a faint glimmer of hope in her voice, but Gaius was still sullen. However, just as he was saying that, this time a messenger came from the front. Naturally, that one came from the front line where the fighting was taking place, so if there was an urgent message coming, it could only be...

“The demon forces from the front are overtaking us! They'll be here soon!”

“What did you say!?”

“What the hell are you doing!? Fuck!”

Weitzer and Gaius let out a yell at the sudden crisis. The staff officer next to them went completely pale. A hole had formed in the wall of soldiers. And then they started pouring through as they eliminated the soldiers... In other words, they were aiming for the commander. Weitzer drew his sword and Gaius stood to his feet.

“We're fighting back! Staff officers fall back and call for support! Every

one here take up formation immediately! We'll meet the demons and attack them back!”

At Weitzer's command, the soldiers present quickly took their positions. The spearmen advanced to the front and put together a wall of spears and the swordsmen hardened both flanks. Behind them, together with Weitzer, the mages were standing in a row. They were prepared to fire their magic at their own discretion at the demons. As Gaius and Selphy also prepared for battle, the demons came into sight.

“That's a lot...”

There was easily over a hundred demons who broke through the front line. Along with enormous monsters, the demons were all in a single lump coming in at a terrifying speed.

“First we'll fire magic at them. After that I'll leave the rest to you.”

Both Weitzer and Gaius silently nodded back to Selphy. Every single person present had a poor complexion and had broken into a cold sweat. They managed to take formation in time, but there weren't many mages, there was only enough to blow away just the front row of monsters at most. It was up to the spearmen and swordsmen to buy time until the next chant could finish, but they were outnumbered by the demons. It was unknown whether they would be able to hold out until reinforcements arrived.

As they held their breath, they waited for the demons' line to come into striking range of magic. Before long, the mages all began chanting in unison, and immediately fired their magic. Fireballs rushed towards the demons like cannon fire. The spears and swords that were pointed forward shined brilliantly from the orange light. And from the fire, the demons began appearing one after the other.

The demons' vigour was not reduced in the slightest. Even more so than they expected, they were unable to deal any significant damage to the charging force. Everyone swallowed their saliva and looked at the scene pessimistically. And just at that time, from behind the formation, a solemn and quiet woman's voice was carried by the wind and resounded

around them.

"—Just as the wind from far and wide conveys. Bring the flame that shines as it sways. Hear my voice, thou art the shimmer dyed in white. Hear my voice, thou art the shimmer which shakes off all calamity. And so, I shall sing and recite them once. Eva, Zurdick, Rozeia, Deivikusd..."

What was resounding in the air, was a chant for a spell. A white magic circle formed in mid-air and began revolving. The magic circle disturbed all of the air in the surrounding, and a gale was born. And then, the white magic circle shed the light of a white incandescence.

"—Mow them down! Truth Flare!" (White Flame Toss)

A white flame coiled around them in a flash, and with a sound like a high pitched shriek, it swept into the demons from the side and mowed them down. Just a little after the white light came sweeping in from the side, the dust that went soaring due to the turbulent winds blew into the demons and detonated everything in a white explosion. After a soundless moment, a thunderous roar shook the earth. As the white light vanished, the demons had also all vanished. Looking at the remnants of the white flame that were still vigorously flickering in front of the spearmen, Weitzer came to his senses and raised a loud voice.

"What is this!?"

"It's probably magic, but this destructive power is..."

He couldn't tell what was going on at all. There was no mage in the Alliance who could use magic which such devastating power. While Weitzer looked dumbfounded, Selphy reported this to him. As Gaius looked at the dazzling white flame in astonishment, he let out a mutter.

"Either way, with that destructive power... Almost all of them were completely blown away."

"It is not just that. The embers from the aftermath are taking down the remaining demons in the area. There's no longer any need for us to do anything."

"That really put a waste to our heroic resolve though..."

“It's something to be thankful for. But even so, this kind of magic, just who could...”

As Weitzer knit his brows, the wall of soldiers to the back split open, and a single shadow appeared with glossy silver hair and a robe of the same colour as the flame which burned the demons. Of course, this was the mage who just fired off the magic which defeated the demons—Felmenia.

“—It seems we made it in time.”

“Just now that was you—Wait, aren't you the little lady that I met at the restaurant!?”

Gaius opened his eyes wide as he spotted a familiar figure. Seeing him, Felmenia took a docile attitude and gave her greetings at their reunion.

“Forvan-dono, it has been a long time.”

“Y-yeah...”

“Do you know her? Just who is she?”

“No, when I was coming back last time I met her at a restaurant but... That really was amazing magic huh. A white flame...”

After seeing Felmenia's magic and hearing Gaius' words, Selphy seemed to have figured it out. She showed a surprised expression as she spoke.

“—Could you be the mage from Astel, the White Flame Felmenia Stingray-dono?”

“Eh!? U-umm...”

Having her identity figured out in an instant, Felmenia began to panic. Though she should have known this would have happened if she used the white flame.

“Oioi, the little lady was the White Flame...?”

“But why is Astel's Court Mage-dono here?”

Weitzer was perplexed since he knew her identity as one of the Court Mages of the Astel Kingdom. Suimei then appeared from behind her.

“Well, a lot happened.”

“You're!?”

“Yo.”

Seeing Weitzer completely surprised, Suimei lightly raised his hand. It was a greeting meant for Gaius an the others as well, but looking at Suimei make such a relaxed greeting, Gauis made an expression like he strangely came to a complete understanding.

“... If the little lady is here then it would be obvious you were too.”

“Well yeah. Besides, it's not just us you know?”

As he said this, Suimei turned his head to where Rumeya was smoking her pipe.

“Larsheem's General of the Fist-dono. It was been a while right?”

“Ugeh!? Sasanqua of the Seven Swords!”

“Ah? What's with the 'Ugeh'? Do you want me to beat you to a pulp again?”

“Give me a break... I mean, please.”

Gaius' usual reliable expression crumbled into a weak one before Rumeya. Something must have happened before. Though they could guess from what she had just said. On the other hand, Selphy was making a curious expression as she spoke to Rumeya.

“So you are the reinforcements from the guild?”

“Yeah, that's right. By the way...”

As Rumeya began looking around, Lefille and Liliana suddenly came out.

“It looks like they're being pushed back quite a bit.”

“It is not, a good atmosphere.”

“The little lady with the sword and the tiny one are also here huh... Yeah, the number of demons far exceeded what we were expecting.”

The two of them were quite experience with battle and seemed to be able to read the situation of the army. Rather than not good, it was just bad. They weren't quite on their heels, but just maintaining the front was quite difficult. Hearing this, Rumeya let out a sigh with a frown.

“So, it led to this messed up situation huh—Aah, after this the lot from the guild will be supporting the other places. You don't mind right, your Highness Weitzer?”

“Yes. I thank you for your assistance, Sasanqua-dono.”

During this, Suimei suddenly looked at his surrounding dubiously. He realized that somebody who was supposed to be there, wasn't.

“Hey, is Hatsumi not here?”

“Now that you mention it, she doesn't appear to be.”

Agreeing with him, Felmenia also looked around, but they weren't able to spot her figure. Suimei noticed that her companions and the Alliance soldiers were making a bitter expression, and he once more asked them.

“Hey, where is Hatsumi?”

“... What will you do if you hear about it?”

Weitzer returned his question in a somehow irritated tone. Hearing this, Suimei grimaced and returned it right back at him.

“The hell? Can't I just ask?”

Suimei glared at him sharply as he asked, but Weitzer only glared back strangely and stayed silent. Seeing this exchange between them, the soldiers from Miazen were filled with anger. They were unable to stay silent at such arrogance before the prince of their country. Representing them, a staff office came forward and flared up at Suimei.

“Oi, you bastard! How dare you speak like that to his...”

“Shut up. Outsiders should keep their mouths shut.”

There was no time to dispute. After Suimei fired back in no time at all, he forcefully shut the staff officer's mouth. No longer able to open his

mouth by his own will, the staff officer was frozen in surprise for a moment, and then struggled to open his mouth with his hands.

“Does someone else want to fucking complain? Come on out.”

As Suimei scowled at them, Miazen's soldiers faltered. Though a little late, Gaius gestured to them and warned them to step back. In a complete change from the friendly attitude he was showing before, Suimei's expression was blurred by irritation. Selphy then spoke up.

“Hatsumi is not here.”

“She's not?”

“Yes…”

Selphy nodded back in a depressed tone. And then, she told Suimei and the others about what happened at the boundary fortress.

“… So, you guys were ambushed at the fortress you went to relieve.”

“And then we were scattered, we were the only ones to link back up…”

“Oioi, so it ended up like that huh…”

Hearing Weitzer groan as he told him this, Suimei pinched his brow. The situation was moving in a direction he did not expect at all, and it was the worst imaginable.

“A rescue… If it was something you could do you would already be doing it huh.”

Without waiting for anyone to reply, Suimei convinced himself and remained silent for a moment. And then, as if he settled on a general plan for his actions from here on out, he turned to Selphy with a firm expression.

“So? Which way?”

“Which, way?”

“Which direction is that boundary fortress in?”

“Why are you asking something like that, bastard?”

“I'm going to save her. Isn't it obvious? If I know the general area it'll be easier to search.”

As Suimei said this, Weitzer flared up while still gripped by surprise.

“You... If you do that it will mean plunging into the demon army you know!?”

“I can tell that much without you telling me.”

“You can tell!? Don't be foolish! Just what are you thinking plunging into the middle of the demons despite knowing that!?”

Certainly, in a normal situation it would be a strange declaration. But they were only talking about plunging into the demons. Suimei could somewhat understand his anger, but he also felt that Weitzer was also somehow flustered.

“Hey you, just what's got you so angry?”

“I'm not particularly angry!”

“Well calm down a bit. Either way, if I don't go to save Hatsumi right away it'll be bad right? It's not the time to debate whether or not I can do it.”

After saying something completely reasonable, Weitzer was at a loss for words. And then, as if swallowing down his anger, he cast his eyes down as if vexed. Perhaps he understood that he had lost his composure.

“... Are you saying you can do it?”

“I have to. It's my role.”

Hearing Suimei say this, Selphy spoke up in a fluster.

“H-however, even if you head towards the fortress, you don't know whether you can catch up to Hatsumi or where she went right?”

“I'll just have to try my best and search. Nothing will start unless you do something.”

“But you know lad, the place you're trying to go to is filled with demons right?”

“That's why you'll attract a whole lot of them, old man. If you do, I can get by skillfully.”

Suimei shook off all of their anxieties like they were nothing. All three of them sank into silence.

“Then Suimei-dono, I will go with...”

Just as Felmenia was requesting to accompany him, Lefille stopped her.

“No. Felmenia-jou, we will stay behind.”

“Eh? Why!?”

“This is a losing battle. The Alliance soldiers are at a disadvantage against those numbers on an open plain. If we do not suppress their advance, let alone recovering, holding on will be impossible. It's up to us to attract the demons.”

Lefille gazed over the sand being kicked up from the battlefield as she restrained Felmenia. Looking at her, Rumeya held her chin as she laughed lightly.

“You sure said it Lefi. Do you see those numbers?”

“When those things invaded Noshias, the number of demons I cut down myself was about that number.”

Lefille fearlessly boasted. They were reliable words for a warrior about to head into battle. Weitzer and the others as well as the Alliance soldiers didn't pay her too much attention. However there were a few people present who thought her words were only bravado. Liliana then spoke up in a somewhat clumsy tone.

“Lefille. That's, a lie, right?”

“Yeah, of course it's a lie.”

Though she said that, her tone certainly didn't seem serious. When Noshias was invaded by demons, Suimei heard there was a preposterous number of them. If that was true, and taking into account her true abilities...

“Umm, Suimei-dono...”

“It doesn't necessarily sound like a lie at all...”

“Yes...”

Suimei had a little secret talk with Felmenia. He didn't think it was actually true, but it was definite that she defeated quite a number of them. Perhaps because of what they were talking about, even if she charged into all the demons they could see in front of them, they felt like it was possible she would just come back with a composed expression. Hearing Lefille boast like that, Rumeya burst into laughter.

“You said it. You're in quite the good mood.”

“I'm just happy I'll be able to vent my anger after a long while. I haven't fought any demons since I was in Astel.”

Her voice as she said this was filled with an extraordinary wrath. And then, Lefille turned towards Suimei.

“So, that's how it is, Suimei-kun.”

“Yeah, I'll leave it to you. Menia and Rumeya too.”

“Yes, please leave it to us.”

“Aiyo. Get it done lickety-split and save her you hear?”

After the two of them replied, Liliana who had been following along, mumbled apologetically.

“... There's nothing, that I can do...”

“This time you played a huge role in other places. Today just take a look at Menia's magic and study.”

Hearing Suimei reassure her, Liliana nodded back. The talks between Suimei's group came to and end quickly. However, the others were all still anxious. That was natural, the place that Suimei was headed towards was—

“The fortress is to the northeast of here. However, how will you pass through that thick battle formation?”

“How? I don't have any intention of struggling my way through that.”

As Suimei said that, he pointed his chin towards the direction that Selphy pointed out. They could faintly see the demon army gathering there in the distance. The Alliance army was not there, and despite it being inadequately defended, they were not attacking, as if the battle formation was there to defend. It was somewhat inconceivable, but having already made his plan, it was not anything Suimei would feel uneasy about.

“Ridiculous. Even if you try and go around, it's not like you'll escape the demons' reach.”

“Well that's obvious from looking at their numbers.”

Hearing that he was off the mark, Weitzer's bewilderment only strengthened. Suimei then stepped forward. Gaius' voice chased him hot on his heels.

“Oi, are you listening to us lad!?”

“I can hear you. That's why, all of you stand back a bit.”

“Ah?”

Gaius only grew more puzzled from Suimei's response. Without replying to him any further, Suimei continued walking forwards. As if flipping open a coat, he flung his arm out, and his green clothing changed to a black suit in an instant.

On one hand was the two men and the Alliance army unable to get rid of their bewilderment, on the other, Felmenia, Lefille, Liliana and Rumeya obediently stepped back as they were told. And then...

“— Abreq ad Habra...” (Oh death. Thou shall perish before my lightning...)

Suimei's voice quietly resounded in the skies above the battlefield. And before long, the inhuman shriek of a woman swept down.

★

“—There aren't any flowers huh~”

Focused on the demons flying through the air and running across the ground, Rumeya stabbed her swords into the earth. She only had two hands, but the number of swords exceeded that and matched the number of her golden tails, numbering seven in total. Like a blooming flower, she stood in the middle of her swords casually. She stretched out her arms lightly to the point where she was just barely touching the swords around her with the tip of her fingers, and stood there quietly as she waited.

There were no allies around her. If they got even a little bit close to her, they would get caught in her sword techniques. It was a tacit understanding of those who accompanied her on the battlefield that only their enemies should come close to her. Before long, the demons who were aiming for her came flying in like falling meteors.

“My goodness, even animals have properly working brains. Just why do these guys who know nothing of elegance come in to get killed right away?”

Lying in wait, Rumeya let out a tedious sigh. The first demon that crossed her broke into eight pieces as it flew past her. Before they knew it, her arms were crossed. It was like the afterimage of her having drawn and slashed with all seven swords. A crowd of demons then came in. There was ten, maybe twenty of them. However, altogether, they splashed into the surroundings like a flower made of blood, silver and gold.

—The Death Boundary of the Flower Arrangement. Everything before her was cut to pieces in the blink of an eye, and would fall in her surroundings like a blooming camellia sasanqua. This was where her second name came from.

Watching the blooming sasanqua like it was the beginning of winter from behind, Lefille gave her a compliment in admiration.

“As expected of Rumeya-dono. That was splendid sword handling.”

“That's enough flattery. I don't want to hear it.”

“It isn't just flattery.”

“What are you saying? Just as you know, when I do this I can't move

right? Well, that's why I lost to a human in the Seven Kings sword tournament.”

Rumeya spoke like she was at a loss, but even so Lefille shook her head.

“Even so, it doesn't change the fact that your sword technique is beautiful.” “Well that's obvious.”

This person lived with the aim of making the flower of swords bloom on the battlefield. Weitzer who was also looking over her from nearby spoke out respectfully.

“As long as Sasanqua-dono is here, it is like having the strength of a hundred soldiers.”

“You're also going to flatter me Prince? Give me a break.”

“No. It is a fact that because Sasanqua-dono is here, the battle line has been preserved.”

It was still at a minimum. But even so, it was Weitzer's opinion that the fact that the demons were no longer slipping through was thanks to the presence of Rumeya's power. However, that was nothing more than his own opinion.

“Not really~? Weren't most of them blown away just some time ago~?”

“Th-that's...”

Weitzer fumbled over his words. However, Rumeya couldn't tell what he was thinking, despite witnessing that power, he couldn't honestly admit it. Suimei, who had come along with Rumeya and the others, was no longer present. As he walked towards the thick lineup of demons sealing the path to the northeast, after he quietly muttered those words, he unleashed a devastating amount of mana, and fired his magic.

A grand ultramarine magic circle. An enormous bust which resembled a woman. Within the brilliant luminescence, everyone present was only able to catch fragments of it with their eyes, but a tempest of lightning poured down onto the wastelands. That lightning which spread out widely and gathered everything beneath its fingertips manifested power

far beyond the understanding of the people of this world. And then, the pale blue light cast by the lightning blasted away the vast majority of the demons on the right flank, and one person went running through the path created by the lightning.

“Thanks to that I'm able to take it easy here. That's also true for you right?”

“…”

Rumeya looked back at him, but Weitzer only frowned and averted his gaze. And then, she seemed to have sensed something.

“Oh dear, is it like that? I see, in that case you can't really honestly assess him… Well setting that aside. Just how long do you plan on sitting there? Larsheem's general?”

“I'm exhausted after taking care of the soldiers coming all the way here. I bet you don't care though. Since you're all here now it'll just work out one way or the other anyways.”

Gaius threw up both his hands while remaining seated. He was being slovenly. However, they were words he could say precisely because he could properly grasp their strength.

“… Anyways, as usual it's quite the dreadful technique. I can't see your hands at all, and I don't know whether it's because your tails are in the way or what, but I can't read your movements at all. As one would expect of the second place Sword Master-sama of the Seven Swords.”

Gaius then turned towards Weitzer.

“… So, what does the fifth place Sword Master-sama of the Seven Swords think?”

“Is that sarcasm?”

“No~”

Gaius replied frivolously to Weitzer's glare, who then replied with sarcasm himself.

“If you don't even have the energy to stand up then be silent. I'll at least

let you be my herald.”

“My glorious time has really passed huh. It's the end after having a brat tell me that.”

As the two were joking with each other, Rumeya turned to Lefille.

“So, next is your turn Lefi. It's been a while, bewitch me with those skills of yours.”

“After being shown your techniques just now, my sword will only seem boorish.”

Despite saying such self-deprecating words, Lefille walked to the front. After Rumeya had cut them down relentlessly for a while, the next line was faltering and kept their distance. However, it did not change the fact that there was a large group of demons. Weitzer then questioned Rumeya.

“Sasanqua-dono, who is that girl?”

“Hm? Lefi? That child is the daughter of a swordsman I admired before.”

As she spoke nostalgically, Weitzer continued speaking dubiously.

“I understand that you trust in her skills, but is this not a situation where you can't just stay here and watch?”

“What are you saying Cloud of Death? The battlefield is the blooming stage for a swordsman right? Just what do you plan on doing by getting in the way of a flower in full bloom?—Eh, oioioioi! That child really had dreadful amount of pent up anger huh...”

As Rumeya was talking, an unbelievable thirst for blood swept through the atmosphere.

“This is...”

It was without a doubt, Lefille's murderous intent. Weitzer could feel a hallucination of his skin being cut to pieces and held his breath. Behind him, Gaius muttered in an astonished voice.

“... It's like we don't even have any ground to stand on anymore...”

Lefille then opened her mouth before the demons.

“Hear me demons!! You shall become a mist of blood and vanish before my sword forged by the spirits!!”

She was shouting in a thunderous voice. From her war cry accompanied by a whirlpool of red wind, her voice froze all the demons in place. And then, in an instant, she began rendering them into paste with her sword, it could only be described as a massacre. Before those opponents who could not run, fight or even move, it was a display of completely one-sided excessive violence. There was no time to even describe it. In a single instant, Lefille had blown away that mass of demons.

“Gala Walner.” (Mountain Breaker)

Her voice was quiet. However, the action following it was equivalent to an explosion. After wrapping her large sword in a red wind, she swung with all her might. The red wind became a shockwave and rushed towards the demons.

Naturally, the demons could not stop it. All they could do was be blown away, as if they were burned by a scorching heat, all of their bodies were completely reduced to dust. Lefille then charged into the hole created in the demons' formation and devoted herself to swinging her sword. Demons soared through the skies. Broken demons. Minced demons. They were just being struck that hard. Even a demon large enough to cover one's entire field of vision was categorized as an easy opponent to her. After piercing its stomach with single strike from her sword, she swept to the side. As a result, it was split in two extravagantly and tumbled over the other demons as it crushed them.

They were unable to see Lefille's expression within that red wind. However, without a doubt, as long as her blue eyes gave off that afterimage like a flash of lightning, her wrath coexisted with righteous indignation that the demons could never wash away.

“To think a sword master like that would still be in the north...”

After saying that, Weitzer was at a loss for words. Felmenia, Suimei and the swordswoman who came after Rumeya, compared to the general

worth a thousand soldiers, compared to the heroes that appeared in epics, they exhibited absolute strength which completely overshadowed all of those.

“As one would expect of an acquaintance of Camellia Sasanqua the Empress of the Sword Dance is it? It's a relief to see.”

“... No, that's dangerous.”

“What do you mean?”

Rumeya suddenly made a sour expression as she gnawed down on her teeth. Gaius and Weitzer then turned towards her with puzzled expressions.

“It may look compelling to you guys, but I can only see a sword of complete desperation in that.”

After hearing Rumeya groan, Gaius once more looked at Lefille's fight. However, he was unable to see what she was talking about.

“I don't see anything dangerous 'bout it? She's dodging their attack and hasn't been hit right?”

“Certainly that is true.”

“So what is it?”

“It doesn't really matter. Even if she cast aside defence, that kind of sword exists. But you know, after watching her fight like that without any pause at all, I just wanted to say that. She understands the limits of her stamina well, but she seems to have forgotten about the danger of concentrating on thin ice like that. Even if she isn't just a human, she's the child of one after all...”

Hearing this, Gaius finally realized it.

“I see. Now that you say it, I get it.”

Weitzer then turned towards Gaius.

“Do you understand? What does it mean?”

“You listening? At a glance that little lady looks like she's fighting perfectly safely. It's true that those demons aren't worth mentioning, but it doesn't change the fact that she's running wild without any concern for her own well being. Just look at the way she's fighting without paying attention to herself. There's no room in her consciousness for anything else, if she fights for too long the gaps will just get bigger. That's why in general, to avoid breaking one's concentration, it is necessary to fight with composure... But that little lady has none of it right now.

“My goodness, to think I didn't see through this earlier. Is this also because that boy was near Lefi...?”

Rumeya wasn't speaking to anyone in particular as she mumbled to herself with an anxious look in her eyes.

“Then…”

“I will go and support Lefi. The lot from the guild are guys with knowledge of tactics, you can command them as you like, your Highness.”

After saying this, Rumeya ran off towards Lefille. On the other hand, Felmenia and Liliana were in another place and were unaware of the talks that had occurred and were watching the demons coming in from another direction.

“It's about time me made a big move ourselves. Lily, please take care of the demons who get close.”

“Understood.”

After saying this to Liliana, Felmenia began to fire magic while avoiding the Alliance soldiers who were fighting. Unlike the right flank where Lefille and the others were where they completely overwhelmed the demons, the left flank where they were was losing ground to them. The far left side had collapsed. Thus, the aim was to pierce through the side, and take care of the demons flanking the soldiers who were pinned from the front. The magic she weaved was naturally the white flame. Just as she burned down the demons before, she wrapped them up in a brilliant flash carrying a white flame. The soldiers were surprised at the powerful support they were receiving from behind. With a backwards glanced, Felmenia faced Selphy's direction.

“It was Fittney-dono correct?”

“Y-yes.”

After looking at the white flame, Selphy eyes were wide open in surprise. It was a spell she had never seen before this day after all. She was still gripped by both surprise and admiration. Felmenia then gave her instructions.

“When you next use your magic, please add on the words I'm about to say to the end of your normal chant. Eva… No, Olgo, Luciula, Ragua, Secunto, Labielalu, Baybaron.”

“Olgo, Luciula…?”

Selphy made a puzzled expression like she didn't really understand. Liliana then questioned Felmenia.

“Felmenia, is it okay, to teach her?”

“There shouldn't be a problem. More importantly, it is essential to defeat the demons before us. In that case, it would be regrettable to leave Fittney-dono's power unused.”

In the current situation where the demons were pushing them back, even the power of a single mage could influence the life and death of the soldiers. In that case, it was obvious for a talented magician to play a role. Selphy then cut into their conversation timidly while still completely perplexed.

“Umm, just what were those words...”

“They're called savage names. It's an ornamental chant that increases the effect of magic. If you add it on to the end of a chant, it will drastically increase the destructive power of the magic.” “That kind of convenient chant exists!?”

“Yes. It is just as you saw with my magic just now.”

Selphy then looked at Felmenia's face and the demons who were still being burned by the white flame. Liliana then lightly tugged on Selphy's robe.

“It's, Olgo, Luciula, Ragua, Secunto, Labielalu, Baybaron. You can't, teach other people.”

The reason they didn't tell her the savage names Suimei and Felmenia used was because they were difficult for the people of this world to pronounce correctly without practising. However, just thinking that with only those words she was able to increase the power of her magic, Selphy held her breath. From her tense expression, they could tell that she was still half doubtful of the fact, but she began to chant the magic for her snowstorm regardless.

“—Oh wind. Thou art the evil wind who receives the blessing of the frozen glacier. Blow violently, become a gust, trap my enemy within a

superb cage. No one at all is permitted to crawl out of the icy prison which swoops down upon them, the baptism of the snowstorm! Olgo, Luciula, Ragua, Secunto, Labielalu, Baybaron!—Ephemerally Razed!”

After her keyword, her magic activated without a problem. However, due to the amount of mana it carried and the unexpected amount of force which exceeded her expectations, for a short time she was unable to control it well and it began to run wild. However, as expected of one given a second name as a mage, she regained control of her magic quickly, and sent all of that power towards the demons. The scale of the snowstorm of snow and ice could not even be compared to when she did not use savage names. It wrapped around the demons and froze them completely.

“A-amazing...”

It did not reach the destructive power of Felmenia's magic, but even so, it held far more power than any single strike a typical mage could conjure. It was a splendid performance. Knowing that they were getting powerful support from behind, the soldiers at the front were able to fight with composure without needing to pay attention to the flank. Seeing the power of her magic clearly rise, Selphy stood there dumbfounded for a short while. Seeing her like this, Felmenia made a bitter smile.

“That was amazing, but...”

“If it's Suimei, without using savage names, he could fire this much out, in his spare time. After seeing that thing before, I believe you can tell.”

After they said this, for some reason, Selphy hung her head down.

“As expected, it's best to leave it to him for now huh...”

That depressed groan was likely born from her inability to accomplish the task. Felmenia then spoke up to her.

“Are you worried about Hero-dono?” “Yes. Though it is presumptuous, I think of Hatsumi like a little sister.”

“Is that so...”

Felmenia and Liliana were unaware of it, but just as Selphy said, she got

along well with Hatsumi. After being summoned to this world, she didn't know right from left or even about herself. Selphy took care of her a lot and was someone she was comfortable with keeping close by to her. And to Selphy, Hatsumi was also someone she could easily stay close to without prejudice.

“Besides, because of my failure, Hatsumi's memories...”

This was also one of the reasons that Hatsumi weighed heavily on her mind. When Hatsumi was summoned, she felt like the fact that she lost her memories was due to her ineptitude as the summoner. She always felt responsible for it. Felmenia was able to sympathize with this part of her.

“Fittney-dono. I understand your feelings. When I did the hero summoning ritual as well, Suimei-dono and Mizuki-dono... I ended up summoning people who were completely unrelated to the hero summoning.”

“Then, the accident that happened during Astel's summoning?”

“Yes.”

Felmenia replied as she cast her eyes down. However, she immediately raised her head, and showed her a determined gaze.

“I'm sure you are worried about Hero-dono, but if it is Suimei-dono, there will be no mishaps.”

“It's okay. If it's Suimei, he'll bring back the hero right away.”

Felmenia and Liliana called out to Selphy to try and cheer her up from her depression. She was able to feel a little more at ease from it. And then she once more put her strength into her staff, and resumed supporting the soldiers on the front line. Seeing her figure like that, Felmenia leaked out her voice without talking to anybody in particular.

“I'll do my best too.”

“Felmenia?”

“I am still quite inadequate. If I'm to be of use to Suimei-dono, I must be diligent.”

Saying this, Felmenia once more began chanting her spell.

# Chapter 4

## Hunt the Moon

After separating from her companions at the fortress, Hatsumi wasn't quite sure just where she had run to. Since she was within a forest, it was probable that she had entered territory that was under the demons' sphere of influence. She was unable to retreat to the south, so it was likely the case.

She had been running while cutting down the demons in front of her and the demons who were pursuing her hot on her heels. She was completely engrossed in running continuously while demons kept popping up everywhere. Before she knew it, her surroundings had become profoundly dark and her field of vision was considerably poor.

This evening, there should have been a crescent moon in the sky. But likely because of the tight clutter of black trees in the area, it was just that much darker. It was pretty much pitch black. The deep blue and dark grey leaves hung off the branches of the trees and the bark of the black wood trees also looked like the night sky was peeled off and pasted on top of them. Despite there being a fair amount of space between trees, all of this darkness was likely what made her feel like the dark forest was just that much denser.

Because she had looked at a map of the area beforehand, she was at least aware of the general area that she was in, but because the Alliance territory was in the completely opposite direction, it would be quite difficult to escape the demons' sphere of influence. Not to mention that even if she managed to get out of the forest, it still couldn't be done so easily. Now that she thought of it, she felt like the demons were only aiming after her. They persistently hounded her and moved in a way to make sure that she was unable to use the correct path of retreat—in other words.

“This, was their aim from the very beginning...”

Everything that happened was their scheme. They thought it was a plan to attract and disperse the troops, but in truth they were only aiming for the hero's life. It was plan that didn't care for anything else.

If the human army was caught in a dilemma, the hero would definitely depart for the front line. Because the hero could do the work of several units, it was efficient to put her in action and it was much simpler to do too. Using that to turn the tables, they aimed to take down only the hero who came to rescue the fortress.

First they kept the main Alliance army restrained by preparing a large force of similar scale directly to the front and put several other units to use. Those other units attacked the fortresses. The units attacking most fortresses were intentionally insufficient to actually throw them over, but the one they wanted the hero to come to was allocated a much larger force. Everything else in the scheme was exactly as it happened at the fortress. The exact moment they sallied out, the demons suddenly came pouring in from every direction.

The reason the demons suddenly swelled in number, was because the other demons to the northeast were divided in a way that they were all prepared to be annihilated. Those beings who thought nothing of the life of others easily used their own allies as sacrificial pawns. Either that or they only put monsters in place, and only the demons came in to attack. In that case, she could be convinced of the sudden outbreak of reinforcements.

Hatsumi knew from the beginning that there was some ulterior motive. That's why they prepared a sufficient amount of forces as they moved and were not negligent when gathering information. However, because they were unable to properly deduce what the enemy was aiming for, defeat was a certainty. They misunderstood the main aim of the enemy as the annihilation of the main force, so they easily ended up falling for this scheme.

Using an obvious plan as a cover, they aimed just for the hero. In other words, when they linked up with the main force, the best hand they could have played was to send a large number of reinforcements to the

boundary fortress, or to abandon their allies.

Sending a large number of reinforcements seemed like it was bound to fail against that number of demons, and there was no way she could simply abandon her allies. Making use of those facts, they were definite that the hero would break through the situation herself. Though it was far too late for her to notice now.

“I see…”

After discerning the truth behind it all, she suddenly lost strength in her body. Just like that, she crouched down at the base of a tree. And then, like she was embracing herself, she tucked her body into a small ball. Her eyes may have been clouded over after her victories up until now. Because she never lost to the demons, she could just keep fighting. She was aware that there were demons who could come up with strategies, and was careful of that fact.

No, even if she thought she was careful about it, in truth that was not the case. Being blind to the truth was just the same as being unable to recognize it. Her foresight was shallow. Just from having power, a battle was not something that could be so easily won.

“Come with me, huh…”

Suddenly, she remembered the words Yakagi Suimei said to her on that evening. If it was going to turn out like this, she was thinking if it would have been better to have just taken his hand honestly at that time. Without making a show of courage, if she took the responsibilities of the hero and the pangs of guilt from cutting herself off from the fighting and just cast them off into the winds, she probably wouldn't have ended up in this predicament brimming with anxiety.

—She didn't have a reason that she had to fight for no matter what.

Just as he had said, she was just summoned over. On top of that she ended up losing her memory. There was no need to force herself. While thinking of these things, Hatsumi shook her head vigorously. At this rate, she was only complaining. They were all only convenient excuses. Even though she swung her sword of her own will, even though she decided to

take independent action of her own will, just what would she accomplish by playing innocent now? She was simply suffering the consequences of her own actions.

"..."

However, even so, the pain in her heart only grew stronger. It was because she was all alone in this pitch darkness. No, that wasn't the only reason that her painful feelings of loneliness were swelling up. She was lonely ever since coming to this world. Even if she was showing a smile to her surroundings, she did not think that it was a smile which came from her heart. As long as she didn't know who she was, she was unable to calm down after all.

The reason she fought up until now, was perhaps solely for this reason. Though she was filled with anxiety, only when she took up a blade and swung it, was she able to distance herself from these lonely emotions. That's why up until now, she believed that she was unconsciously desiring to liberate herself from her loneliness by fighting.

However, right now, that anxiety had slightly weakened. Why was that? It was because there was someone who knew who she was, and this made her feel at ease. He said that he was family. That he was a cousin connected to her by blood, an important relative. It was embarrassing to talk about, but in this place where nobody was present, those words certainly rang in her heart.

She was being thought of. She was being waited for. Because that person was there, she was able to feel just a little, just a tiny bit less anxious. As she shut her eyes, she could see the contents of her dreams playing on the back of her eyelids. What came up was herself and the boy she was playing with. This was probably an experience from her childhood before she had lost her memory. If only just like in that dream where they were playing hide-and-seek, he were come and find her.

"—My goodness, so you were in this kind of place huh."

Yes, just like that, completely out of nowhere...

"Eh—?"

“Yo. You're quite tattered.”

Hatsumi turned towards the voice she heard and doubted her eyes. As she pointed her gaze towards the voice, she found Yakagi Suimei's figure among the darkness created by the forests branches and leaves. Due to the darkness she wasn't able to see clearly, but he really did just appear completely out of nowhere.

“Yakagi!? Really!? You're kidding...”

“Y-Yakagi you say...”

After saying that, he put on a frown. It could simply be because he wasn't used to being called like that. He was wearing different clothing from before. Last time he was wearing modest green clothing, but right now they were black—a black suit.

“Why, are you here...?”

“Isn't it obvious that's because I came to find you? Cause I heard you departed to fight the demons, then after meeting with the main force you went missing or something. I'll worry about it.”

“Ah, un...”

Hearing him say that, her face suddenly felt hot. To distract him from this fact, she changed the subject.

“Y-you were wearing a suit?”

“No, when I came to this world I had my student uniform on. But I can take this out anytime the occasion asks for it after all.”

“It's useful being a mage huh.”

“A magician. At the very least, it's distinct from the ones of this world.”

She didn't quite understand how they were different, but as he said this, Yakagi pulled an old fashioned lantern from the bag he was carrying.

“So, I'm going to switch on the light, okay?”

“Eh?”

“Hm?”

“W-wait! If you do that won't the demons find us!?”

“Maybe, but no matter how you put it, isn't it too dark for you?”

“But.”

“Darkness wears out your nerves. Just being unable to see properly is a bundle of anxiety. Someone who is unable to see would be used to it, but for anyone else the darkness will definitely weigh heavily on their spirit. If demons suddenly came and attacked, wouldn't it be fatal if your concentration was lowered?”

Yakagi did not wait at all for her to consent. She didn't know what kind of trick he used, but after poking the lantern with his finger, a light came on within the glass container. The light was a warm orange. The source of the light was very small, but it provided as must illumination as an open fire. Hatsumi became able to clearly see Yakagi's figure and the forest. After the area brightened, just as he said, she felt like she was able to calm down somewhat.

“Now then, show me where you're hurt.”

“Can you heal it?”

“Cause I'm a magician.”

As he said this in a reliable and refreshing tone, Hatsumi obediently showed him the cuts on her arms and legs. There were quite a few deep wounds, but thanks the divine protection from the hero summoning ritual, they had become less serious ones. As she did, Yakagi recited one or two words, and a green magic circle appeared in the palm of his hand, letting out a faint light. That light landed on the cuts on her arm. She could feel a faint warmth that felt gentle. Before long, when he separated his hand from her arm, the cut that was there vanished without a trace.

As he continued healing her other wounds, suddenly she started imitating his words as she hummed to herself. This was certainly the good luck charm that she heard in her dreams. The smile he showed her as he finished the treatment was the same reliable smile the young man in her dreams showed her. After the treatment ended, for some reason, the

tension that had been binding her heart was cleared away. Having noticed the subtleties of that change in her expression, Yakagi looked at her with a worried gaze.

“What's wrong? Are you alright? Do you want to take a rest before we move?”

“I'll walk. I can't stay like this forever.”

The kindness he was showing her was somehow embarrassing, and she abruptly faced away from him. As she did, he suddenly opened his mouth with a flabbergasted expression.

“What is it?”

“Aah no, after being healed you're instantly full of energy... is all. That part of you is exactly the same as before you lost your memories.”

“Mu... Well excuse me for being a tomboy.”

Hatsumi spoke with irritation in her voice. She somehow just couldn't stomach being seen like that by him. On the other hand, Yakagi spoke up as he laughed quite pleasantly.

“Well then, shall we go?”

“Do you know the way back?”

“I can tell which way is north at least, it'll work out somehow.”

“That's so haphazard...”

But right now, they couldn't do anything else. There was a possibility they would bump into demons, but if they remained where they were, the situation would only get worst, and since she was now brimming with power, it was better to move. The fact that the hero did not lose energy was said to be because of the divine protection from the Goddess. It was likely that because her anxieties were dispelled, the divine protection was once more working in full force. Like this, even if demons did appear, she could fight well enough.

Hoisting up his lantern, Yakagi began to walk. Even though he was walking through thickets, he cut down anything that was in the way

skillfully with magic and created a path while he walked. Hatsumi followed after him while focusing on the orange outline of his shadow drawn by the light from his lantern. He then suddenly began speaking to her.

“These are quite the sturdy trees huh?”

“They seem to be called black wood trees. They're trees that can be found in the north. I heard they're used for weapons and other stuff.”

“Now that you mention it, I heard it was an unusually sturdy wood before this.”

Yakagi let out his admiration. In spite of it being a critical situation, he didn't seem to be carrying an ounce of tension. Somewhat astonished at his behaviour, Hatsumi asked him about something that was on her mind.

“Hey, did you meet with Selphy and the others on the way here?”

“Yeah, I met them. I had my companions stay with them too. Right now all three of them are probably just resting. I didn't ask in detail, but it looked like the other soldiers were with them.”

“I see, thank goodness... They got away safely.”

One of Hastumi's fears just vanished and she let out a sigh of relief. It was a blessing that all of them were safe. But that could also have been entirely because of her previous conjecture. And just as she was thinking about it, Yakagi moved on to that exact topic.

“But to think only you would come all the way here.”

“It's probable that their aim was me alone. That's why I ended up here.”

“Mu...?”

After Yakagi knit his brows at her suggestive reply, Hastumi explained her thoughts briefly. About the strategy the demons employed, the results born of that plan, and just what the demons had to gain. After quietly listening to her to the end, he began speaking like he was fully convinced.

“... I get it. Because they were only aiming for you, the others were able

to get away easily.”

“That's probably it. It's just a conjecture from how the situation turned out, but if we think about it that way their strategy seems practical.”

After walking side by side for a while, deep within the darkness in front of them, Hatsumi could see a pale blue light illuminating the trees.

“It's bright over there...”

It was probably the moonlight. After Hatsumi blankly looked at it and spoke softly, Yakagi turned his lantern towards it.

“Shall we take a look?”

After nodding back at him, they cut through the thickets and came upon a strange area with enormous stones lined up. Even though the surroundings were filled with those sturdy black wood trees, for some reason, the trees were cut down only in this place making an open space where the moonlight poured down on them. The enormous stones were placed here and there, and due to the long years they were worn down and chipped away in places. However, the way they were lined up indicated that they were placed there by human hands.

It had a different appearance from the ruins left behind around the Alliance. Illuminated by the moonlight, it looked like this space was being lifted in the air. It somehow resembled the decline of a single civilization.

“What is this? A ruin?”

“Looks like it, but...”

As he muttered in response to Hatsumi's question, Yakagi got closer to the ruins. When he got closer, he came to a stop when he was able to see the centre of them clearly.

“What's wrong?”

“This is...”

He didn't answer her question. Rather than ignoring her, he seemed to be unable to hear her. Looking at his face, she could see that he was making a surprised face just like she thought he would be. After he

walked around while carefully looking at the surroundings, he muttered once more.

“To think it was all the way out here...”

Yakagi strangely came to some sort of understanding as he raised his voice with a hint of happiness. It was like he was talking to himself. As Hatsumi also drew closer and looked around as well, she also noticed something.

A magic circle was drawn in the centre of the neatly lined up enormous stones. In the centre was a reversed triangular shape. The words inscribed in it were words from this world. And despite being here for what was probably ages, the paint used to draw it looked like freshly drawn blood.

“Isn't this, the magic circle for summoning heroes?”

“Yeah. It seems there are some points that are a bit different from the one created in Astel, but there's no mistaking it.”

“But, why is it out here?”

“I told you before that I came here to look for a way back right? That's because I heard that the first time the hero summoning ritual was performed, it was somewhere in Alliance territory.”

“So this was that clue you were looking for?”

“Yeah, this was my goal. But really, to think I would find it out here... To find it at a time like this is really ironic.”

Yakagi let out a foolish laugh and shrugged his shoulders in good humour.

“Hey, does that mean that if we use this we can return to our world?”

“Hm? Aah, no. We can't return with this thing. This is a circle for calling things over. To return I need to get information by getting a good reading of this original circle and make a new teleportation use magic circle based on it.”

“How tedious.”

“Don't say it. It's different from sci-fi warp devices or wormholes or portals after all.”

Yakagi rebuked her while listing convenient sounding examples. All of the examples he casually brought up were things Hatsumi felt like she heard before and was able to understand. As expected, talking to someone from the same world as her was different.

“Well then, sorry, but you're going to have to wait a bit.”

“Eh? C-could it be that you're going to take a look now!?”

“I'll finish quickly. I'll just transcribe the magic circle and examine it in a jiffy.”

The young mage said this as he walked briskly towards it. She couldn't tell at all what he was thinking in spite of the fact that demons could be coming at any time. He then started to gather his mana. Unlike when he turned on the lantern, his mana was now being released in the open.

“Seriously? The demons will notice...”

“Maybe.”

“Maybe?”

Yakagi didn't pay her any mind and was just going 'Heeeh' or 'Hooou' in admiration as he started to use some kind of magic.

“Wait, that's not it right!? Why are you going out of your way to make them notice us!?”

“No, I don't really care after all.”

“Why can you say that so calmly!? Do you understand the situation we're in right now!? Really! Properly! Understand!?”

“What are you getting pissed about? Calm down, it's fine. It's not like I don't get it.”

“Ha... Haa?”

His reaction was so casual that her tone had weakened. And then, Yakagi turned towards Hatsumi with a troubled expression as he

scratched his head. And then in a complete change, he sighed like he was resigning himself and let out a tranquil and cold atmosphere like when he first appeared at the palace. Hatsumi unconsciously held her breath, and then Yakagi's eyes shined red.

“You said earlier that you were entrapped by the demons right? That the demons were only aiming for you as the hero, and that this was their plan this time around.”

“Th-that's what I believe... Why do you ask?”

“If they went out of their way to put up a plan like that, they would be aiming to take you down after you ended up on your own. In that case, it's impossible that they would only send small fry at you. To definitively bring a result, a demon general will absolutely appear.”

“... That's...”

She was also convinced of this fact. Hatsumi had previously defeated a demon general. That's why it was necessary for someone with similar combat abilities to take her down. Just like he said, it was extremely probable that a demon general would show up.

“But, what does that have to do with acting in a way that will get us noticed?”

“Well just listen. In other words, a demon general is currently in the middle of looking for you. There's an eighty to ninety percent chance it's the same guy who set this trap up in the first place... So there's two choices we can make from here. Run away, or stand and fight.”

Pausing for a moment there, Yakagi then continued.

“It may be fine for you not to defeat that demon general yet. It's also a choice to run away and gamble on your next meeting with them after you rally. But you know, I have a reason that I have to defeat that guy here and now.”

“Wh-why is that?”

“It's not out of the realm of possibilities that that guy will trap you in

another scheme next time. It's also not definitive that I'll be nearby like this time around. That's why, to me, that demon general needs to be taken down definitively right here.”

As if his foolish attitude earlier was a complete lie, his words were earnest and passionate. And she could certainly feel that his bright red shining eyes were telling her, 'For the sake of protecting you.'

“That's the reason we're not running away in a hurry. Do you think I'm being impudent?”

“U-uun... I got it.”

Expecting that their gazes were about to suddenly line up, Hatsumi dropped her gaze downwards and averted it. She couldn't look at him. If she looked directly at those eyes shining with determination, she thought her heart would be seized in an instant.

The reason she evaded him like that, was likely because she was in a state where she had amnesia. She didn't know what kind of feelings she held for this man before, or whether it was fine for her heart to be stolen by him either. She was likely thinking of such things unconsciously. After speaking of his resolve, Yakagi returned to his investigation. Hatsumi then looked at his back.

Just like when he infiltrated the palace, he came here for her sake. He wasn't looking for any compensation. He demanded nothing. As if it was completely natural for him do so. Therefore, she couldn't help but feel that she had to ask.

“... Why?”

“...?”

“Why do you go so far for me?”

“Didn't I tell you already? To me, you're family. That's why...”

“I get that. I also get that it's because we're cousins. But, is that really the only reason?”

“The only reason...?”

“I'm saying, are you and me…”

Just as she was about to ask, the leaves and branches in the forest suddenly began rustling. They could feel the atmosphere begin to prickle from being chased. From a distance they could hear the sound of footsteps and flapping wings, and they could sense an eerie presence.

“—So they showed up.”

It was exactly as he said. The demons had been completely lured in by the bait he spread by scattering around his mana. As the rustling of the forest suddenly came to a stop, the repulsive figure of demons appeared between the trees. Perhaps because of the ruins, there were no demons behind them, but they were still half surrounded.

“…”

Hatsumi took a stance silently. As she took a fleeting glimpse to the side, Yakagi was standing next to her with his hands in the pockets of his slacks. The demons were not showing any signs that they were about to attack. Normally, the moment they found a human, they would lunge in immediately, but right now they only bore their fangs and hostility towards the two of them. The way they were behaving was just like dogs waiting for permission to have their meal.

Before long, something wearing a black robe with golden embroidery on the fringes showed up from the centre of the demons. From it's figure, one would think it was a human for only an instant, but after looking at it properly, the body that was supposed to be inside the robe was nothing but a pitch black haze, so it was easy to see that it was not a human at all.

Unlike the other demons, it did not give off the impression that it was waiting, and the demons around it were acting like they were all obeying it. It was likely that this was the demon general. It's red eyes shined like fire in the darkness. Anticipating its arrival, Yakagi questioned it in a somewhat listless tone.

“Are you a demon general?”

Perhaps to respond to his question, a voice came out of the unsettling

black robe that was floating in the air.

“I am called Vuishta, one of the demons who was entrusted with one of the seven demon armies. It's a pleasure to meet you, Hero-dono who has received the blessings of the hateful Goddess.”

He had a haughty tone of voice. Deep inside, he was likely looking down on her and ridiculing her. The way he spoke was as if deep down, he believed this to be an absolute reality.

“The one next to you doesn't seem to have any of the characteristics of the people who came up in the reports, but are you one of the hero's companions?”

“Nope. I'm a relative.”

“...”

The demon general—Vuishta, must have found this to be a completely incomprehensible reply. Certainly, after hearing that he was a relative of someone who was summoned from another world, he didn't really understand at all. Suddenly, Vuishta began laughing.

“I received a report that we had lost sight of you and panicked a little, but you really saved us the trouble of searching for you. After all, as if to announce that you were here, you've been scattering around easy to understand mana.”

“Well that's good. So using my powers turned out to be fruitful. How about you give me a reward for it?”

“Yes, of course. I will compensate you with your blood. Hehehe...”

Vuishta started to let out an eerie laugh, and in complete contrast, Yakagi was not even moving his mouth in the slightest. Hatsumi then turned to him to criticize him.

“... Just why are you going along with him?”

“Don't be so tense. It's fine to be a little frivolous right? But I guess this kind of guy doesn't really fall for being stirred up huh.”

“... Mu.”

It seemed he was measuring the demon up just now. Rather than playing around, he was just being sly. Next, Hatsumi questioned Vuishta herself.

“Are you the one who thought of this scheme?”

“That's right. Hero of the Alliance, you are strong. That's why I thought to throw you down with a scheme. And so, it took this kind of shape.”

“And that's how it ended up like this.”

“Yes, you all managed to defeat Mauhario. In that case you would definitely become enthusiastic and I believed it would be easier to trap you within a scheme after that. It just means it was worthwhile stirring him up.”

“You, used your own allied general?”

After saying that, Hatsumi realized. Just by the fact that he set up this kind of plan, this demon did not have such morals regarding his allies. And just as expected, Vuishta began laughing.

“You're wrong. Mauhario simply exhausted his body for his allies' sake.”

“You scum…”

With clear disgust in her voice, Hatsumi pointed the tip of her sword towards the black robed demon. She was pointing her blood thirst at him, but he was not agitated at all. After she took a step forward, Yakagi's voice chased after her in a somewhat perplexed tone.

“Oi Hatsumi.”

“I'll take the front. Please take care of the other demons.”

“No, I'll take this guy.”

He was likely implying that he was the one who acted out to attract them, so he should take responsibility for taking them down. However, Hatsumi could not just stand there being protected. A swordsman's blood flowed through her veins. It was telling her to defeat the opponent before her. She couldn't just entrust that malice to someone else. After they quickly exchanged looks as she glanced back at him, he seemed to have

grasped her will, or perhaps he just gave up on convincing her. After letting out his breath without quite sighing, Yakagi obediently stepped back.

“Got it. I'll do something about the guys in the area first.”

As Yakagi said this, his body swelled with mana. Sensing this, Vuishta brought his eerie laughter to an end and raised his arm.

“Now, get them!”

Swinging down his arm and giving out his command, the demons sprung to action all at once. However, even with that wave of demons, Hatsumi didn't feel like she was in any particular danger. It was the same as always. These demons attacked all at once like a mob every single time. They were just like wild beasts being thrown a piece of meat. Though that was almost certainly exactly what they were.

Normally a human wouldn't have any techniques to deal with a large mob springing upon them. However, that was only the case for a normal human. For someone who possessed sufficient skill, they would hold knowledge and plans for overcoming a many against one situation.

In this situation, it was vital to cut them down quickly before they could completely surround her and gang up all at once. In a situation where one was surrounded by enemies, instead of defending, there was some swordsman in the past who always said it was better to go on the offensive and cut down the enemy. Hatsumi's memory wasn't definite of the fact and she wasn't confidant about their name, but there would be no problems in acting along those lines in reality.

Before the demons came into range, Hatsumi dashed forward like a gale towards the nearest demon. The demon had no time to be surprised at her footwork which brought the distance between them to zero in an instant. By the time its expression could reflect that, its head was already tumbling on the ground. And then, without losing any momentum, she moved on to the next demon. She leaped towards the demon who was trying to react towards the one next to it being done in. Seeing that the demon was taller than her, she thrust out her right arm out and stabbed

at its face.

Against a large number of enemies, a thrust was a very poor choice of move. It was a powerful technique, but after the thrust it was necessary to pull the sword back out of her opponent's body which would delay her next action.

However, her skill was to a point where it could be said that she didn't care about that kind of thing at all. After stabbing the demon in the face, without even pulling the tip of her blade out, she pushed in further using the strength in her legs. Disregarding the spray of blood, meat and grey matter, before the demon could fall over, she slashed out her sword through its head at her next enemy.

In a single breath, the next demon was rendered into five pieces as a spurt of blood soared in the air. It was only an instant before the blood cleared up, just a single moment. As if everything was moving in slow motion to her, she placed her large sword on her shoulder, and determined to decapitate all of demons in a single line, she cut the air with all her strength.

After that slash which happened in an instant that she perceived in slow motion, everything reverted to regular speed as every demon before her slash split in two and were blown away. And with that, all the demons who were charging her were taken care of. With that single slash, every one of them was brought down.

But, it was dull. The abilities of the demons could hardly be taken into consideration at all while her own powers were overflowing. It felt like a geyser that would never dry up, her power was swelling out endlessly.

While being vigilant of Vuishta's movements, she worried about Yakagi's side of things. Since he was also surrounded by demons and they were leaping at him just as they did to her. Yakagi's actions were lagging, he had still yet to move. He was completely composed just like that evening when he first came to the palace. There was somewhere around ten demons lunging at him. He had nowhere to run, it seemed to her that he didn't have enough time to deal with it. However—

The demons around Yakagi, along with the ground beneath them, all burst in an instant.

“... Amazing.”

While listening to the sound of an explosion, Hatsumi unconsciously muttered. Yakagi shaped his hand like a blade and swung it out in a horizontal line, the moment he raised those fingers to the sky, the demons were all swallowed in an explosion of flames. The man standing at the centre of the explosions had an opened stance as he moved in a relaxed manner, it was as if he was a fierce god who controlled the flames.

... As she thought, he was quite skilled. She had seen magic used in battle against the demons several times already, but those differed in quality from what this man used to the point where they couldn't even be compared. Yakagi then pointed a composed gaze towards Vuishta.

“At this level, no matter how many of them you let loose at us, you'll never defeat us you know?”

“However, if they drain your mana and stamina considerably, it's a different matter right?”

As Vuishta declared this, a massive number of demons began to appear from within the forest.

“Nothing but small fries swarming around like bugs...”

“Hehehe, please keep those small fries company for me. I must serve as the hero's opponent after all...”

While letting out another eerie laugh, Vuishta turned towards Hatsumi. It seemed he had the intent to come at her immediately. Paying close attention to his movements, she charged towards him on her own.

Flying type demons came at her from the right and left. She swung her large sword at them, and in a single breath, she struck down both of them and aimed for Vuishta. But just like Yakagi, Vuishta's movements were composed, she was getting an ominous feeling from his figure just floating there.

Going around and cutting in from the left, Hatsumi extended her large sword while her opponent extended his claws clad in an evil violet aura. She took a swing with her sword from the side, but he dodged it. As she thought, the demon general was seemingly different from the other small fries. Like a piece of paper blowing around in the wind from her sword, her blade did not even graze Vuishta's robe.

“Ku...”

Seeing that it wasn't going to end so simply, Hatsumi let out a slightly bitter groan and she leaped back. She then prepared to take on Vuishta's attack that would be coming at her, when suddenly, a purple flash came flying in from behind her.

“Nuu?”

As if escaping the light, Vuishta's black robe lightly flutter as he greatly opened the distance between them. What was fired out, was magic from Yakagi who was currently still facing down a large number of demons.

“Yakagi!”

“... Seems you're able to do something quite skillful.”

Instead of replying, he only looked towards Hatsumi. But his gaze soon returned to the demons who resumed their attack on him. Using fire and lightning, he continuously shot down the demons one after the other.

Yakagi was supporting her from the back. On top of facing off against the surrounding demons, he was making it so that there were no gaps in Hatsumi's attacks by keeping Vuishta in check.

*(He really is quite capable...)*

While fighting a constant stream of ten or more demons, it was not normal to be able to provide support to her own battle. It was to the point where she was suspicious of whether his eyes, ears and ability to perceive all of his senses with his brain were at least ten times the level of a normal person.

In the meantime, focusing on her own battle—

“SEAAAAAH!”

Hatsumi attacked Vuishta as she let out her fighting spirit. Naturally, she wasn't able to strike him so easily, but she continued to attack as she linked her sword techniques together in a chain. Before her incessant chain of attacks, no longer able to keep up with her movements, Vuishta's movements eventually dulled.

*(Right there!)*

Using that opening, Hatsumi slashed down from his right shoulder to his left waist in an instant. She didn't yell as she let out her killing blow, that fighting spirit was held in her sword as she silently struck. Just as she planned, her sword cut through Vuishta's body. However...

“Eh—? Kuu!?”

Hatsumi caught a violet aura coming at her with her eyes and backed away immediately. Right after she finished swinging her sword, in no time at all, Vuishta's evil claws came in and attacked her.

“You dodged that well. I intended to kill you with that just now.”

“What are you saying so hastily!?”

She was stunned for an instant by the unexpected event, but she immediately yelled back as she swung her sword. This time, Vuishta did not move in the slightest or make any attempts to evade it. As if telling her that he had no need to do so, her large sword cut through the darkness without any resistance at all.

“What's the matter? You won't be able to defeat me with that kind of attack you know?”

“That can't be!? My sword certainly...”

Connected. In spite of that, she couldn't feel such a response in her hands. In a fluster towards that mysterious situation, she became negligent of her defence. Yakagi then yelled at her from behind.

“Hatsumi! Move!”

“—Tsu!”

Reacting to his voice, Hatsumi abruptly retreated a large distance. In that instant, she could hear the satisfying sound of Yakagi snapping his finger, which quickly transformed into the sound of a large explosion. The air in front of Vuishta detonated. The shockwave directly impacted Vuishta's body, but as if nothing happened at all, his black robe was still lightly swaying in the air.

“—Aah?”

“What's the matter? That level of magic will not work on me you know?”

“...”

Yakagi did not respond to his provocations. Disregarding the demons who were lunging at him from behind, he simply glared at Vuishta in silence—

“Eh—?”

Yakagi's figure suddenly vanished like smoke and the demons lost their target. When Hatsumi noticed, he was already standing behind those bewildered demons. And then, a great number of magic circles took shape suspended in the night sky.

“Wai...!?”

Looking at the many magic circles that seemed to be filling the night sky to capacity, Hatsumi reflexively raised her voice in a fluster. She understood it was something being done by an ally, but she was not yet able to organize her thoughts on the matter.

“Adcentum transcription. Augoeides maximum trigger!” (Brilliant spell at maximum operations. Continuously deploy bombs from number one to a hundred, Carpet Bombing!)

A flash of light was fired from numerous magic circles that were filling the night sky. As the light impacted the ground, it let off an explosion along with a violent flash. The demons and Vuishta had nowhere to run to, and everything in an extensive range was blown away. It was entirely appropriate to call this a carpet bombing.

With this, there was no way they could survive. Hatsumi shuddered at the thought of taking on something like this—but setting that aside. Eventually, the afterimage of the light burned into her eyes vanished. And Vuishta was there.

“Hehehehehehe…”

“No way!?”

All of the winged demons had completely vanished, but Vuishta was the same as before. He was still quietly letting out an eerie laughter filled with excitement. Yakagi's attack just now didn't even leave a three centimetre gap anywhere to escape to in a fairly wide range. Even the sturdy black wood trees in the area were cruelly blown away and had fallen over in their surroundings. The storm of light was so intense that all the ground around them had been dug up… But despite that, Vuishta was in perfect health. Just as if nothing had happened at all, his robe was just swaying in midair. Yakagi turned his gaze over to Vuishta, and let out a troubled groan.

“Even high order magic doesn't work…? Wasn't the one just now high quality enough to annihilate all the other ones? No, is it just that magic didn't pierce his body…?”

Hatsumi could hear him speaking in a perplexed voice with a couple of technical terms mixed in. It seemed he was also unaware of the reason why their attacks weren't working on Vuishta. Despite his bewilderment, Yakagi once more opened his mouth.

“—Et Factus, est Invisibilis. Instar Venti Tempestas!” (My blade is invisible, however, it is sharp as steel and will drown my enemy in a pool of blood! Blow away into atoms!)

As Vuishta was about to take action, Yakagi fired off his next magic. Right as his chant came to an end, the black wood trees, the ground and the scattered stones were all abruptly torn to pieces and blown away. Hatsumi could not tell whether they were blades made of air or just invisible blades, but their surroundings were being cut to pieces as the tempest of invisible slashes continued with no signs of stopping. Vuishta

was being hidden by the kicked up dust and wood chips and was impossible to see. However, until everything in the area was reduced to rubble, the tornado like windstorm continued. This time for sure...

“With this...!”

“Nope, this is the opening performance.”

“Eh—?”

Just as Yakagi spoke, an invisible power pulled Hatsumi's body over to his side. After landing next to him, within the sandstorm of wood chips, she could see a thin fire similar to a red string cutting through it. Before long, a bright red monster was born within the sandstorm of wood chips and swelled up. And then, everything exploded. Neither the heat nor the shockwave from the bomb blast reached her. Yakagi was likely intercepting it. The two of them weren't injured in the least. However...

“C-could this be... a dust explosion!?”

In complete contrast to Hatsumi's surprised expression, Yakagi was only persistently pointing a cold gaze towards the exploding fire as if nothing was going on. Not only did he fire off magic, he used the effect created by it to incite this phenomenon as an attack. Thinking of how he created this kind of phenomenon by combining his magic into a consecutive attack sent chills down Hatsumi's spine. However, even so, Vuishta was in perfect health.

“So he can't be blown away... huh.”

As if accepting that reality, Yakagi's meek tone rang in the air. After that, he didn't speak anymore. Even though Vuishta was acting defenceless, he didn't chant and he didn't fire off any more magic.

“Yakagi!”

“...”

Yakagi did not reply. As if he gave up on defeating the enemy before him, he simply stood there with his head hung down.

★

The hero's expression was becoming more bitter and unpleasant as time passed. It was no wonder, no matter how much she cut Vuishta's body with her sword, all her sword ever touched was the air. The reason she was starting to become flustered to the point where it burned her body was likely because Vuishta was just that unusual.

The man had stopped using magic, the hero was just recklessly swinging her sword. Despite not knowing why her sword was not connecting, she still moved her feet and let loose her blade. They were fluent sword techniques. Her techniques were matured to the point where Mauhario's sword could be said to be only practice swings performed by a child. If he let his mind wander, it had a beauty that could steal one's gaze, even as a demon. However, right now it was all just reckless. Her sword that had no conviction that it would hit was simply too clouded. Naturally, even a cloudless, clear and masterful sword would not strike his body.

As the hero swung around her sword, she was muttering 'why,' 'how' quietly as she was puzzled at the outcome. She probably wasn't intending to do so. But her impatience was likely making her mouth move on its own.

Rotating her body, the hero's sword drew a spiral in the air, and her sword came flying in with plenty of power from the outside. Vuishta exposed his body openly to that slash. However, without any resistance at all, he shook off the blade. Mimicking the movements of someone being struck by a sword in front of the hero's eyes, she could only gaze in wonderment. She was being shown clearly that her sword techniques would not work after all, it was only natural.

“It is useless no matter how long you go at it. Your sword will never strike my body.”

“Ku—!”

Vuishta spoke as if remonstrating her as she let out a sort of groan. He was acting like the attacks from the hero didn't pose any threat at all to him after all, but even so, her movements were a pain to deal with. These were the techniques that defeated Mauhario. It was obvious that she was

able to do at least do that much, but because of that, dealing the decisive blow back to her would prove difficult.

However, even the hero had limits. As long as he kept dealing damage to her will to fight, she would weaken along with her depleted stamina. She had been fighting continuously since the fortress was attacked. She probably didn't have any chance to rest. Right now she was panicking and slowly coming to an understanding. At this rate, her power to fight would just die away.

Simply thinking of this outcome, Vuishta was naturally filled with laughter. He was leading around an opponent who was supposed to pose a threat to the Demon Lord by their nose. There wouldn't be anyone out there who would be able to contain their laughter. It was simply such a delightful and pleasant feeling.

“Hehe... It seems your breathing is starting to get rough huh. How about giving up already?”

“You talk too much.”

“Unfortunately, unlike you humans, I don't have a tongue to bite on after all.”

He began to corner the hero with his words. Humans were beings with weak hearts, no matter how strong their constitution was, if their emotional strength was chipped away at, every single one of them was the same. They would only be degraded to a delicate a living being.

Both Rajas and Lishbaum were well aware of this point as well. Aiming directly at their mental state, they could steal away their fighting spirit right at the root and make it all too easy. Vuishta was reminded of what they had said at each and every opportunity. Therefore...

“It's about time you gave up, could you just graciously hand me your head?”

“Who would do that!?”

“The man behind you seems to have already resigned you know? While you've been swinging around your sword, look, hasn't he just been

standing there stock still the whole time?”

“... Tsu!”

The moment he pointed out that man, the hero's complexion worsened to the extent where he could see it plainly. It was a vivid depiction of her being driven into a corner. If he attacked her using that man as a pretense, the hero would easily capitulate. He thought it was somewhat troublesome that she had a companion present, but it turned out to be quite fortunate.

It was no wonder, the hero stepped forward on her own and fought quite prominently, but the fact that she was relying on the man behind her was clear as day. She peeped at the man's complexion, and was using it to judge whether they were in a superior or inferior position. When she fought, she did so in a style that relied on his support. And then, after that man became completely silent, she started sweating a bit, and had become indecisive. Vuishta was confident of this fact.

While defeating Vuishta's brethren, that man provided precise support for the hero like it was natural. He was quite skilled, but in the end he was only human, after all that, he could only provide that level of entertainment. That man's magic was not able to inflict a single wound on Vuishta's body after all. It was impossible. No matter who it was, probably not even Lishbaum, who taught him this technique, or even the Demon Lord Nakshatra could inflict a single wound on him.

At last, the hero's shoulders dropped like she was abandoning hope. Perhaps she finally perceived that no matter what she did, she couldn't defeat him. She cast her gaze downwards, dropped her shoulders, and bit her lips bitterly. That figure which made the power that she was firing out earlier look like a lie was far too humorous.

“HehehehehyaHAHAHAHAHA!!”

Unable to contain his joy, Vuishta poured his evil power into his claws. It would only be a few more moments. In a few more moments, he would take the hero's head and gain the honour of being the first to kill a hero. There was no longer anybody who could get in his—

“—Aah, what the hell. So that's what it was.”

“... Wha?”

“... Eh?”

Two simultaneous voices were raised at that completely out of place statement that came out like someone realized something. When Vuishta noticed, the man who should have been standing stock still behind the hero was exhaling with a stunned expression. His stunned face was as if he was astonished that he was unable to realize such a simple truth up until now.

“I thought you were quite the difficult opponent to deal with, but now I totally get why attacks aren't working on you. Your real body isn't exposed here, so obviously there's no way an attack would really connect huh. Just why the hell didn't I realize something so simple earlier? I'm far too much of an idiot.”

And then, the complexion of the man in black clothes worsened as he acted greatly perplexed. That behaviour was just like he was suffering over matters in a completely different world from the fight between Vuishta and the hero that was happening right in front of him.

After he let out that out of place statement in a lax tone, Vuishta fired the evil power he had been gathering as a magic bullet towards him. However, the man noticed it and as he snapped his finger, the attack was sent flying away with an explosion.

Up until now he was simply staying silent like he had given up, but now he was showing a bored-looking expression as he looked as Vuishta just as he did in the beginning. Before he realized it, the hero also moved as if dodging Vuishta's attacks and leaped towards that man's side.

“Didn't you give up...”

“Ha? What the hell are you talking about? Why would I give up in this kind of situation?”

“Eh...? But you know, to survive, or something...”

“No, if we can't win it's fine if we just run away. You… After losing your memories, did you also lose some of your intelligence?”

“Who're you calling stupid!?”

The hero began yelling at the man. The man was also making a fool's face back at her, but his gaze was attentively pointed towards Vuishta. As Vuishta once more gathered his power for an attack, the man raised the hand that he had put down once more. His ability to intercept seemed perfect. It would be difficult for Vuishta to get an attack in. The hero then pointed her sword towards Vuishta as she spoke to the man once more.

“… Did you figure it out?”

“Yeah. Seriously, I thought the guys in this world couldn't do it, but it looks like there's an exception. There's a part of it that I'm a little curious about, but… Well, I'll just set that aside.”

The man was speaking like he would be able to deal with Vuishta's technique somehow or other. Could it really not be a bluff and he actually figured it out? No, that was absolutely impossible.

“… I don't know what you're talking about at all though.”

As Vuishta said this in a deep voice, the man made a bored expression and he started speaking in a taciturn fashion.

“Then should I just explain it simply? The reason attacks don't connect with you, is not because your physical existence has become ambiguous, but because the place you are occupying itself has become ambiguous, right?”

“…”

“It looks like your body becomes hazy, so at first I only thought you were turning into vapour or making your physical existence ambiguous… But my goodness, to think that you had that kind of body from the beginning, it's amazing. Well you're a demon after all, anything goes I guess.”

“… You're completely off the mark.”

“Quit lying this far into the game. I've fought a guy who used a similar technique to what you're doing right now. Well, from the beginning, that guy's technique was several levels better than yours though.”

The man was confident that his conjecture was correct. Vuishta was unable to deceive him.

“... Fine then. You are correct. I'll praise you for seeing through it. However, this technique cannot be broken by anyone.”

“That ain't the case at all. There are countless ways of dealing with it.”

The man's face as he said this, was smiling. It was as if he had just heard a completely incorrect assumption. That attitude which looked like he was sneering at Vuishta greatly fanned his anger.

“That kind of technique doesn't...”

“I'm saying it does, you hear? Pretending to be knowledgeable like that really is uncool you know?”

“—Ku! What are you... With that kind of bluff!?”

“Fuu, whether or not it's a bluff, shall we test it out?”

Vuishta gathered the power in his hand once more, and it swelled up into the shape of a gigantic hand. As he swung it with all his might, the ground was turned over along with a great shockwave and flew towards that man.

The man's defences would not make it in time. Even for the hero, by the time she reacted, it would already be too late. However, even that underhanded play seemed to have been anticipated. The instant his attack was crashing into them, the man's figure fizzled out, and when he noticed, both he and the hero were now in a different location.

... Just what did they do? Vuishta was unable to read when that man had used a technique. On the other hand, even the hero, who was his companion, was baffled by their instant movement and was looking around at her surroundings incessantly. And then, that man quietly shut his eyes, and began reciting words from memory like he was singing.

"He who reveals the truth. Open the gates of knowledge, the third eye held by the Fool, and return all ignorance to the fate of the Earth. The purified soul of Jnanachakusya. Transcribe the ninety six spokes revealed by them as two spheres and semi-circles, and draw them at my feet." (Spell is in English)

The man's chant resounded in the air. His mana was agitated, and matching up with that, it poured out into the atmosphere surrounding him. The fierce wind created by his mana was systematically wounding the earth, and eventually, the man opened his eyes.

“—Before the opened eye of Danguma, obliterate all falsehoods."

Anything and everything in the area was drowned in a dazzling light that looked like it was reflecting off of a surface of water. However, that light immediately settled down, and just like before, the darkness of the black wood forest illuminated by the crescent moon returned. Vuishta could not tell at all what effect the light just now had. However, nothing about his body had changed. The hero also seemed to have realized this, and looked at the man with a puzzled expression.

“Yakagi...? That magic just now?”

“It's done.”

The man conveyed to her that the magic was over. As Vuishta thought, it was only a bluff made in desperation.

“Fu, fu, fuHAHAHAHA! What's that!? Like I thought, wasn't it just a bluff!? Just as I thought you were doing something exaggerated, nothing happened at all! Everything is the same as before!”

“Nope, that's not true—Look, this right here is different right?”

As the man declared this, he tapped the ground with the sole of his shoe. On the ground, there were several circles drawn there with a pale glimmer which looked to be imitating several eyes.

“And what is that picture supposed to do?”

“Hm? It'll take a while to explain you know? The Buddhist symbols,

Danguma and Ajunya. I'd have to start explaining it from the western magic born from Indian Buddhism.”

“Saying such incomprehensible...”

He was brimming with composure, but it wasn't like there was any change. That picture at his feet was simply a left over magic circle from his bluff. There was nothing to be worried about.

“W-wait a sec! After you were brimming with confidence like that, nothing at all changed didn't it!? What are you doing!?”

“... Even you're going to say crap like that? It's out of your area of expertise so just be quiet.”

“But...”

“Look, then how about this?”

The moment the man spoke, a cold light suddenly rushed out. It was the man's magic. Despite knowing that it would not work, that it would only repeat the same event, he was worst than an idiot who only knew how to do one thing. It wouldn't hit. Absolutely—Or it shouldn't have.

“Guuu—!? Wh-what the...”

Betraying all his expectation, that light pierced through Vuishta's shoulder. The shock of being struck by magic and a sharp pain ran through his shoulder.

“You see? It hit didn't it?”

“You're kidding... So that magic earlier was for this?”

“B-bastard, just what did you...”

“Demon general Vuishta. You falsified the location that you were occupying. However, as long as this eye of Danguma is open in the physical world, you are unable to falsify where you are. Either the vision of your body that we see here or the one in another phase will vanish, and everything will simply be exposed right here.”

“Ridiculous! Just from something like that picture, my true body can't be struck by magic! My body is already always in the realm of the dead!”

“Ha? Always in the realm of the dead? Don't go spouting such nonsense you damn octopus. You're simply existing on the boundary line of different phases and making your existence ambiguous right? Despite using the damn technique yourself, you don't even know this? It's not like your body is in a faraway place.”

“An attack from here couldn't possibly...”

“Yeah, it can't. It really can't reach. However, your understanding of the technique is still unclear. Each and every time you attack or defend, your current condition is only matching up with being here or there. The supernatural skill of being able to attack from a distance across different phases is something only someone like Kudrack could do. In short, you're

only hiding your body on the other side just a little bit.”

“Wha...!?”

It was a shock. That man could see through portions of the technique that Vuishta knew nothing about.

“H-however, just because you've broken through this technique doesn't mean I've lost!”

“—But, the fact that you're now able to be cut by me, is quite serious isn't it?”

The hero who had been quiet up until now declared this as she let out her blood thirst. Just like when the fighting began, no, she was overflowing with even more spirit than before.

“Shut it you stupid little girl!”

As Vuishta gathered his evil power and fired a magic bullet, the man acted in concert and shot forward his light magic. The two magics crossed each other in the space between Vuishta and the hero. Using his evil aura, Vuishta deployed his defensive wall, and the man's magic was blocked and vanished.

On the other hand, the man also blocked his attack with a magic wall. A golden magic circle floating in the sky was deployed before him like a shield. Suddenly, the hero pointed her gaze towards that man.

“Yakagi.”

“What, was it none of my business?”

“Um, that's not it but...”

Seeming to have grasped her feelings after she had hesitated to speak, the man let out a sigh like he was resigning himself.

“Fine. The Phantom Sword of the Kurikara Dharani is a sword that cuts down the evil that haunts the world. Go ahead and thoroughly show that guy those sword techniques that have been polished for five hundred years.”

After his fearless statement, the hero resolutely nodded back. She then pointed her sword towards Vuishta, and came charging in with a sweeping strike.

“HAAAAAAAA!”

“Don't underestimate MEEEEE!”

The moment he thought he had caught her in his sight, she suddenly vanished, and a horizontal slash was coming from his side. She was fighting while remaining out of his field of vision. It was also clear that her movements were much sharper than before. However...

“All that means is that I just have to evade! I've already seen through your sword!”

Even if her sword was no longer clouded, even if it was now perfectly clear, there was no way her blade would strike him. Vuishta had seen through the hero's sword. Her technique was clear to him. Whenever she slashed out at him, the mithril blade was glittering quite clearly after all. Even if the hero herself vanished from his field of vision, the light cast by her blade as it drew a line in the air instructed him exactly where her strikes were coming from. Just like when the fighting started, all he had to do was dodge it. Nothing more.

The foolish hero seemed to have yet to realize this. She simply continued to honestly send her blade flying towards him. And just like before, all he had to do was toy around with her until her power faded.

“Ku, I can't hit him...”

“That's right! Even if I can't use my technique to make your sword strikes pass through me, you can't hit me! You will never be able to!”

“...”

Seeing the hero become silent, Vuishta's joy leaked out. Watching his enemy who had heated up with passion bite down on their lips due to their powerlessness brought him unbearable levels of joy.

“Fu, fuha, FUHAHAHAHAHA! After I defeat this stupid little girl of a

hero, next is you, you damn brat!”

After the hero would be that man in black clothes. There was no way he would let that man who understood his technique and held power to break through it to get away alive. Vuishta fully understood from the magic he shot out earlier that the man's magic was unable to pierce his defences. After being spoken to in such a cocky way, Vuishta had to pay him back greatly by killing him.

On the other hand, something was wrong with the hero, in complete contrast to how she was moving around non-stop while attacking him just now, she stood there quietly with her sword in position. Her sword was pointed right at his eyes and the hilt of her sword was just a little lower than her chest. He didn't know what she was planning. However, the light shining off her sword showed him what her next actions would be. It told him of the reality behind the sword. The moonlight which reflected off her sword. The moon, light...

“Ha—?”

It was gone. The glittering that was supposed to show him her next move that was supposed to be there, abruptly vanished. And just as he lost sight of her sword, he could hear the voice of a woman before him.

—The Phantom Sword of the Kurikara Dharani, the Hazy Cross.

Her spirit was sharper than the crisp and cold night. While the hero's awe-inspiring voice echoed in his eardrums, Vuishta's body was now laying face down in the ground. Within the darkness, Vuishta turned his neck. Before he knew it, his body was divided into four pieces. Before he could even raise his anguish, his doubt came pouring out of his mouth.

“H-how...”

How did she do this? Just what had happened—

“—On the night of a new moon, never compete against a swordsman. My goodness, as one would expect of father. I really need to take my hat off to him.”

The man in black clothes looked up at the sky as the night wind blew

against him. And he spoke up as if he was reading Vuishta's thoughts.

His voice vaguely held a somewhat nostalgic yet happy tone. However, he then looked at Vuishta with a smile. That smile was just like the one the Demon Lord Nakshatra would make, as if everything was only allowed to play out as he willed it on the palm of his hand.

“Ridiculous… The moon is thin, but it should certainly be shining down in the sky…”

“Is that so?”

Because of the way his voice was ridiculing him, Vuishta looked up at the sky. However, the shining crescent moon…

“It, isn't there…!?”

As if the crescent moon never existed, the night sky was pitch black, not even a single star was shining in the sky.

“—Hunt the moon. The moon is a mirror which reflects all truth in the solar system. Everything under the moonlight is made clear by its brilliance, and all beneath that light becomes honest. Therefore, I hunted it from the sky.”

Vuishta could not understand what that man was saying as his voice rang out like he was reciting a poem. However, that black clothed man shrugged his shoulders as if ridiculing Vuishta's bewilderment.

“Well I said it in quite an exaggerated way, but this isn't even the same solar system as the Earth, and I don't even know if there is the ninety degree spectrum here. I said it like that, but it's only for mere consolation. Consolation. However—”

—To you, it was quite the fatal consolation wasn't it.

Those shining red eyes that he looked down at Vuishta with were more ominous than even the Demon Lord Nakshatra's as he spoke in a cold voice which caused him to shudder. Though it was far too late, he realized that this man was a god of death.

“Bastard… You knew, that I had captured the light reflecting off her sword.”

“You said yourself that you saw through everything. And just like that, your eyes were always focused on Hatsumi's large sword. I thought that would be the case is all. Well, if the sword wasn't made from corroded silver and was made from the naturally brilliant orichalcos it would be a different story. Well, after all, it's your loss for being captivated by her killing intent like that.”

His words mercilessly rang through the nighttime forest. And then, the man once more tapped the ground with his black shoe. As he did, Vuishta realized something was out of place. If the moon was not shining down on them, then the surroundings would be completely dark, and he wouldn't be able to see. However, his surroundings were plainly visible because the picture of eyes at the man's feet was filled with a pale light.

“It just means that the dazzling light that reveals the truth can also hide a lie. That's all.”

“If... Only you, weren't here...”

“Well, I wonder about that? There could be other techniques that could capture your real body and Hatsumi could have done something about it at the eleventh hour. Also that sword skill just now, you got cut down because you didn't properly measure the distance right? You could have been chopped up before you even realized it.”

The man boasted that Vuishta's probability for victory was basically nonexistent in the first place.

“Well, if you were at least as strong as Rajas, you may have defeated us, but it seems you're really inadequate when it comes to the foundations.”

As the man spoke like he was remembering something, an impossible shudder passed through Vuishta's body.

“Bastard, it couldn't be...”

And then, the man made an expression like a brat playing a prank who got found out, and let out a light laugh.

... Then this man, was the one to smash down the demon general who was chosen to make the first move as the vanguard among all the

generals.

“Reiji was the one to defeat Rajas. Let's leave it at that, and have you kick the bucket right here.”

The man's voice as he tried to create a smokescreen of his actions, was the last thing the demon general Vuishta would ever hear.

# Epilogue

By Kuchiba Hatsumi's hand, Vuishta was severed from his right collar to his left thigh, and from his flank to his right armpit. The school of the Phantom Sword of the Kurikara Dharani, the Hazy Cross. If he remembered correctly, it was supposed to be a phantom blade where a strike to the collar went to the waist, and that strike transformed into one from the waist to the collar. And Vuishta ate both of those long swords. In other words, even if one could see the sword technique, there was a high probability of taking either of the slashes.

“With that, the moon hunt was completely unneeded meddling huh.”

“Seriously. But, there is no doubting the fact that I was able to take him down with absolute certainty thanks to your help.”

Hatsumi replied as she let out a long sigh. The moonlight which revealed her sword's movements would become like a heat haze, and become 'unseen.' She concluded that Vuishta would be unable to match that. It was an ingenious hand for her to play, and may have been the single strike she was sure would bring about certain death. It may have been a decision she made that would bring about an end to the fight, but—

“Despite having amnesia, why can you do that kind of thing?”

“I don't want to be told that by you. Even if you were alone, you could have defeated him while laughing scornfully at him right?”

“That's just overestimating me a bit too much. There was a vanguard present, so it just made it an easy victory is all. If I was on my own it wouldn't have gone like that.”

“I wonder. Rather, from the very beginning of the fight, frankly speaking you were quite shady.”

“It's just that sort of occupation.”

After being called shady, Suimei replied with the courtesy of a

gentleman showing his gratitude. Magicians were fundamentally suspicious people. They'll act foolish, shady, and mysterious. In that sense they were wretched. However, she didn't care about any of that, and looked at him suspiciously with half closed eyes.

“If you came up in a story of heroes, then you would be the type who showed up as an ally but was actually the secret boss.”

“The kind that you can't beat without just going around them huh? Certainly I fit the mould of the shady guy who shows up at first perfectly.”

Suimei shrugged his shoulders as he laughed, and Hatsumi made an exasperated face as she smiled.

“You sure are composed.”

“Well, thanks to you.”

Hatsumi seemed to have relaxed quite a bit. As they had that frank exchange, she spoke up like she suddenly remembered something.

“Now that I think about it, you said so earlier, but did you fight someone like that guy before?”

“Well... Yeah. It was a guy who used magic which was a lot like his technique to make the location of his real body ambiguous. Actually, it was far too similar though...”

Suimei's face grew hazy as his tone dropped. It was a memory of an unpleasant battle. Just by remembering it, he was reminded of his own worthless figure.

“Fuu. Could it be, that guy is also here?”

“Don't be stupid, that's impossible.”

“There's the exception of myself and Yakagi though. I don't think it's something you can outright deny without listening to me though?”

“Nope, that can't be. It really shouldn't.”

As he repeatedly denied her, Hatsumi was becoming a little angry, but she calmed down after seeing Suimei's expression. His face as he kept

saying it wasn't possible was grim, and also filled with anxiety. Suimei then looked up at the moon, and began speaking unprompted.

"—One of the Ten who Fell to Greed, Kudrack the Ghosthide. That is the name of the man who used that magic."

It was quite a while ago when he fought that magician. Even so, after Hydemary became his assistant, and after he was acquainted with Isrina—using modern magic, living for the ideals of the Society, it was the man who betrayed the dream he was aiming for.

He was a magician who killed others, and did not loathe making the mysteries known to the entire world, but because those who were released from death could not be stopped by anyone, his criminal record piled up completely neglected over the span of half a century.

However, because he was planning something far too serious, many magician organizations sent in magicians to subjugate him, and as a result Suimei also went until he was defeated, but—

"That guy was obliterated by me. Even if he was a lich, he can't exist after having his roots severed. And even in the case where he survived due to my failures, just who would summon that man here? Besides, I can't see any reason for that man to team up with the demons. He was an extreme asshole who thought that all living creatures would find the best salvation by dying and returning to the Earth you know? That kind of asshole..."

There's no way he survived, just by imagining it, goosebumps ran down Suimei's skin. As he said this, he wasn't sure how Hatsumi took it, but she made a strangely convincing statement.

"If everything is destroyed by the demons, it may end up like that."

"I'm begging you, don't say any more... It'll seriously turn into reality."

"Is he that strong?"

"He's about a million times stronger than the guy we just beat up. It's possible he might even be ten million times stronger. If we had to go up against him, it would be simpler to take on all the demons, demon

generals and the Demon Lord all at once. Aaah, I feel like puking.”

She wasn't sure if he was fooling around, but Suimei's complexion worsened as he dropped his shoulders. Not knowing the circumstances at all, Hatsumi spoke like it wasn't a problem in the least.

“But, you defeated him right?”

“I did. It's cause the world's number one shittiest enemy was an ally at the time. If it wasn't the case, I would have been cut into mincemeat by those phase blades.”

At that time, the one who had become an ally for just that very moment, was the man who laughed at his dreams. Suimei talked about him when he saved Lefille, the one who showed him the way to his dreams was just that very man.

“... I don't want to do it a second time. If that guy is alive, before the demons could annihilate humanity, that guy would completely obliterate humanity and every other living being.”

Hatsumi then questioned him in a puzzled tone.

“... Is our world, that dangerous a place?”

“Not at all. It's so peaceful you could die.”

“Then why is it...”

“Who knows. The reason the balance between danger and peace became so weird just shows how far into the end of days it is. I don't know whether it's the delimitation for reform or in the middle of the process headed towards the world's demise, but I really can't laugh at the possibility of the world ending before we even make it back.”

“It's not really the time to be saving another world huh.”

“Even if you say that, no matter what we do, when it ends, it ends. In the place we lived, we don't have that kind of position as a hero. About all we can do is tremble in our houses until the world ends.”

After letting out a sigh like it wasn't funny at all, Suimei ridiculed the movements of a soldier doing a complete about face accurately and

turned towards the ruins.

“Well, setting that aside, I'm going to go ahead and continue my investigation.”

After the matter that was causing him concern vanished, he seemed completely refreshed. Suimei walked towards the remains of the stones where the magic circle was drawn. Hatsumi followed after him with generous steps. And then, Hatsumi's eyes suddenly sharpened. Beyond where her vigilant gaze was pointed, was a dreadful presence. It was probably...

“... Hey, Yakagi.”

“So it isn't over yet?”

As if replying to Hatsumi's warning, Suimei sighed like it was getting tedious. Just how much more was he supposed to put off his investigation? That presence that was wriggling about within the darkness of the forest was without a doubt the remnants of the demons.

The two of them faced the directions that the demons were likely coming from and lie in wait. Between the black wood trees in front of them, they could see the darkness opening up. Anticipating that they would come out from there, Hatsumi shouldered her sword, and Suimei prepared his magic.

Before long, the demons showed their figures. From the darkness, a single figure, followed by another continuously. They didn't quite number as much as they did when they were surrounded earlier, but they were in position to charge in all at once and were brimming with blood thirst.

“... It'll be a series of battles, but will you be alright?”

“Don't be stupid, I won't fall behind from small fries.”

Though he talked frivolously, Suimei was not smiling. Even though she didn't think that Suimei's manner of speaking was haughty, his expression didn't show any signs of negligence. And then, it was right at the moment of whether they would attack or be attacked. Suddenly a shadow fell down from directly above the demons.

They didn't have any time to wonder who or what just appeared. Only Hatsumi's puzzled 'Eh—?' rang through the air. In an instant, the demons were struck by a shockwave from above, and along with the ground and trees, they were all blown away.

There was still a few left after the shockwave, but even where Suimei and Hatsumi were standing at quite the distance, going along with the shockwave, huge splinters of wood and lumps of earth became bullets and came flying in towards them.

“Wh-what is this?”

“...”

While gripped by confusion, Hatsumi held her sword forward while Suimei used magic to repel the debris that was flying towards them at a murderous speed. As the thunderous roar settled, within the cloud of dust, was a man with silver horns growing out of his head, wearing clothing similar to traditional Japanese attire, with his fist planted into the ground at the centre of the dead demons, who announced himself as he complained.

“—How fragile. To think these pests worst than shit could threaten all that live under the Goddess. I don't know who said it, but it's such a bad joke it sends shivers running down my spine.”

He spoke like he wasn't expecting anyone to listen, perhaps he was only spitting out at the demons at his feet. Eventually, the other demons noticed the unexpected visitor, and lunged at the man with horns from the sides. However, he brushed them away with the back of his fist, and the demons were smashed up along with the black wood trees they flew into.

... Suimei and Hatsumi were at a loss for words before that overwhelming figure.

It was fine that he was blowing away the demons. It wasn't like the two of them were unable to defeat all of those demons though. However, lightly, with movements like he was just swatting away a fly, it was incomprehensible that even the sturdy black wood trees would be

smashed to pieces. The man shook his hand like he had just touched something dirty, and suddenly, his gaze was fixed on Suimei.

“... Tsu!”

Suimei's heart leaped with a single strong thud. His body was seized with fear. It was because he was shown that overwhelming strength. No, it wasn't his strength. It was that man's existence, his gaze. Unexpectedly, one of Suimei's feet took a step in retreat. Completely reflexively, his feet moved in fear.

Even since coming to this world, such fear, and having to step back like this, was a first. On the other hand, Hatsumi who was standing beside him, was unaware of the crisis that was approaching them. Perhaps she judged that an ally had appeared. She was only looking at the man with silver horns in wonder.

“The hero and... Hou? Are you one of her companions?”

Suimei was unable to answer his question. Alarm bells were clanging nonstop inside his head. Other than the sound screaming at him to run away, all others sounds all flew away beyond the distance. In contrast, Hatsumi stepped forward, and returned the man's question.

“Just who are you? Why do you know that I am here? An ally?”

“I wonder. That depends on you.”

“What do you mean?”

Those words like the man was trying to purposely confuse them, Hatsumi's puzzled voice, all of it couldn't be heard by Suimei. And he finally realized, just what the man before him was.

“... Are you, a dragon kin?”

Perhaps because Suimei's trembling voice was on the mark, only the man's mouth warped into a smile. On the other hand, Hatsumi finally noticed the complete change in Suimei's expression, and looked at him with a puzzled gaze.

“Yakagi...?”

“As I thought huh…”

“Bastard, you seem quite frightened. I can't approve of a man who can't at least bluff before his enemy.”

“—Sh-shut up! This is a normal reaction!”

“However, I don't have any business with a scared weakling. Sorry, but I'll have you vanish.”

As if concluding that Suimei was someone boring, the man pierced him with a cold gaze. And then he slightly opened his mouth, and began sucking in air.

—A dragon's roar.

The moment Suimei sensed this, the tension that was binding his body and the trembling which urged his cowardice vanished from his body. The only thing occupying his mind was evading the menace before him. Hatsumi did not seem to be anticipate the tragic event that was about to happen, she stepped forward as if covering for him with her sword pointed at the ready. Suimei strongly grabbed her shoulder.

“Hatsumi! Come here!”

“Eh?”

“Behind me! Quickly! You'll get swallowed by the dragon's roar!”

“Dragon's r… Kya!?”

Suimei pulled the bewildered Hatsumi behind him forcefully, and thrust both his hands forwards as he began chanting.

“—Non amo Munus Scutum. Omne Simpetumin Victus. Invincibility Immobilitas Immortalis. Cumque Mane Surrexissent Castle.” (My shield is not a shield. It is solid before any kind of offence. It is one that would not waver before any amount of gunfire. It will never fall apart, it is immobile and completely solid. It is the strong fortress which collects the breath of the stars and ostentatiously shows its golden brilliance. Its name is…)

Along with the mana Suimei was letting out, many golden magic circles

were deploying around the two of them. The magic circles to the front were revolving, the large magic circle at their feet had a needle etched in which was counting the seconds like a clock. As Suimei's six verse chant came to an end, all of the magic circles stabilized.

“—Firmus! Congrega Aurum Magnalea!” (My solid shield! The brilliant golden fortress!)

As Suimei let out his keyword, the man with horns released a high pitched grating sound from his mouth which shook the air. Just as the wave of oscillations spread into their surroundings, the ground was astir like it was boiling, and fissures resembling red lightning were flickering in the air. The air was electrified as the molecules were agitated. Within that illusion of the world being thrown into a bright red plasma ball, everything was transformed into a red hot mass.

Between the flickering flashes, everything in their vision was dyed red, and eventually the earth, the black wood tress, the corpses of the demons, the summoning ruins, anything and everything was equally swallowed up in an explosion.

That thunderous roar and the whirlwind of incandescence could be mistaken for a small scale solar flare. The still night had fallen into a burning hell. If the dust explosion Suimei created could be described as dynamite, this could be said to be the equivalent of a nuclear explosion.

... Eventually, the flames settled down, and the scenery around them completely changed.

“This... is...”

Hatsumi was gazing around in wonderment, she wasn't able to grasp what had just happened. When she realized, the dark forest and the ruins had been completely blown away together with the ashes. All that remained, was the overturned dirt on the ground and the red burning embers.

On the other hand, the man with horns, for some reason, opened his mouth wide completely unexpectedly. For a while, he only looked at Suimei in a complete daze. Just as Suimei was thinking that, the man

with horns suddenly began laughing like a fire had been ignited in him.

“—KukuHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!... Kuku, to think you would endure that head on! I always thought it was something that a mere human could never defend against, but my goodness it seems I was just being imprudent huh! Bravo! Bravo!”

What he was letting out, was certainly joy. After laughing for a while, he gazed at Suimei fanatically. In spite of focusing entirely on the hero up until now, he was not even sparing her a single glance, and was only staring at Suimei like he was scrutinizing a sword of the finest quality. And then...

“Man in black. Bastard—No, when I called you a weakling, I take it back completely. Calling a man who steps forward to protect a woman a weakling, whatever the case may be, is simply not the truth. Besides, you endured that without a single scratch too, the reason for your trembling was not simple fear was it?”

This time, the man smiled while bearing his fangs. It was just like a starving beast who had finally found their prey, a terrifying and ferocious smile. Just from that joy of preparing for a meal, Suimei's fear towards dragons was dug back up. Beside Suimei who had once more began trembling and shivering, Kuchiba Hatsumi once more questioned the man.

“You're...”

“Hm? Ooh! That's right. I completely forgot because of that just now. My goodness, to think I have to do my duty at the same time as finally finding such a trophy, the whims of the world are truly nothing but ironic. However—”

He was speaking as if he just remembered what he was doing. No, that man seriously may have completely forgotten of Hatsumi's existence just now.

“I am the dragonnewt Eanru. Hero of the Alliance, Hatsumi, regardless of whether you consent of it or not, I will have you come with me this evening.”

Under the moonlight, the dragonnewt Eanru bore his dragon fangs towards them.