



The different world magic is too behind!

# 遅れてる

# 異世界魔法は



6

樋辻臥命

Gamei Hitsuji

Illustration = himesuz

OVERLAP



# 遅れてる魔法

# 異世界魔法は

The different world magic is too behind!

6

樋辻臥命

Gamei Hitsuji

Illustration = himesuz

OVERLAP



樋辻臥命  
Illustration : himesuz

異世界魔法は遅れてる! 6



八鍵水明  
やみずきみづみ

友人である遮那黎二の英雄召喚に巻き込まれ、意思とは無関係に異世界に召喚された自称一般人……と本人は名乗っている。実は現代に生きている魔術師であり、魔術師としても確かな腕を誇る。



フェルメニア・ステイングレイ

異世界では貴重な、新しい魔法を編み出せるほどの天才魔法使い。黎二の旅に同行しない水明を毛嫌いしていたが、化物から救われた際に評価を改め、帝国にて水明と合流する。



レフィール・グラキス

今はなきノースアスの王族に連なる血筋で、精霊の家系に生まれた半人半精の少女。救世教会でたびたび託宣を受けるが、いつもその内容に頭を悩ませている。精霊の力を使用しすぎると、体が縮んでしまう。



リアナ・ザンダイク

元・帝国軍情報部少尉。義父であるローグ・ザンダイクに育てられる。闇魔法の技量の高さと感情の起伏の少なさから、近隣諸国には帝国の人間兵器と呼ばれていた。現在は闇魔法の副作用の治療を受けながら、水明の旅に同行する。



朽葉初美

サーティース連合で召喚された勇者で、水明の幼なじみ。しかし召喚時の事故により、召喚前の世界での記憶を喪失してしまう。便利魔羅陀羅尼幻影刻という剣術を扱い、魔将ヴィシュダを水明と共に倒した。



遮那黎二

異世界からの英雄召喚に選ばれた男子高校生。困った人を見逃させない熱血漢。英雄召喚により勇者となり、魔王を倒す旅に出ることに。肉体を強化する魔法「バーンファースト」を得るとし、ギルドからは「名」全員の勇者を贈られている。



安濃瑞樹

遮那黎二の英雄召喚に巻き込まれた女子高校生。かつては「九天聖王イオ・クザミ」を演じていたが、いまはなりを潜めている。異世界に来て魔法が使えるようになったことで、長年の夢である独自魔法を編み出そうと画策中。



ティータニア・ルート・アステル

アステル王国女王。召喚された勇者・黎二の魔王を倒す旅に同行する。実は七剣の一人に数えられ「薄明」を名乗る二刀流の剣士。しかし、勇者の前でおてんばな姿を見せたくないために魔法使いの淑女を演じている。

# Prologue

## That Memory

“–Dragon kin, you say?”

On the evening of a certain day. The modern magician Yakagi Suimei heard the name of that famous imaginary being from his father, Yakagi Kazami's mouth.

–Dragon kin. In the modern world filled with fictional novels, it was a name widely associated with monsters that had bodies like reptiles that could breathe poison or fire and had wings on their backs.

In the Orient, dragons were considered as a symbol of virtue, while in the west, they were devils—regarded as the incarnation of deceased spirits filled with malignancy, they served as an 'evil' that was exterminated by gods and angels.

The origin of the image of dragons came from the origin of the reptilian body, the snake. In the Bible, the snake was evil, and was the symbol of sin which tempted Adam and Eve.

Back in ancient times, religions based on the Bible and the indigenous religions of Ancient Egypt which worshipped snakes came into conflict, and as a result, the thought that snakes equal devils spread throughout many western spheres. Because of this, dragons were drawn as the enemies of humankind since ancient times, and were treated as evil.

... The reason Suimei turned around the question like that, was because suddenly the phrase 'Do you know about dragon kin?' came flying at his ears from his father out of nowhere. Naturally, Suimei's knowledge was nowhere near as deep as his father's, so all he could do was shake his head from atop the sofa.

“Evidence of dragon kin has been left behind in history books and literature, but their actual existence is not recognized. And, among us magicians, they are an existence that we conceal.”

“Conceal...?”

“Which means...”

As Suimei frowned at the indirect phrasing, as if to lend him a hand, Kazami tapped the armrest on his wheelchair with his finger.

“In reality, they exist, right?”

“Though it's already a story of the past.”

As expected, his father was gazing out the veranda at the cloudy sky while he spoke. As Suimei waited for the conversation to continue, suddenly, his father shot a gaze towards him.

“Suimei, make some coffee.”

“Right in the middle of this talk?”

“I suddenly wanted some. It can't be helped. It's a privilege of a parent to have their son make coffee for them.”

“What kind of privilege is that...? Is it fine if it's instant?”

“I don't mind. But...”

“Black, right? Got it.”

“Are you also having some?”

“After putting in milk and syrup.”

“Hurry up and get used to drinking it black.”

“One day.”

Suimei returned a small smile to his father's expression which didn't change at all. His father's expression was always like a stone bust, but it wasn't like he had no emotions. He simply lost his ability to show his emotions outwardly, just like now, he would still talk frivolously in good humour. Though the only ones who knew this were the ones close to him.

“So, what was that about dragons? They're being hidden in the world of magicians right?”

“That's right. They're hidden because it's better to have fewer people

who know about it after all. However, that is no longer the case.”

After taking a sip of his coffee, Kazami continued speaking.

“The Revelation of Light indicates that a dragon will show up in Europe from an alternate plane. It's a mystical calamity on a scale bigger than any in history so far.”

The Revelation of Light was a vessel which predicted phenomenon in the world used by the Thousand Nights Association. It predicted everything from trite small phenomena to gigantic apocalyptic ones—Frankly speaking, it could be described as an object that could predict the future. It's true nature was a little different than that, but setting that aside.

“A scale bigger than any in history so far you say...”

“It's a vague way of describing it huh. But because of that, it is only a matter of time before it is known to other magicians. At this point, keeping it hidden is extremely inconsequential. Because the last survivors of the dragon kin were wiped out thirty years ago, dragons cannot be born in this world ever again.”

“Then, why did the prediction that a dragon will appear come up?”

“That's because of the phenomena of the apocalypse. An unexpected outbreak of instability in cause and effect at a location in Spain will end up as a A-grade class source on a grand scale. From there, a beast like figure will be born, the prediction was that the beast will have a dragon's form.”

“A beast...”

A beast. Short for a beast of the apocalypse, it was one of the phenomena of the apocalypse, apparitions. Suimei was still not clear on all the details, but when the end of the world was determined, it was a phenomenon that appeared to accelerate the apocalypse by annihilating all living beings in the world, they were conceptual existences which took the shape of 'monsters which attacked the living.'

Most of these took on the form of a C-grade class mix of a dog and a

wolf. In the times when an existence known as an A-grade class appeared, its form would change and take on a shape which people naturally held a deep fear towards. To the people of Europe, this likely ended up being the symbol of evil, a dragon.

“But if that gets out into the world.”

“There would be tremendous casualties in Europe... No, it probably wouldn't just stop there.”

The largest scale in all of history, and if it had the special characteristic of taking on the form of a dragon, it would be impossible to defeat without a superhuman at the level of a hero or saint. But right now in the world, people like Saint George or Saint Sylvester who were written about in the golden legends were nowhere to be found. If they made a blunder in dealing with it, it was possible the world would end.

“Then, father too?”

“Yeah, exactly. I was called for the gathering too. This time around, twenty magicians were chosen to take part in the dragon subjugation. The elite few are going to go defeat it.”

“Who's leading it?”

“The Thousand Nights Association. Just this time, they can't entrust everything to everyone else. The group is unified under the eldest daughter of the Katoraia family, the representative of the Enforcers of the Thousand Nights Association, Formelkress. The one aiding her is her little sister, Zealkis.”

“The two strongest Enforcers in history, are leading...?”

“On paper. In truth, the duty of leading all the magicians on-site will be left to someone else. Though the two girls will be extremely dependable in the battle against the dragon...”

Kazami quietly trailed off at the end. The two names he brought up were the Katoraia sisters who were currently the symbols of power of the Thousand Nights Association's Enforcement Agency. The two of them used magic which manipulated time, and they had strength that they

could boast of as being completely unequal in battle. But because the two of them were still youths in their early twenties, even if they were considered the leaders, they would end up handing over command to the more experienced magicians on site. For Suimei, who was still lowly ranked as a philosopher, this conversation was simply in another dimension.

“A dragon, and the tops of the Enforcement Agency. It's quite the amazing story. I've been to Europe quite a few times, but it still feels like such a faraway conversation.”

“No, you can't talk about this like it's not your problem.”

Confused at the meaning behind his father's words, Suimei's understanding of them was delayed for an instant.

“Ha? What do you mean by...”

“From the prediction, the Revelation of Light revealed several possibilities. From the outbreak of a dragon kin, Europe's destruction, the death of many and the acceleration towards the apocalypse. Naturally, because those are only possibilities, it is also possible to alter them.”

After that roundabout way of talking, his father spoke of the heart of the matter.

“And so, the final piece of guidance that the vessel which predicts phenomena gave us, was you, Suimei. That you definitely have to be brought along.”

After speaking, Suimei looked at his father's sharp gaze. And then, Suimei raised his voice as he yelled in shock.

“M-ME!?”

“That's right. The actual reason for it didn't seem to come up yet, but it likely means that your power will become the key to fighting the dragon.”

Yakagi Kazami spoke of a serious matter with his usual blunt expression. However, from his father's manner of speaking, just a little, he was able to catch a glimpse of the prideful emotions swelling up inside

him. His son's power was necessary as a vital piece. He was happy about that, but as expected, Suimei could still only hear this like a bolt from the blue.

“But father, I can't help but think that I'll be completely useless in that kind of place. I'm a magician whose rank is quite low right?”

“The bestowal of your proper magician's rank is simply something that has been deferred. I've taught you in a way where you have acquired at least that much ability, you're also confident in your own abilities right?”

“I can fight as a magician. Up until now I've followed along with father's battles after all, and you've also taught me about dealing with mystical calamities. But, when it comes to fighting together with such high ranking users, in any event, I'm still anxious...”

Suimei's voice trailed off quietly at the end. In a sense, it was only natural for him to feel strongly pressured. Regardless of whether low ranked and high ranked magicians were opposing or cooperating with each other, there was a magic law called 'Rank Disparity Extinction' which applied. A low ranked magic would be shut down by a high ranked one, so the magics used by a low ranked magician would become extinct if they drew near to the domain of the magic used by a high ranked magician.

By all rights, it wasn't something that occurred unless there was a large disparity between them, there were also certain conditions for it to come into existence so it wasn't really something to be too worried about, but because the magicians gathering this time were who they were, the problem would rise to the surface.

In this case, if the high ranking magicians took heed not to use magic which would cause Rank Disparity Extinction to occur, their annoyances would only increase by one. It was the important stage of subjugating a dragon. On the battlefield where high ranking magicians needed to freely use all their skills, they shouldn't have any leeway to take care of a low ranking magician. It would be a different matter in the case of support or bestowal magic where one did not need to worry about Rank Disparity

Extinction, but Suimei did not think the support and bestowal magics he could use would be of any use to the high ranking magicians in the first place.

In that case, he just couldn't nod back if he was asked whether he would be of any help. Kazami then shut his eyes.

“The reason you are seized with anxiety right now, could also be because my way of raising you was poor. Kiyoshiro told me that he found faults regarding that too.”

“... What do you mean?”

“Frankly speaking, it means I've been overly strict. Unless it was something fairly extreme, I've never praised you right?”

“Uh... Umm, well, you certainly haven't...”

While Kazami taught Suimei magic, even when Suimei showed skillful manipulation of magic, Kazami did not offer him much in terms of praise. That was certainly true. However, Suimei thought that it was something that couldn't be helped and put up with it precisely because he knew his father was of the disposition where he did not talk much. He didn't understand why that meant it was a poor way of raising him. He didn't see the point of the roundabout way his father was speaking.

“... Suimei. You can use large scale magic right?”

“Eh...? Yes, of course. It was father who said that for one who names himself a modern magician, it was essential to be able to use at least one. But taking into account the chanting speed, it would be rather difficult to use in actual battles, but...”

Because of the tests his father imposed on him, a little while ago, he worked out a few that could be used in actual combat. Because he followed along with the intense battles that were entrusted to his father more often recently, he chose to develop those magics, but to use them in actual combat, his powers were still insufficient.

“In the fight in Spain, the number of magicians who have the ability to use large scale magic independently without using a major ritual,

including you and me, would only be about five people at most.”

“So for the battle this time, other than those two from the Enforcement Agency, there aren't that many strong magicians coming? In spite of a monster springing forth which could bring a great calamity to Europe?”

“Aah, no, that's not what I meant, but... Fumu, to think that my inadequacies would come out after coming all this way.”

His father's figure with his eyes closed deep in thought, as well as the words he spoke, were all nothing but mysterious to Suimei.

... However, for Kazami, he understood that the way Suimei was unable to guess his intent, was also because of his own inadequacies.

Currently, even compared to the other high ranking magicians, Suimei held sufficient combat prowess to take part in the battle against the dragon. However, Kazami hated the idea of Suimei becoming a magician filled with self-conceit, and imposed nothing but difficult problems upon him as his magic teacher.

Kazami never properly informed him that the magicians around him, including Kazami himself, were all magicians with unusual levels of skill. He thought it would be bad for Suimei to live a life that was soaked in nothing but magic, and wanted him to focus on life as a normal person without any relation to magic—originally, being a magician was supposed to be an extra way of living for him, but it could be said that that way of raising him led to Suimei's misunderstandings.

He was a son Kazami could be proud of no matter where he was. Even the other magic organization would gladly welcome his skill and talent. However, the negative effect of teaching him as much as he could, was the birth of 'a timid magician who did not correctly understand his own strength.'

It could be said that he destroyed that magician's greatest enemy known as 'self-conceit.' But, to compensate for that, his prudence was turned around against him, and just what kind of enemy that would turn in to was an issue for Suimei to resolve on his own from here on out. But, right now—

“You'll understand the reason if you go. Of course, don't lose your focus. This battle will likely be the most relentless battle you will ever face from here on out after all.”

“... Yes.”

Suimei nodded back to Kazami, and after they finished drinking, he stood up and brought their cups to the sink. While staring at the water flowing out of the faucet, he noticed a sense of discomfort towards the unreasonable flow of events.

“A dragon, huh...”

He could feel an ominous feeling on the back of his neck like it was being scorched. That strange red hot sensation was just pulsing as it attacked him. From what his father said, this was because of a power his mother had. Though Suimei had no way of knowing what it implied at the time.

... And so, it could be said that the magician Yakagi Suimei's battle, started on this day.

# Chapter 1

## The Dragonnewt in the Moonlight

The complete stillness of the black tree forest prevented any from trespassing. But along with the sounds of a thundering blaze and conflicting air currents, the forest had fallen into an incandescence so bright it could burn one's eyes.

Right after Suimei and Hatsumi defeated the demon general Vuishta, the dragonnewt Eanru suddenly appeared and fired off a dragon's roar. And because of that, the trees of the forest were burned to ash, and all that was left was smouldering fires and embers, a complete ruin where one could no longer tell what was there before. Looking up at the heavens, the colour of the blaze threatening the evening looked like red waves under the darkness.

Everything present except for Suimei and Hatsumi was blown away by the power of the dragon's roar. The ruins of the hero summoning ritual that Suimei had been looking for vanished without a trace.

Both of their gazes were lined up on Eanru above the flames. His body could be described as a young man who seemed to be an intellectual. He was slender and elegant. Coupled together with his long green hair which did not flow along his back, he could easily be mistaken for an aristocrat who had nothing to do with battle. However, in truth, he held enough strength to blow away multiple demons with a single hand and his feet were firmly planted into the ground like the roots of a large tree.

The fighting spirit held within his body also did not match his appearance at all. His scientifically inexplicable pressure was conquering all in their surroundings. Hatsumi had her blade aimed at his eyes as the dancing flames damaged her golden hair. Without loosening the tension born of her vigilance, she sharpened her green eyes like a blade, and questioned Eanru.

“You'll have me, come with you...?”

“That's right. I cannot reveal the reason yet, but I need your power.”

“I believe the power of a little girl like myself obviously does not amount to much though?”

“If it was only your power. However, you have another power within you other than just the power held by your own body. Am I wrong?”

The implications behind his words were likely pointing towards Hatsumi's powers as a hero. However, just what did he need the hero's power for...?

“But, from how things went just now, it doesn't look like you want it because you want to defeat the demons right?”

“Naturally. Those guys are completely secondary. If things are carried out well, they are fated to disappear partway through anyways.”

Eanru spoke fearlessly, and it seemed his goal was different from the reason the hero was summoned to this world for in the first place. However...

“Frankly speaking, you're too suspicious. What's with the 'I'll have you come with me?' Regardless of my consent?”

“Because to us, it is necessary.”

“Don't you think it's normal to build up trust beforehand?”

“I never had any delusions of sweet talking you so that you would come with me after you believed me. At any rate, I have no intention of treating you politely. I don't care what you think about it.”

“What do you mean? What do you intend on making me do?”

“I said that I cannot reveal the reason... But, it's nothing much, it simply means you'll be used by us.”

“Treating people like they're objects...”

Listening to Eanru's manner of speaking, Hatsumi's face visibly distorted as she took offence to his words. People who wouldn't get mad

at being told they were just going to be used generally didn't exist. On the other hand, Suimei, who was protecting Hatsumi behind him slightly to the side, looked directly at Eanru with a piercing red gaze, and cut into their conversation.

“Aren't those shady parts something you don't talk about and try to trick us about? Isn't it the established tactic to use sweeter words to invite her if you want her to come along?”

“You certainly have a point. But, the fact of the matter is that we will use the hero. I have no intention of fooling you.”

“Mu...?”

Despite being unable to reveal the reasons for his suspicious request, he was still completely open about this point. Suimei wrinkled his brow at that somewhat mismatched interaction with Eanru.

“Though before that, first is, this.”

As Eanru spoke, he turned towards Suimei as if the hero was a completely secondary objective.

“Man in black. I would like to hear your name.”

“Mine?”

“That's right. The name of the one who splendidly defended against my howl. I must ask this of you without fail.”

Eanru spoke while his unwavering eyes shined like emeralds as they looked right at Suimei.

“Is that, something that you have to hear beforehand no matter what?”

“Isn't it obvious? Desiring the name of another is a courtesy reserved for the strong. Could it be you intend on giving me a boring answer like you have no name worth giving?”

Implying that such a reply would be a complete disappointment, he was wrapped up in a bottomless well of fighting spirit. However, showing courtesy beforehand was something that lined up with the etiquette of magicians as well. Suimei had no reason to refuse, so conforming with

that etiquette, he began speaking.

“A magician affiliated to the Society, Yakagi Suimei... To line it up better for you guys, would it be better to say it as Suimei Yakagi?”

As Suimei spoke, for some reason, Eanru's eyebrow twitched as it jumped up.

“You said Suimei Yakagi?”

“That's right?”

Suimei was wondering what was wrong with his name. While he was baffled by Eanru's reaction, the power overflowing from Eanru's body was suddenly dispelled.

“I see. So the one who did in Romeon was you...”

“Ah?”

“No, I just thought that I owed you both my gratitude and an apology. To do so while postured for battle would be inappropriate.”

There wasn't an ounce of his fighting spirit left as Eanru spoke. But setting that aside, what held Suimei's curiosity more strongly was—

“What do you mean? I may just be hearing you wrong, but did you just say Romeon?”

“That's right. The elf Romeon. The man who served as a librarian in the Imperial University's Library. It is exactly who you are thinking of.”

Eanru confirmed Suimei's bewildered suspicions. On the other hand, Hatsumi, who knew nothing of what they were talking about, was completely treated like an outsider. However, Suimei was the same in that he didn't know what Eanru was trying to say.

“Gratitude and an apology, about that guy?”

“The incident that Romeon brought about in the Empire, I heard you were the one to bring an end to it. For bringing about a clear end to the depravity of a fellow member of the organization I belong to, I must offer you our gratitude as a representative.”

And then, with a light bow of the head which could even be considered a nod...

“—We are in your debt.”

“... In other words, that guy is one of your companions?”

“That's right. He is a comrade who aimed for the same ideal as us. Or at least, he was.”

His feelings of camaraderie towards Romeon were already a thing of the past. Hearing of Romeon, Suimei's distrust towards Eanru only grew stronger, but having said that, he knew that before Romeon touched upon darkness, he held honest desires. However...

“I don't really get it, but if you're going to apologize, then you should have at least properly gripped his leash that much tighter. No matter how you put it, that guy couldn't be saved you know?”

“You're precisely right, I can't say anything in our defence. That guy's will—No, our inability to see through the fact that he had been taken in by the darkness, is all because of our oversight.”

“From the way you're talking, you're saying that uproar wasn't your real intent, was it?”

“By and large it is exactly as you say. Though naturally I'm not talking about the uproar that happened in the Empire, but about the harm that came upon that young girl.”

In other words, the uproar in the Empire was something he, no, from the way he spoke, it would be 'they,' had something to profit off of. So during that incident, that meant the damage done to everyone except for Liliana and Rogue was—

“I seem to have spoken too much.”

“I wouldn't mind if you spoke even more though.”

“I'll have to refrain from doing so. Your intuition is too sharp, even when you are panicking, you are still shrewd.”

Eanru spoke as he revealed a sharp gaze within his eyes. As expected,

this man had completely seen through Suimei's timid attitude. And then, Eanru's eyes suddenly shook with sorrow, as he sighed about something regrettable.

“Romeon was someone we were originally supposed to dispose of ourselves. However, before we could make our move, you ended up defeating him. We cannot even pay you back.”

The words he tacked on at the end, after all this time, only sounded like an excuse, and he sighed... His voice sounded like he was ashamed of his own failures and self-deprecating himself. However, there was something Suimei was more curious about.

“I get what you're saying about Romeon's case. But, how do you know that I defeated that guy? There shouldn't have been anybody present observing us at the library that time right?”

“Let's just say that our ability to gather information is just that good.”

They were bold words. But, just as he said, there was likely no mistaking the strength of their intelligence network. There wasn't much evidence that Suimei was there. Having heard all that he had to, Suimei lightly shrugged his shoulders as he spoke once more.

“Hey, if you're that thankful for it, could you maybe just step aside?”

“I refuse. There's my goal in bringing along the hero, but above all else, I have an interest in you. In that power you hold which overwhelmed Romeon after he fell into darkness.”

“... Tch! Give me a break, seriously.”

As expected, Eanru pointed a ferocious gaze and smile towards Suimei like a carnivore who had found their prey. Exactly like Graziella, or even more so than her, he was the type who found enjoyment from battle. A dragon kin, and a battle maniac. To Suimei, it was the type of person he did not want to deal with the most right behind lunatics. Seeing Suimei's harsh grimace like he was chewing on something sour, Eanru suddenly narrowed his eyes like he found it curious.

“I don't really understand, but why are you so frightened? If you hold

that much power, then there's no need to show that much cowardice right? How strange.”

“Mind your own business. I've got my own circumstances to deal with.”

“Is that how it is...? Well fine, it's about time to begin, but how will you come at me? I don't mind if you both come at once you know?”

“So a fight's just predetermined?”

“From what we have been talking about, it's more than obvious that the young hero has no intent of quietly coming along with me. In that case, is it not evident that I must now take her along by force?”

“...”

“There's no need to make sure a grim face. If you don't like it, then all you have to do is win against me. It's a simple matter.”

Eanru gave a clear and simple answer towards Suimei's scowling. And then, he once more fearlessly wrapped his body in fighting spirit.



—Even though the conversation was fixed on her, in truth, the conversation had completely cast her aside and continued on.

In this unreasonable situation, Kuchiba Hatsumi held on to her anger and many anxieties as she pointed the tip of her blade at the newly arrived enemy.

That enemy was a young man named Eanru who was a dragonnewt. He plainly told her to come with him, but wouldn't speak of the reason, and the conversation had devolved into a battle.

On the other hand, bearing the full brunt of the fighting spirit that man was letting out, Yakagi had a cold sweat coming down his brow just as when Eanru first showed up. The face he was making was as if he had just met someone he definitely did not want to meet. There was no fear showing on the surface, but unlike the time he faced off against the demon general Vuishta, she could see fear dominating his heart.

Even now, Yakagi's index and middle fingers were restlessly and

rubbing against each other while he fixedly kept his gaze on Eanru without faltering for a moment. Hatsumi then called out to him from behind.

“Yakagi. I'll take the front.”

If they couldn't avoid the battle, then their strategy should remain the same as last time. She would leave the support from the rear to him, while she would take the position of vanguard. It was a strategy which was obvious for a mage and a swordsman. However, Yakagi fired out a strict voice without even turning around.

“No. Step back. Just this time, you can't.”

“What are you saying? Isn't it better to fight together? Aren't you making that kind of expression because he's a bad opponent?”

“...”

“Hey!”

“... Yeah, that's right. He's a bad opponent. He's to the point where he's bringing back up the absolute worst trauma for me.”

After taking out her irritation on him, she realized something from Yakagi's trembling voice. Right now, the reason he was rubbing his fingers together, was not because he was unable to calm down, but because he was trembling in fear.

“... Are you that scared?”

“I'm scared. Cause at that time too, the opponent was a dragon kin.”

“Is that, when Yakagi's father?”

“That's right. At that time we won, so I thought I wouldn't have to overcome this again, but I was naive. Thinking that I'm going to lose something once more, I can't stop shaking.”

The reason he was sweating and shaking in fear, was not just because he was standing in front of someone strong. He held a deep seated fear of what could be waiting before the defeat itself, for what the defeated have to give up, and for having to face that once more. Since he feared defeat

like that, all the more, it made sense for them to fight together. And as Hatsumi was silently conveying that thought to him...

“No, it's fine. Leave this one to me. This guy is different from that demon. He's a being on a different dimension. If you still had your memories it would be one thing, but for you who cannot pull out all of the Kuchiba's techniques and dharani and all of your experiences up to this point from the depths of your mind, this guy will be far too much for you to handle.”

“But even so.”

“I've only fought against those demons earlier, but you've been fighting constantly haven't you? After going to the fortress to relieve them, you should have been fighting non-stop ever since. Even if you think you're fine, your concentration will be worn out.”

“That's not.”

True, and in the middle of trying to say that, Yakagi then cut her off.

“That's my line. In reality, right now, how long has it been since you've taken your eyes off him?”

As he said this, she suddenly realized. Just as Yakagi had said, she had been completely focused on their conversation. If at that time, Eanru made his move, her reaction would be late, and she would fall victim to the first blow. The fact that she was not properly vigilant was proof that her concentration had been worn down. Realizing her own carelessness, she swallowed her saliva hard. Without saying anything more, Yakagi stepped forward. As if protecting her from the unbeatable opponent in front of them, his back spread out in front of her eyes.

She had more to say, but the words wouldn't come out of her mouth. As she tried to let out her voice, she unconsciously kept her mouth shut tight. The reason her words were stolen from her, was because of that back.

That wide back like he was obstructing her from the fight, overlapped with something she saw in her dreams multiple times. Though the back she saw in her dreams was much, much smaller. But even so, the back in

her dreams looked far larger than it actually was. Perhaps, to her eyes, that back just appeared to be that much more reliable.

“Ah—”

At that time. In that dream. It was same as that past that she would recall in her sleep. It hadn't changed. That figure which put itself forward to protect her from an incoming threat. The profile of the young man's face who she held earnest aspirations for. That gentle expression and kind smile which told her not to worry. Standing up against the stray dog before them, it was a tiny but priceless courage. Therefore, that thought came back to her.

—I hated being the one who was always protected, isn't that why I became stronger?

“U, guu...”

At the sudden pain in her head, her knees folded. After a thunderous noise reverberated in her mind for an instant, the next thing she heard was the sound of her knee striking the ground. Perhaps the sudden recurrence of a memory put a heavy burden on her mind. However, that question which caused that electric shock like pain, immediately vanished somewhere. And then, she could hear Yakagi's voice.

“Hatsumi? What's wrong? Are you alright?”

“U-uun. It's nothing.”

“Then step back... I'm begging you.”

The voice that quietly pleaded this of her, was certainly heavy. That was not from its persuasive power, but because she realized that it was a petition from his heart, so she no longer had any will to cling on. Silently nodding back to him, Hatsumi took her distance. While she was doing so, he showed slight signs of relief. After she got a fair distance away, Yakagi fired off provocative words towards Eanru.

“You sure waited for us politely.”

“It wouldn't be interesting to make a surprise attack for this long

awaited fight right? To properly enjoy a fight, it's only proper that it begins fairly.”

“It's a world I don't get. Despite having a mission, you're just completely neglecting it.”

“No matter what battle a warrior faces, isn't a battle something that must be carried out in one's own style? No matter what price needs to be paid to do so. Is it different for you?”

As Eanru spoke with dignity, as expected, Yakagi replied in a provocative tone.

“A magician's fight is one where we attack the enemy when they're unguarded. Testing each other out is one thing, but in a fight to the death there ain't such a thing as fair and square.”

“So attacking the enemy unguarded is your style huh. Certainly that is similar to those mages who are unable to fight head on. However, is that something you should reveal beforehand?”

“That's for you to think about. Do your best to suspect anything and everything.”

As Yakagi's expression went from showing fear towards the impending crisis to bearing his fangs, the surroundings began to shake unnaturally. Perhaps as evidence of the extreme instability of the physical laws in that place, the area around him crackled as blue flashes of lightning like electric currents flickered. Due to the change in the electromagnetic field, debris and soot floated into the air and vanished as they were used a medium for the lightning to pass through. Everything began to shake. As Hatsumi put her hands to the floor, she could feel her body contracting as if enduring a severe earthquake. And Yakagi Suimei quietly opened his mouth at the centre of that mysterious phenomenon.

“—Archiatius Overload.” (Mana Furnace, Load Activation)

Without being drowned out by the thunderous shaking, a chant with a mysterious echo to it rang in the air. And immediately after that, mana and the ether wind born of it explosively fired out of Yakagi's body, and a

powerful shockwave broke out as if an actual explosion had just occurred, blowing anything and everything away.

Hatsumi stabbed the tip of her sword in the ground, and used it to support herself as she endured the blast, and from her thinly opened eyes, she could see Yakagi leap into the sky. Perhaps because he was using magic which allowed him to fly in the sky, he seemed to be able to freely control his movements in mid-air, and after taking a trajectory like he was flapping his imaginary wings in the wind a few times, from what she could see, he came to a stop.

Seeing this, Eanru raised his voice in admiration. The reason he had a smile on his face was likely because he thought it was an interesting technique. Even after having air superiority taken from him, he still seemed to have plenty of composure. In regular circumstances, this would put him at a considerable disadvantage, but just as Yakagi had said, because he was an enemy in another dimension, her common sense did not likely apply.

“That is some excellent mana. The last time my heart throbbed so much would be back with the 'Man-Eating Evil.'”

After Eanru spoke with a faint smile on his face, as if the two had arranged to do so beforehand, they each fired out their words.

“Here I come.”

“Now come—”

As Eanru and Yakagi's voices overlapped, the curtain of the battle was raised.

—However, the first thing that Hatsumi saw, were Yakagi's movements completely beyond her expectations. From what she had seen before, the way a mage fought was to constantly keep their enemy at a safe distance and fire out magic from long range. That way was safe, and made fighting easier.

But right now, Yakagi's way of fighting did not follow that trend. After flying into the sky, it would have been fine to just fire off magic from a

place that Eanru could not reach. But in spite of that, he began to fly around Eanru's vicinity without firing any magic. He was throwing away his own advantage. Despite having more combat experience than her, she couldn't understand the reason that he would dare to do so.

Just as she thought that man was just flying around the sky as he zipped about, once in a while he would land as he crouched down, and would once more leap into the air and repeat his actions. When he changed course in the air, he fluttered in the air softly with a very small break in movement. And for some reason, he seemed like he was moving in a way as if to bewilder his opponent.

On the other hand, Eanru, who was facing those movements as an enemy, was conducting himself skillfully. To him, an attack could come from any direction in an entire hemisphere. He had to be wary of the possibility that an attack could come from every single direction that could come to mind.

However, whenever Yakagi entered his blind spots, he immediately coped with it, and evaded. On top of that, the low powered magic Yakagi had been firing off to keep him in restraint seemed to have no effect, and even when he took it head on he would just make a nonchalant expression.

And then, there was his attacks. Matching up with Yakagi who was firing short ranged magic and drawing nearer, he would leap in aiming for the moment Yakagi landed. He moved with the sharpness of a bird of prey rushing in on its target. Just like a green thunderclap, he came in from above, and fell downwards. Right before reaching Yakagi, he would regain his form as a person, and attack. It was as if he was a god of thunder. This intersection repeated many times, when finally, the thunderclap caught Yakagi's figure.

“Tch—”

As Yakagi clicked his tongue, he snapped his fingers. The air in front of the approaching thunderclap exploded, but the thunderclap passed through it with no resistance at all, and caught him. Before Eanru's far

too speedy fierce attack, Yakagi did not seem to have time to spin any words together. Without being able to put up his defensive magic, Eanru's open palm attack swooped down on him.

And just as expected, it's destructive power was tremendous. That Yakagi, as if he was a pinball struck by a plunger, was sent flying all the way to the trees that the dragon's roar did not reach.

... Watching that spectacle, Hastumi held her breath, and the sound of her swallowing could be easily heard. If he didn't land properly, it would be fatal. However, it did not seem that was all there was to Eanru's attack. The moment Yakagi crashed into the trees and the ground, the black wood trees, plants, and even the ground itself turned to pulp and were smashed to pieces.

“You're kidding...”

Hatsumi could not believe the scene happening before her eyes. Just how could that reliable man be defeated so easily? Obstinate refusing to fall into despair, she strongly gazed in the direction he was blown away, but even after the cloud of dust dispersed, there was nothing there but the vestiges of destruction –

“Yakagi!!”

“... Don't scream like that. I'm alive.”

“Eh–?”

As she let out a scream like she thought he had been completely done in, she could hear a voice coming from another place. As she turned towards that voice, standing there while holding down his stomach and leaning forwards a bit, was Yakagi. He seemed to be healing his wound with magic. While sweat was pouring down his brow, a pale green light was coming out of his hand holding down his stomach.

“–I thought I managed to get you with that one though.”

“As expected, you can use the draconic eye huh...”

“As expected would be my line. Knowing that you moved around to try

and run from my sight. However, is it not careless to stop just to heal your wounds?”

Eanru boldly warned him as he criticized Yakagi's fault. However, Yakagi did not seem to think that was the case.

“I wonder about that?”

“—Nu?”

As Yakagi spoke while making a face like he was laughing scornfully at Eanru, for some reason, Eanru let out a puzzled groan. Immediately following that, Eanru staggered, and then shook his head like he was trying to shake something off of it. Hatsumi couldn't tell what happened at all. His reaction was like he was suddenly stricken by dizziness or vertigo. And while that was happening, she suddenly realized something.

“A picture of an eye?”

On the ground right next to Yakagi, different from the one used when they had defeated Vuishta, a simple picture modelled after an eye was drawn there. Looking at it carefully, copies of the same picture were drawn on the ground all over.

“It's a picture of a nazar bonjuk, a charm against the evil eye. Since the draconic eye's origin is based on the concept of the evil eye, this will avert it. I'm not just recklessly fighting here you know?”

“What a surprise, to think that there is a means of defending against this. Could it be that I came across an unfavourable opponent?”

Behind those words, Eanru was stifling his joyful laughter. Seeing that he was completely joking around, Yakagi scowled at him like he was being annoying.

“Shut up. It's seriously unfair that I can't properly put up a fight unless I take the time to do something like this.”

“I guess so. Generally, everyone I meet is simply unable to cover for that difference between us, but you really do know a lot about a technique that a human should know nothing about.”

“Humans from this world, right?”

“I see! You are a citizen of another world huh. No wonder the magic you use is different from the magic used here. The reason you are intimate with the hero, is also because of this right?”

“That's how it is. That's why I won't let you take Hatsumi with you.”

“In that case, it is only natural. However, I also have a reason that I must bring her along for no matter what.”

As he stopped speaking for a moment, Eanru slowly took up his stance once more.

“I won't ask for forgiveness. I'm more than aware that I'll be resented from the very beginning.”

“I can tell that much. After starting and coming so far, I don't intend to bitch and whine about it. I'll at least have you let me speak frivolously and be disagreeable though.”

And then, Yakagi boldly stuck out his tongue as he wiped off his sweat from the fear that he was unable to escape from. Seeing him like that, Eanru smiled.

“That's good. At times like this, the type who whine and complain that I'm mistaken and are unwilling to accept defeat are in the majority though.”

“Unfortunately, I'm not very good at appealing to my opponent's emotions you see?”

“You sure can talk for someone who seems to specialize in talking impudently.”

“Shut it.”

Saying that, Yakagi snapped his fingers. The air explosion marked the opening to the second act of their increasingly ferocious battle like a violent signal gun.



—After one of Eanru's moves was sealed, just as he would expect, the attacks of the mage before him grew even more intense than before.

Just as Suimei Yakagi had said, this was likely because he was freed from having to spend time to make preparations. He was still racing through the sky while touching down on the ground intermittently, but the magic that he was firing out had become stronger, and both his casting speed and frequency had doubled. All of that was within the realm of expectations that Eanru had, but that was not what he wanted to complain about.

The point that deserved high praise from this man named Suimei Yakagi, was that he knew of the way to fight against dragonnewts, and that he seemed more knowledgeable of it than the dragonnewts themselves. Whenever he drew close, he would absolutely never come in close enough to be within range of Eanru's fists. He fought well beyond the distance that one could measure by eye and kept that distance.

Normally, when Eanru swung his fist, just like when he blew away the demons, the wave of wind that followed would be enough to blow away absolutely everything in its path. But that man was moving around in a way like he had completely seen through this power as well and would not get caught up in it.

And then there was the howl wave Eanru used right as they met. Suimei Yakagi called it a dragon's roar when he yelled, but in reality, he clearly understood the true nature behind the howl wave. If he was a normal human who knew nothing of the dragonnewts' techniques, he would have done nothing but stand there dumbfounded as he was evaporated. But this man quickly sensed what was happening during Eanru's preparatory stage, and played his defensive hand immediately.

Speaking of things he knew of beforehand, this also applied to his dragon's eye. Judging that Eanru held the technique to crush all within his line of sight by just looking at it, he jumped around the surroundings without staying within Eanru's gaze for any extended period of time. And then, he splendidly prepared the technique to break through it.

All of these techniques were certain kill strikes. Of course, they were difficult to understand if one were to only hear of them. All of them were techniques where even if you understood how they worked, most anybody would be unable to evade them and would just die on the spot. But this man slipped through all of them. And he was continuing to fight Eanru just as he was.

“Fu, fufufu...”

Without being aware of it, Eanru's laugh began to leak out. Before him, he could see the figure of a man who was using magic incessantly. Suimei Yakagi tapped the ground with his finger, and behind him, magic circles which differed from the ones on the ground appeared. The magic circles that were appearing continuously seemed to be substitutes for chanting. From those circular shapes, magic was fired out, the attributes they carried varied, and a completely unknown type of attack filled Eanru's field of vision to capacity as it came rushing in.

And just like that, just like when the fighting began, his predictions were all being betrayed one after the other. His casting speed and frequency were good. However, what he was unable to unravel was Suimei Yakagi's consecutive use of magic. Eanru understood that magic casting speed was something that could be done quicker by performing the spell quicker, thus he was not particularly surprised at that fact. However, the fact that he was not taking a single breath was something he could not grasp at all.

When magic was used consecutively, mana had to be expelled from one's body to do so. As mana is transmitted to the outside, body heat would also increase. The body would confuse this with a deficiency of air in the atmosphere, and cause one to be short of breath. Normally, because of the time it took to chant spells, most mages never encountered this situation. However, it was supposed to be unavoidable that a mage had to take a break when using magic consecutively.

But this did not apply to the man before his eyes. In spite of the container of his soul being nothing but the body of a human, Eanru could not hear the sound of the cycle of inhaling and exhaling coming from his

mouth.

In its stead, he could once in a while see a pure white vapour made of mana being expelled from his mouth. He was guessing that there was likely some sort of strange organ inside that body responsible for all this.

The consecutive use of magic was a menace, but in a sense, this non stop attack could be said to be Suimei Yakagi's means of defence. From the hail of fire, lightning and light magic, one would assume that he was going on the offence, but it could also be interpreted that the incessant attacks were a means of keeping Eanru restrained without allowing him to attack on his own. As evidence of that, Suimei Yakagi had yet to fire off any magic that could deliver the final blow.

“If you aren't going to push in, then I'll be the one to make a move.”

As Eanru spoke, he stomped on the ground. And as if an explosion occurred, the surface of the ground split and sent large lumps of earth flying. With that one move, he slipped through the magic, and when he arrived right in front of Suimei Yakagi, Eanru could see him swallow his saliva as he trembled.

“Dammit, you move too fast!”

Suimei Yakagi let out a shriek in complaint on the spur of the moment. As expected, he was quite flustered. Perhaps due to some terrible memories, this man held a deep seated fear towards Eanru, no, towards those known as dragonnewts.

However, that was none of Eanru's concern. Aiming for his lower jaw, he let out a kick. To evade the attack from below, Suimei Yakagi threw his body to the ground. Just as Eanru thought that he had discarded any thoughts of landing properly, because he could freely fly through the air, his posture did not seem to matter at all. Being pulled by an invisible force, his body took an unnatural path through the air, and Eanru chased after him with a backhanded fist.

Suimei Yakagi anticipated the serious blow from the waves, but even so, they still caught up to him. The wave of power blown towards him struck his leg. And at the same time, Eanru could hear the sound of bones

breaking. The immediate moment after Suimei Yakagi made an anguished expression, a green circle with letters and numbers inscribed within it took shape around the broken bones. It was recovery magic. Every time he was dealt a serious wound, Suimei Yakagi would use that magic to heal the damage.

—The fact that he couldn't get enough offence in, was just the same for Eanru as it was for Suimei Yakagi.

As that self-deprecating thought passed through Eanru's head, fire magic was shot out towards him.

“Mere desperation!”

“Just take it!”

He let out a shout like the attack was meant to finish Eanru off, however, the actual attack was somewhat different. The large fire magic which blocked his entire field of view was nothing but a smokescreen, just an inch in front of Eanru's head, a tiny magic circle took shape.

“Tch—”

It was too close. The moment Eanru's mind judged that he wouldn't get off lightly if he was hit by that, his body reflexively took evasive action. However, the moment he distanced himself from the tiny magic circle, another tiny magic circle took shape, and just like that, they chased after him. No matter how fast he moved, how much he changed directions, whether he took to the skies or not, the tiny magic circles formed a line as they chased after him perfectly. Thinking that it looked like some out of place child's toy as they formed an accordion like shape in the sky, those magic circles finally pointed their fangs towards him.

—'Chain Explode.' Along with that keyword, consecutive explosions erupted. In the blink of an eye, they caught Eanru's face.

“Gu, Ah...”

Eanru took evasive action, but he was too close to avoid the shockwave. Its power was on the same level as a strike from Jillbert's superhuman strength. Just as he would expect, he was unable to endure it and threw

back his head. However, it would not be a hindrance to the battle. After lightly shaking his head, he could see an ultramarine light coming down from the starry night sky.

–Did he set this attack up beforehand?

The moment Eanru sensed the impending crisis, Suimei Yakagi began speaking.

“–Adcentum transcription. Augoeides randomizer trigger.” (Brilliant spell simplified operations. Randomly deploy bombs from number one to a hundred. Strategic bombing.)

Immediately following that, a hail of light fell from the sky. The magic lights falling from the sky reminded him of the falling stars he saw in the Empire, but it seemed to be a different kind of spell. Having lost his chance to evade, Eanru overflowed his entire body with mana and took a defensive stance. Soon, the magic would come to an end, but...

“This isn't the end of it.”

And just as he said, Suimei Yakagi prepared his next magic. Before Eanru could notice, Suimei Yakagi had leaped backwards and was weaving his words while taking a landing posture.

“–Fiamma est lego. Vis Wizard. Hex agon Aestua Sursum. Impedimentum Mors.” (Assemble flames. Like the cry of the magician's resentment. 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 were forming in the air, and at Suimei Yakagi's feet, a single large magic circle was expanding. The shape filled with words in the centre of the magic circle and the two fold circle on the outer circumference of it began revolving in opposite directions, and the ground around it was wrapped up in flames. The red blaze was reflected in Suimei Yakagi's eyes. The red hot brilliance held a zealous purpose. And the moment Eanru was captivated by that scene...

“–Fiamma. O Ashurbanipal!” (Shine. Oh Ashurbanipal's revolving stone!)

He crushed the light in his right hand. At the same time that gem like object was smashed to pieces, a flame burst out of the large magic circle, the blazes in their surroundings were repelled, and the earth boiled like red hot iron.

The common sense that dragonnewts were immune to fire came to Eanru's mind, but at the same time, a bad premonition struck Eanru's back. Rather than common sense which was useless on the battlefield, he put more trust in that sensation, and before the boiling earth could catch his feet, before the snake like extending flames could entwine him, he put all of his strength into leaping back.

He managed to evade, but the heat spreading in the air scorched his body. What he felt on his skin, was a pulsing pain that he had never felt before in his life. As he thought, this was no simple flame. It was likely that other than just the outbreak of fire, there was another curse applied to it. Judging that it would be bad to take the fire head on, alarm bells began to ring deep within his head.

Piercing through the flames in front of him, was Suimei Yakagi. Just as he was caught in bewilderment at the sight of a mage closing in on him on his own, the man in front of his eyes turned into smoke and dispersed.

Seeing that, Eanru once more let out a smile. Before he could ascertain where the smoke went as it dispersed in all directions, he could feel a presence behind him. As he hastily turned around, Suimei Yakagi's figure was right in front of him with a small magic circle in the palm of his hand.

“OOOOOOOOOOOOH!” “HAAAAAAAAA!”

The two of them let out their fighting spirit at the same time. A crash of howls. Meeting the palm thrust with the small magic circle in it, was the dragonnewt's fist. Immediately following the collision of power, an explosive shockwave broke out and sent Eanru's body flying.

As he corrected his posture and looked forward, perhaps because he also suffered from the same shockwave, Suimei Yakagi was also sent flying away.

—Just how much will this fight make his heart dance? Eanru had not

had a good fight like this since the day he was born. To think that he would be blessed right now with the ceaseless fight that he had been seeking all this time.

“What's so funny?”

“Hm? Was I laughing? Aah, no, it's just such a battle. Doesn't it make you happy?”

“Now that I think of it, you're just that kind of guy huh...”

Suimei Yakagi spoke like it was an annoyance, he muttered 'battle maniac...' quietly. Those were likely words that described people like Eanru. However, to him, those loathsome words spat out of his enemy's mouth were unmistakably words of praise. Being considered a formidable enemy by the strong gave meaning to everything he had accumulated to this point, it allowed him to accept himself.

Therefore, this battle had significance. The meaning of life Eanru sought was certainly right in this place. The only regret he had, was the fact that the fate he had with this man was happening at exactly this time. It was an unparalleled fortune that he was embroiled in such a fight in such an unexpected place. However, because he was in the middle of a mission, he was thinking that he couldn't fight until his heart was content, and he couldn't help but feel unhappy about it.

“—Aah, it's beyond my control.”

It seemed that the voice that he quietly leaked out reached Suimei Yakagi. Due to his tone being in complete contrast to his earlier ecstatic voice, Suimei Yakagi's brow noticeably wrinkled. However, for some reason, he wasn't shooting out any magic. Despite the fact that he had been firing ceaselessly until now and that he showed no signs of being short of breath, it seemed that he was taking a short break in the battle.

It was also possible that he was simply preparing a technique, but concluding he would deal with it, Eanru stepped forward. Eanru began with consecutive strikes. However, the mage before him seemed accustomed to not only close range combat, but also to fighting at the range of a fist fight as he skillfully warded off Eanru's strikes. For a mage,

this was a fatal range, but he was able to deal with it effectively, it left Eanru astonished.

However, even so, he was poorly matched against Eanru who specialized in fist fights. Naturally, a human could never compete with the physical strength of a dragonnewt. The arms he was using to ward off Eanru's strikes were showing signs of becoming red, and in a flash, they were becoming more and more tattered.

“Gu, ah...”

While letting out a groan, Suimei Yakagi immediately took some distance between them. After Eanru refrained from chasing after him, Suimei Yakagi looked back with a puzzled gaze.

“It is such a good feeling to have a difficult battle.”

“Ha?”

“Isn't it? If the opponent is that much more difficult to deal with, you'll be able to fight that much longer. And then, it is possible to test out all the techniques you have been fostering too.”

“... Bewitching others with techniques and having that reciprocated is certainly enjoyable. Though that's only if it wasn't in a situation like this.”

“Agreed. Don't we unexpectedly get along?”

“No, my grief is different from yours. There's no mistaking it.”

“That kind of thing is trivial.”

“... You're that right? Your personality is one where you just get everything you're not interested in over with quickly right? You really do have quite the character, seriously.”

“Fu.”

While amusing himself with their conversation, even now, cold sweat was pouring down Suimei Yakagi's forehead. But, it was also a fact that his fear was somehow becoming weaker. It was likely that this man also became stronger just to accomplish his goals. Even though he spoke to the contrary, their conversations up until this point were on the same

wavelength, so he may have softened up somewhat.

Even if the places they were aiming for were different, the thing they desired to get there was the same. That elevated peak that nobody could reach, and the dream which stimulated that desire. This man had that. He was definitely looking at a dream.

“It's hard to get huh. Really. You have a different kind of radiance from that man.”

“...?”

Just like the light within the darkness was more dazzling than anything else, the man before his eyes was also dazzling within the darkness. That dwarf woman's question could certainly be said to be right on the point.

“At any rate, you sure talk a lot.”

“Good grief, that is even surprising to me. Even though speaking in the middle of a battle is the height of folly—Aah, that's it isn't it, this is that. That thing where you become overexcited and start talking as you get worn out right?”

This useless consideration and conversation was something Eanru had never done in a battle before. However, the reason he was unable to stop this excess despite that, was because it was something hard for him to understand. Things that were hard to understand, were important matters. If he was exposed to it too much, he would no longer want to destroy it, and unconsciously, he may have been taking that into consideration. Even though he fought for the sake of destruction, this was a tremendous contradiction.

And then it seemed that Suimei Yakagi finished his break. Just as Eanru was thinking that the trees behind him were being mowed down by his magic, they were swept away, and began flying. Pushing through the air, numerous big trees roared through the sky. The trunks of the black wood trees were thick and sturdy. If a human was struck by such a thing, it wouldn't end well—But that only applied to humans.

“Such a thing won't even serve as a distraction to me.”

Just as he said, he could see the shadow of Suimei Yakagi running behind the large trees between the gaps. After Eanru smashed the first tree trunk with his fist, Suimei Yakagi used that opening to close in right before his eyes. Wielding a silver sword, the mage came in with a thrust, however—

“That won't pierce...”

The point of his blade reached Eanru's chest, but the blade could only pierce his clothing. There was no way a mere blade made by a human could pierce a dragonnewt's skin. In that case, just who was the one who would take advantage of this opening?

“I'll be taking that arm.”

Forming his hand like a blade, Eanru severed Suimei Yakagi's right arm. Losing his dominant arm was the price he paid for closing into close combat where he had the disadvantage. His right arm flew off, and blood started gushing out of the opening.

From a distance, Eanru could hear the hero's scream. And before him, he could see the man's face twist in anguish. However, Suimei Yakagi did not fall back. Far from that, he stepped forwards as if to say an opening was made by having his arm cut off.

But even this was within the range of Eanru's expectations. Striking first, and then sacrificing one's own flesh and bones to create an opening, was a technique which was pretty much commonplace. However, what he thrust out was outside of Eanru's expectations, for some reason, it was the arm that had been reduced to a round slice.

It wouldn't reach. It wasn't long enough. Did he misread the distance? No, the reason he thrust forward his right arm was likely just simple desperation. It could be summarized as the limits of a human, instead of thinking of it properly, they prioritized attacking. And just at that moment, Suimei Yakagi's mouth moved.

“Is it alright? Like this.”

—The severed right arm that was fluttering in the air suddenly changed

its trajectory, and jumped towards Eanru. Seeing that movement, he involuntarily made a broad grin.

“–Haha. So it's come to this?”

The reason his words were coloured in joy, was because it was the first time in a while that a technique completely exceeded his expectation. But the unexpected events did not stop there, the opening of the flying right arm lined up with the stump Suimei Yakagi was extending and pressed against it.

“SEAAAAAAAH!”

Immediately following that, a magic circle formed at the opening of the lined up wound, and rotated as it gave off a green brilliance. At the same time, he stepped into the ground intensely. The air he drew in to its limits. The ether wind he scattered. The breaking ground. And with a fist which was in no way inferior to one he could make when he was unhurt, he let out a single strike.

“T-tch!!”

The fist caught Eanru right in the face. He never once thought that a human would hold such destructive force in their fists. The earth beneath his feet was unable to withstand the force on its own, and as his feet shaved away at the earth beneath them, he was pushed backwards a great distance.

Withstanding all of the power, he came to a stop while still standing, and put his hand to his jaw, and as if to check its condition, he twisted around his neck as it cracked. Without wasting any time, Eanru leaped into the sky and came closer again as Suimei Yakagi let out a loathsome voice.

“Really? It pretty much didn't work at all...”

“Unfortunately, I'm quite the resilient being.”

“Despite being shaped like a person there wasn't any damage to the brain? That's why this is a damn scam.”

Both that complaint and the pain he received felt good to Eanru. He pushed on his neck with his hand and cranked it around as he once more checked on its condition. The man who had dealt him pain that went beyond his expectations was already making his next move, but Eanru couldn't help but yield himself to such a pleasant feeling that he hadn't felt for so long. As Suimei Yakagi shot out his magic, Eanru kicked the ground and created a grand cloud of dust.

“You punk! Copying humans now!?”

“Not at all, a smokescreen is not to be undervalued.”

The cloud of dust completely covered Eanru up. He couldn't see, but with this he also couldn't be seen. Abandoning his needless sensations, he devoted himself completely to reading presences. The opponent was a mage who held a vast amount of power. If he followed the mana, he could accurately locate Suimei Yakagi even without his eyes.

—That was as long as the person in question didn't multiply.

“He split? No, multiplied?”

“Fast Replication, I'll be using it here—!”

It wasn't only the presence of mana that multiplied. Within his closed field of vision, exactly identical presences were increasing in number. It was as if multiple Suimei Yakagi's suddenly appeared. Right after Eanru heard his voice, the ground suddenly broke apart.

“What—”

Eanru was tripped up. He couldn't tell what happened. Even as he reached into his memories, he could not find the magic's origin. The ground that was boiled by Suimei Yakagi's fire magic was not so weak that it would crumble so easily like that.

As he promptly focused his gaze right below his feet, he could see a bright light made of mana. Just when did those magic circle get set in place? As he raised his eyes from his current crisis, he could see Suimei Yakagi make a smile.

*(I see, that light spell from before—)*

What suddenly came to his mind, was that magic which brought down a rain of light. He wasn't just firing it down, the scars left in the earth seemed to have become magic circles.

—Before the fight began, Suimei Yakagi said that 'a magician's fight is one where we attack the enemy when they're unguarded.' Certainly this chain of attacks was outside his expectations and could be said to be a splendid tactic. Eanru did not receive a single wound from the ground crumbling beneath him, but he could not move well without being able to brace his legs properly. Because of that, Suimei Yakagi's next strike would get through.

The earth in his surroundings began to rise up. Coiling like a vortex, it stretched out to the sky, and then came flying in towards him. His opponent was supposed to know that an attack of such a mass would be ineffective against him—No, in that case this had a different purpose.

“—Ground Seal.”

Looking up, all Eanru could see was an incessant avalanche of dirt. Before long, it completely covered him up.



... As the rising clout of dust settled down, the ground was smoothed out without any undulations, and at its centre was a shape like the ground had been coiled into a whirlpool. Seeing Eanru sink under the Ground Seal spell, Suimei could hear Hatsumi shout in exaltation as she was convinced he had won.

“You did it!”

“Nope.”

It was too soon to think of victory. Hatsumi could only let a puzzled 'Eh?' at the complete contrast between what she saw before her eyes and the way Suimei was speaking. Suimei held out his hand and urged her to step back, and just as he did, the whirlpool of earth burst open with a thunderous roar. And from the earth that once more soared into the sky,

the dragonnewt Eanru made his appearance.

“—When I heard you say 'attack when they're unguarded,' I thought it would be a surprise attack. But I see, so it held this kind of meaning huh.”

As he gave out words of praise, he spoke in a refreshing tone as if he had not received any damage at all. Grinding his teeth secretly while seeing his opponent like that, Suimei replied frivolously.

“It's just the difference between cowardice and elegance.”

“My goodness, I've learned a lot from you. Since it was standard for mages to chant and fire, my actions have unexpectedly become quite monotonous and dull it seems, but—It feels good to be overthrown?”

“Well, you're welcome.”

As Suimei replied while implying he was also saying 'Shut up,' Eanru questioned him in a puzzled tone. At the same time, he fired off a harsh gaze with a topaz like glint in his eye.

“You realized I wasn't defeat from that just now right? Why did you not fire in the meantime?”

“Who knows?”

“I don't think you would be one to overlook such an ideal opening. It was the same when your magic unnaturally paused earlier. In that case, there must be a reason you couldn't fire.”

“ ... ”

“From the looks of it, it seems I hit the mark.”

Seeing that expression filled with confidence, Suimei once more ground his teeth. It could be said that Eanru's guess was a complete bull's-eye. Just as he said, the reason Suimei stopped firing magic was because he wasn't able to. Due to the consecutive use of magic, entropy in the area was nearing its limit.

In that situation, he was unable to deal a decisive blow, having said that, using some half assed magic that would not cause the magic melt phenomenon to occur would be completely futile. That's why he chose a

spell that would at least buy him some time.

Magic woven together using modern magic theory could be cast quickly. However, it also increased entropy greatly, so it was unable to separate itself from the bottleneck of needing an interval between spells. Because of that, he could end up in a situation where he was just a single step away like he was now. He knew of the merits and demerits, but nevertheless, falling into this kind of situation was vexing all the same.

After wiping off the dirt and sand from his body, the man before his eyes once more took a combat stance. That figure which stood in front of Suimei, who had been blocked by his own bottleneck, was composed and did not have a single blemish. He was just like the very representation of a powerful being who could not be hindered.

From his outer appearance, he reminded Suimei more of an oriental dragon, but his fighting style lined up perfectly with the one of a western dragon. This also applied to the etymology of the dragon itself, the origin of the evil eye which became the draconic eye. Since the eight great dragon kings from the Lotus Sutra also had poisonous eyes, he couldn't be absolutely certain of the distinction. But because his ground sealing spell didn't work, it was difficult to imagine that his origins lay in those water gods. The power to suck up and scatter the earth came from western dragons. There was no mistaking that fact.

Just the fact that he resembled the existence known as a dragon posed a considerable threat to Suimei, but what was truly dreadful were his attacks and the weight behind them. For a while now, he had been observing those powerful shockwave attacks right before his eyes. It was physically impossible to do with Eanru's slender body, but if his weight wasn't properly reflected by his appearance, it would be a different story. This was especially the case for creatures which were not human, they often carried weight far beyond how they appeared. Therefore, it was a power different from magic, just from pure brute strength, it held the same 'principle' as the suprarational Long Sword of the Morning Sun that Hatsumi used. Those attacks just held that much power.

That man was a master in close range combat. However, it could also be

said that it was a poor move to stay too far away from him. Looking at it from a scientific angle, he had something like a high output microwave shockwave combined with a noise weapon which formed a plasma emission device. From a magic angle, it could be described as exponentially increasing the heat in the area and causing forced combustion, leading to that end result. The thing he used before the fighting began burned their entire surroundings to nothing. Just like his breath, it was possible to control its directionality as well.

“Though lightning breath is way scarier...”

Suimei was reminded of a similar attack he had seen before. It was different from the dragon's roar, but it was also a creature who took on the shape of a human and let out a 'breath that killed all living beings' from the depths of its mouth. Among the destructive organic attacks that human shaped creatures above ground could use, it was considered one of the most atrocious. Because it held a unique nature which dulled defences, it was an absurd technique which no defensive spells could dampen.

Even in the modern world, that sort of creature which used such an excessive attack against people existed. They could be said to be the strongest kin which stood at the summit of the entire ecosystem. That power far surpassed human intellect, and was like an illusion that came right out of those legends and fairy tales where heroes would appear. It could be said to be a power from a completely different dimension.

And all of those creature, without exception, took the shape of a human. It could just be that in this world as well, that law also existed, and the life-form known as a dragonnewt was just one such creature.

As if to prove this, the dragonnewt Eanru began to show movements that could not be described as merely 'superhuman.' Eanru leaped around the surroundings like he was toying with Suimei, even with the eyes of a magician, he was unable to see everything. The reason he was unable to follow Eanru with his eyes despite Eanru's movements not being that quick, was because he was moving in a way that a human could not possibly imagine doing. As the green thunderclap struck the ground and

leaped to a new location, Suimei would follow the trajectory with his gaze, but before he could notice, he had looked too far. When he realized and returned his gaze backwards, the only thing he could catch a glimpse of was the trail of light left behind Eanru's movements. Like chasing a fly with his eyes, he constantly lost sight of Eanru, and eventually, no matter where he looked, he was unable to grasp Eanru's figure.

Before these movements from another dimension, Suimei had no hands he could play. Therefore, Suimei decided to increase the output of his mana furnace. With that single thought, the reactor core within his body was released, and with that figurative fire thrown into the furnace, his heart rate was agitated. The throbbing sound was louder than any other he could hear as it assaulted his body, going even further than his limits, he pushed his body on as far as it could.

“Just how much mana...”

Eanru was still untraceable, but he let out a voice in admiration.

–The mana furnace was a sort of organ which generated mana which matched the scale of a magician's mana consumption and helped support it. For a normal magician, the limits of their own mana that they could use stably without triggering an overflow, called 'regular mana,' was established.

And then, when they used magic, that regular mana was accompanied by the mana generated by the mana furnace, and manifested mysteries. After regular mana was exhausted, the mana from the furnace would overtake it and cause the magician to run dry. The technique known as reactor core release was used to avoid that condition by overflowing the regular mana and raising the output of the furnace.

When that happened, up to the limits that the magician's flesh could withstand it, it was possible to continuously cause the mana produced to swell. And then, when the scale of mana increases greatly, the use of magic which consumed a tremendous amount of mana became possible, and the effective range would also widen. It pushed one's body to a higher-order existence, and increased the mysteries that one could

perform.

He still couldn't see Eanru's figure. It was fatal that he was unable to grasp his location, but he had one way that came to mind to do so. The moment Eanru went on the offensive was the first time Suimei was able to identify the monster's location.

Suimei applied spells which strengthened his physical abilities and elevated the strength of his body. After he finished casting both of these, he struck light lightning at Eanru's back. The strike itself could be said to be good enough to bestow certain death, Suimei's body was pushed well beyond its limits, and after that strike, Eanru held his ground. Seeing how he was not blown away, Eanru had no openings at all, but Suimei still judged it to be a good opportunity.

Eanru came to a stop with a fist still pushing into his back. Before he could attempt to escape from Suimei's domain, the surrounding atmosphere was warped by magic. And then, changing the location of Eanru's centre of gravity, Suimei dulled his movements. And in no time at all, he strengthened gravity's hold.

“–Gravitatem Bis Coniuctum!” (Gravity Equation, Two-Fold Multiplication!)

This was not enough. Without piling up magics, he concatenated the next magic with the previous one, and erased the time lag between them.

“–Gravitatem Triple Contexitur!” (Gravity Equation, Three-Fold Multiplication!)

If Eanru had even a single free moment, he would be able to escape from the gravity cage. Thus, Suimei could not stop his hand, mouth, or magic.

Suimei could catch a glimpse of Eanru's bitter yet delighted face. 'Enchant me more.' 'Make me grind my teeth harder.' Suimei could understand those thoughts of his just from that expression. That appearance did not waver at all even inside the gravity cage, it could only be described as terrifying.

In that case, Suimei fired magic from the five elements. Using the teachings of the five practices of the Bodhisattvas which mutually helped each other and organize the world, he manifested the chemical elements which antagonized each other and gave birth to destruction. After creating a defensive circle below Hatsumi, the raging five elements gradually reacted with each other and caused an annihilation effect—and blew away the world.

The scale of the blast surpassed that of Eanru's dragon roar. This time, the black wood tree forest was scattered away from the northern Alliance territory without a trace. However, even after blowing away the forest, he was still unable to defeat a dragonnewt. Seeming to have a resistance to this sort of attack which depended completely on destructive force, Eanru was standing outside Suimei's range while laughing enjoyably.

The effect of the five elements was too weak, an attack based on a higher order concept did not seem to be able to provide a telling blow to the dragonnewt. At the same time that Suimei came to this conclusion, he let out a deliberately loud scream from the pain which assaulted his back. Unexpectedly, his feet wavered. Because of that opening, his cold sweat turned to ice as it slipped off his back. And before his eyes, was the figure of a thunderclap that did not overlook even the smallest opening.

“I've got you, Suimei Yakagi.”

Suimei immediately protected his head with his arm, and a fist came flying through his defences and jolted his head. The left arm he put up as defence was bent backwards, and as if that was not enough, each of his legs took a strike, and finally an extraordinary kick was driven into his torso.

“Guu, ha—ah...”

Sent flying by the kick, Suimei's body rolled across the ground. While conscious that he was rolling around as his head was whipped around and jolted into a haze, he immediately started to apply healing magic to the broken parts of his body. Even as he immediately made a comeback, Eanru's shadow was right before his eyes. He once more showed Eanru an

opening, and it was absolutely necessary to withstand this attack.

“Zuu, gu, gahaa....”

With every strike he received, Suimei applied healing to his body. However, naturally, his healing gradually could not make it in time, and the movements of his body began to falter. While taking strikes which could be compared to being struck by a massive iron ball, he was reduced to tatters and sent flying.

–I am, going to lose here? Me?

Rolling across the ground multiple times, Suimei came to a stop lying face down. He could taste blood and dirt in his mouth. From the consecutive wounds without any time for a break, both his body and heart were screaming. But even so, he tried to stand. He clawed at the ground and grasped lumps of earth.

And then, a voice was fired at him from the front, as if it had seen through him completely.

“Is this the end?”

“Shut up...”

“But, you can't stand right?”

“Shut up!”

“If you can't come after me, then I'll take that woman with me, you know?”

“SHUT UUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUP!!”

“That's it! Scream! If you can never hand her over then scream out your feelings! Howl! And lay everything bare! There should be more to your power than this! It isn't something that you hold back this late in the game!”

He didn't need to be told. Just as a swordsman drew their sword deciding that they would gladly accept death when they did, a magician also put their life on the line the moment they decided to take action, and ought to burn to exhaustion both their soul and mana.

Therefore, he stood. Until his body would be rendered completely immobile. Until his heart twisted and broke. Until the day that he lost sight of that dream that he was aiming for ever since that day with both his eyes.

“—Fiamma! Est lego! Vis Wizard! Hex agon Aestua Sursum, Impedimentum Mors!” (Assemble flames! Like the cry of the magician's resentment! Give form to the agony of death and burst into flames, bestow the one who obstructs me with a dreadful destiny!)

“You've already shown me that magic earlier!”

That was right. He had shown him. He had shown him, but this was the opening move.

As if replying to the thought deep within his heart, the magic took on a different shape. As if it was a jet engine, the fire shot out behind Suimei, and as he grasped Ashurbanipal's stone within his right hand, a dazzling conflagration wrapped around his arm.

Pouncing at the opening, Eanru leaped in from the front. Showing contempt for that lapse in judgment, Suimei slipped into the chest of the leaping dragonnewt. As Eanru opened his eyes wide in surprise, Suimei enacted his magic with all his might.

“—FIAMMA! O ASHURBANIPAL!” (Shine! And pierce through! Oh Ashurbanipal's revolving stone!)

The right hand which grasped the gem became a fist, the flames bursting towards the back became a mechanism to aid in acceleration, and that fist buried itself in Eanru's solar plexus. This time more than ever, Eanru was unable to get away from taking damage from that fist, and was sent flying backwards. And then, before he could regain his posture, Ashurbanipal's flames rushed in after him. From within those flames, Suimei could hear Eanru's howl.

“NOT YEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEET!”

He let out loud roar that pierced the eardrums and which seemed like it could even blow away the flames that were wrapping around him. Even

after receiving the brilliant radiance from the gem which granted the fate of ruin to all living beings, the dragonnewt's knee did not strike the ground.

In that case, their next collision was approaching. Without basking in the lingering memory of his magic, Suimei prepared his last hand as he gazed towards the short ranged battle that was once more about to begin.

Immediately, a light made of mana formed around his right hand shaped like a blade. It sparkled like the light of dawn, and using that, he quietly drew out letters and symbols which would give birth to magic.

A magic circle instantly sprung forth at his feet. As he continued his actions, magic circles began to take shape outside the circumference of the first. As he wove his magic, his inescapable past rushed through his heart. Despite having power, his heart was weak. So on that day, that time, that battlefield, that unrecoverable event happened.

In that place, he had lost something important. All because as he stood before an excessively powerful existence, all because he was unable to move. His defences were late. Because his father protected him, the red dragon's roar that was supposed to strike him, ended up taking his father as a substitute.

And at that time, he succeeded his father's will. In exchange for his own self which was not saved, he would save the women who couldn't be saved. He certainly swore to this. That's why, on that day, in that place, that weak Yakagi Suimei died. That's why—

“I'll never let anything like that happen again...”

What he wove as he muttered like he was expelling all the air from his lungs was—a true chant.

—The Progenitor emerges from the sky at dawn, and accomplishes the wishes of all heaven and earth.

—To release the Apostle from his mission, and to release the Apostle from his own hands, the Progenitor descended before the Apostle.

As the chant was exposed, the world began to shake. Quietly, steadily,

and eventually violently, and as if nobody was allowed to stand in that place, greatly. Having finally shaken off the flames, Eanru held his breath at the change in his surroundings. At this distance, even if he ran right away, he would be unable to stop the magic from completing. Therefore...

—And thus the Apostle fell to the ground. Because his wings of light were plucked.

—And thus the Apostle fell into hell. Because his body deemed a nest of malice to be acceptable.

—And so he fell. And the Progenitor passed Judgment, and drove the Apostle away.

—And so I pray. Just as the Progenitor demonstrated. Yes, to manifest that infinite light with no end just as he did.

And just as Eanru got into range—

“Everything becomes unknown and is ■■■—!”

He was screaming 'delivered.' Towards that domain he could not see. He was howling 'delivered.' So that he could surely grasp that infinite light in his hand. However, that light that Suimei was trying to grasp, was still too strong, and it was still too early.

“U, gu... Shit, DELIVEEEEEEEEEEEEEERED!!”

No matter how strong their will, a magic whose words were not complete would end in failure. The aftermath of that torrent of power and notions that he was unable to control wrapped around the two colliding men and caught them.

As the blinding light died down, a cold night air blew through the battlefield. All that was there, was the scorched earth and the carbonized wreckage of trees that piled up as charcoal on the ground. Looking from where he was blown away to, Eanru spoke doubtfully.

“... What did you do? The air has reverted to how it was a little before?”

“The aftermath, stagnated time it seems, it's something like space rewinding. It's probably an effect of the outbreak of low speed light.

Because it broke out, time is flowing to match it or something... Well, that kind of thing doesn't matter..."

From the heat filling his inner organs and the red hot feeling assaulting his throat, Suimei let out a bloody cough. His internal organs were slightly damaged from that just now.

But even so, the single strike that he staked everything on had failed. What had happened here was a far cry from what he imagined in his head. Because he was unable to make that last sound needed for the spell, it ended in failure. No, because he was still insufficient to use such a magic, the last sound needed for the spell couldn't come up.

Due to the rebound caused by magic failure, 'return over,' Suimei slowly fell to his knees. Because he threw his entire being into this high stakes bet, he had no spare energy left to prepare for any counter measures. A strong numbness assaulted his body. He would be unable to move for a while.

"..."

It was a fatal mistake in a battle, but the other side was also not moving. No, couldn't move. It was likely that Eanru was also wounded. He had completely taken the surprise attack from Ashurbanipal's flame, and he took the torrent from the 'infinite light without end' to his body. Even without the magic manifesting, it still had an effect.

As Suimei remained immobile, a shadow suddenly appeared before his eyes. As he raised his eyes, he could see a girl in a uniform drawing her sword from its sheathe.

"Hatsumi... I told you, to step back..."

"You can't move right? Then, someone has to step forward right?"

"If you were watching just now, you should be able to tell that you don't stand a chance."

"Tch— , I can tell without you saying it. But, even so, I can at least buy time until you can move again... And besides, both you and him didn't get out of that lightly right?"

“Kuku, certainly so.”

Eanru smiled, and just as Suimei thought, he still did not move. If Hatsumi stepped forward, this could be a once in a lifetime chance, but even so Eanru was being finicky about putting his burned clothing and smashed body in order. On the other hand, Hatsumi took her stance and aimed the tip of her blade at Eanru's eyes. However, the hand which was gripping the hilt of that sword was letting out a cold sweat, and was trembling ever so slightly.

“Are we doing it?”

As Hatsumi asked, Eanru shook his head.

“No, I'm done. I'll have you allow me to leave here.”

“Eh?”

“What?”

Hearing Eanru's unexpected words, Hatsumi and Suimei both raised their doubts.

“What, is it strange?”

“Well that's...”

“Since the fight has been interrupted, it just means that I'll leave it at that. The chance to retreat has just come around is all.”

They couldn't tell if that was his real intention. Hearing his superstitious way of speaking with no purpose, Suimei questioned him in a dubious tone.

“Is that fine? Weren't you gonna take Hatsumi with you?”

“That's true, but it is something I was to acquire after being victorious over you. Besides, I don't want to leave you behind with a grudge.”

“A grudge?”

“That's right. If I took the hero with me, a grudge would be left between the two of us. The fight between us would become a fight filled with a surplus of hatred. That is not what I wish for. An enjoyable fight, even if it

is unfair, is something that must be done honestly from the front.”

“That's why, since there was an excess of that this time, you didn't fight with me to the end?”

“That's right.”

Eanru closed his eyes as he quietly nodded. It was an absurd reason, but precisely because this was a man who sought enjoyment from the battlefield, it was not necessarily a lie.

While Suimei still held his suspicions, Eanru began to show movements that he was about to withdraw. It seemed he really did have no more intention of fighting. Dispersing his overflowing fighting spirit, the hot atmosphere returned to a cool breeze. Seeing that figure just before his eyes, Suimei sat cross legged where he was, and let out a somewhat astonished laugh.

“... You're really outrageous huh. I've never met a guy like you up until now who so genuinely liked fighting.”

“I can think of no better words of praise. They make all the time I spent polishing my skills worthwhile.”

Eanru humbly smiled and turned around, then began to leave. And as if leaving behind words for a fellow comrade in arms...

“Now then, Suimei Yakagi. I shall see you again.”

“Yeah.”

It was a promise for a rematch. Even though Suimei didn't want to ever fight someone like that again, even though he was completely reluctant, he couldn't help but acknowledge Eanru's implicit request. His heart may have simply been replying to his opponent's sincerity.

After Eanru left, the quiet forest eventually returned. There was still the sound of crackling embers, but even so it felt silent because what had been making a racket in his heart had finally vanished. The stress that had been piling up in Hatsumi's body seemed to have dispersed, and she sat down right where she was with a thud.

“He's gone...”

“Yup.”

“Just what was he, that man?”

“Who knows. All I can say for now is that he's a strange enemy. Also, that he's a battle maniac.”

After giving his brief personal opinion on Eanru, Suimei let out all the breath in his lungs.

“Shit, next time, I won't lose...”

After spitting out all the unpleasant air in his lungs, he leaked out vexed words as he would overcome the next obstacle. He wasn't defeated. To the contrary, he accomplished his goal this time around, if he was pushed to say it, it was a victory. However, the battle ended with Suimei at a disadvantage. It didn't make him feel like he won. So conversely, he could only say that he was defeated.

“Are you alright?”

“Well, as long as I'm alive I'll manage somehow or other.”

“I see.”

After answering Hatsumi and hearing her brief reply, she suddenly seemed to remember something and once more began speaking.

“Now that I think of it, you seemed to be listening carefully to his words quite a bit though.”

“Hm?”

“You talked right? With that guy.”

“Now that you mention it, you're right.”

“Why? There's no need to listen to what the enemy has to say right? You also talked to him pointlessly in the middle of the fight.”

“Well that kind of thing happens. The subtleties behind that kind of fight to the death that turns into different kinds of matches and gets all jumbled up has kind of a tacit understanding behind them.”

“It would have been fine to trap him while he was talking.”

“I agree completely. But with that kind of opponent I just can't help but feel it's too boorish. Isn't it? An enemy you have to defeat head on, anyone out there has one or two of those no matter what. That's why I don't want to lie to myself. Of course, I was thinking of ways of letting only you get away you know?”

Honestly speaking, that was Suimei's true desire. If Eanru's objective was Hatsumi, in the worst scenario he could just transfer Hatsumi on her own to a place he couldn't reach. However, Hatsumi showed him an expression like she didn't consent of that at all.

“... Even so, you're making a face like you wanna say I wasn't thinking at all.”

“Well, yeah.”

“Hey, you saw my power right?”

After Hatsumi nodded once, Suimei continued.

“I'm still midway on my path, but I'm well aware that the power I hold is great. In short, I'm something like an autonomous powder keg. If a guy like that did as he pleased, and flung around his power without knowing anything, you can tell what will happen right?”

“That's...”

“I'm a magician. Not just monsters, I've also beaten many people to death with magic. Of course, at those times, it was nothing but guys who were attacking me, I had not other choice, so I did it. But what if that was not the case? If I swung around my power without properly understanding the circumstances of those around me, and if that turned into something that could not be undone—”

A heavy silence filled the air. Hatsumi could not say anything back to him. It was obvious. This was something that Hatsumi, who had no memories yet possessed power, had to be acutely aware of regarding herself as well.

“I don't want to regret anything after I've done it. That's why I'll have things I want to know, and things I'll doubt partway through. The opponent's personal circumstances is occasionally something that can't be seen. Just because they're hostile, it is far too hasty to decide that they have to be defeated no matter what. Well, if you're too cautious it's also possible to lose an opportunity, so I can't really say which way is better. It's nothing but things to worry about huh? So many things...”

After letting out a self deprecating laugh and looking down on himself, Hatsumi had nothing to say back to him. While Hatsumi made a face like she was carefully scrutinizing something, Suimei gave her his impression of Eanru.

“Well, even so, it didn't seem to me that he was trying to do something just though.”

“The moment he said he'll use me, there was no more room for negotiation.”

Hearing Hatsumi's gloomy declaration, Suimei let out a spiritless 'You're right huuh,' in reply. And then, he suddenly fell to the ground with his arms and legs spread out.

“Yakagi?”

“... I'm so tired I could die. I really, really want a futon.”

After his idiotic declaration, Hatsumi dropped her shoulders in a crestfallen manner. It didn't seem she would be able to pull him up any time soon.



The battle that was taking place on the plains between the Alliance army and the demon army, had already come to a close. The battle came to an end as it ended up in a draw due to sustained casualties, but the Alliance army who misread the strength of their enemy had suffered significantly more damage than the demon army.

Currently, outside the fortress which served as the stronghold in the area, the army was maintaining itself. Inside the main tent, the surviving

generals, Hatsumi's companions, Rumeiya, Lefille and the others were all present. And right now, hot air was suffocating them within that tent. It was a heat born of the war council they were holding on how the army should move from here on out. Weitzer, who was in a position where he had to carefully scrutinize all their plans, was listening to each and every proposal from the generals and staff officers.

“Your Highness, how about we pull the army back for a short while? If we pull them into an area with a ravine, it would put us in an advantageous...”

“No, in an area with a ravine it is also possible that we are put at a disadvantage. There are those among the demons that are able to fly through the skies. It would be better to resolutely pull back the entire line at once, and rally the army...”

“Both are out of the question. Until Hero-dono has returned, we cannot pull back.”

Opinions were being brought up indecisively, but Weitzer replied in a thundering voice. However, the generals and staff officers did not seem to be able to withdraw their opinions, and one among them clung on.

“However, if we remain like this too long, we will be unable to break the deadlock. If it comes to a fight on the open plains once more, we will take catastrophic casualties.”

“That is exactly why we have requested reinforcements from every vassal state. Wait until the soldiers and goods arrive.”

“Even while we wait, the anxiety of the soldiers will only increase! At this time we must display to them a firm plan! If we do not move the soldiers, they will believe that there is no plan and become shaken!”

It seemed Weitzer had reached the limits of his irritation before his officers and men who would not listen to him. Slamming both hands on top of the desk before him, he kicked aside the chair as he stood up abruptly.

“It is certainly as you all say, if we do not put ourselves in order, the

soldiers will become shaken! However, if we lose Hero-dono, there is no hope that our army will recover at all! Moreover, if we abandon Hero-dono and run away after she saved us, do you all really believe it is the proper choice to make?”

“... Ku!”

“You hear me!? In our position where we were saved by the hero, we have a position to protect that same hero! Those who make light of that have no right to rely on the hero! Everyone engrave this on your hearts!”

That thunderous shout held enough force to cause everyone present to sink into silence. It was as if they were tied down and no longer able to move. In the meantime, Rumeya, who was sitting at the foot of the table at the war council, began speaking to Lefille who was sitting beside her.

“... My goodness, seems like it's quite difficult for them huh.”

“Please don't talk like it's none of your business. Doesn't Rumeya-dono also have the right to speak here? As the guild master of a branch, please make some sort of beneficial statement.”

Hearing Lefille's somewhat exasperated opinion, Rumeya shrugged her shoulders.

“I've got no sense for the delicacies of tactics. Well no matter how it turns out, I'll at least listen.”

“Is that really alright...”

“It's fine it's fine~”

After giving a completely irresponsible response, Rumeya puffed away at her pipe. Both Felmenia and Liliana, who were also sitting next to them, made expressions like they were troubled at her indifferent attitude. Setting those girls aside, Rumeya called out to one of the nearby soldiers.

“... Hey hey, you over there. How are the reports from the scouts?”

“Ha! The demon army has already resigned. It seems even the reports from each of the fortresses state that the demon army has retreated.

However, regarding the possibility of an advance, they are still unable to come to a conclusion.”

“Even so they're beginning to retreat right? It's weird isn't it~. Even if we rallied at the end, if I had to say, they still held the advantage. Lefi, what do you think?”

“There are two reasons for them to resign their army. They fulfilled their goal, or they sustained unmaintainable casualties. Certainly those demons took quite a lot of damage, but I don't think it was to the level where it would cause the army to resign.”

“Then, the demons accomplished their goal. That's, how it, ends up.”

“It's just as Lily says. In that case, the problem is...”

“Just what that was goal right...? So, Lefi. What's the answer you came up with?”

“The Alliance army had suffered great casualties and is at a disadvantage, while the hero Hatsumi-dono is currently untraceable. It's hard to say that the damage done to the army was flawless, so in that case there is an eighty to ninety percent chance that their goal was the hero Hatsumi-dono.”

Lefille's answer was pretty much conclusive. Felmenia then showed a somewhat perturbed expression hearing that.

“S-so Suimei-dono failed? Is that what Lefille is saying?”

To Felmenia who had complete and absolute faith in him, Suimei's failure to rescue Hatsumi was something she could not suddenly believe. However, Lefille shook her head.

“No, it is not necessarily as Felmenia-jou says. The demons' plan was centralized on separating Hatsumi-dono from the army. Just from that fact you could say that their goal was accomplished. In that case, there wouldn't be much in terms of consequences to pull the army back. And besides, there haven't been any declarations from them that the hero was defeated. There's a higher probability that she's alive.”

“Ah...”

If the hero was defeated, the demons would surely raise her head to the sky as they let out a great roar. If that happened, the morale of the Alliance would fall to the lowest depths. And then just like that, if they attacked while ignoring the casualties, it would be the shortest path to annihilating the Alliance army.

“That's assuming that the demons have that kind of craftiness and intelligence though.”

“Those things are cunning. They take advantage of weaknesses immediately. That's why they aimed for Hatsumi-dono specifically.”

Saying that, Lefille brought her predictions of the demons' plans to an end. And then, she gave the answer to what Rumeya had asked about in the first place.

“The Alliance army will likely be licking their wounds here for a while. If they poorly pull back their army out of fear of casualties, the other side will only perceive that as a chance, and it would affect morale here as well. In the worst case, the retreating demon army could just turn around.”

“So, you're telling me to say that to them?”

As Rumeya pointed her finger at Weitzer's group, Lefille and the others nodded back to her. Rumeya then turned towards Weitzer, and then once more looked back at Lefille. That side of the tent had still yet too cool down from their heated debate. If anything, they were just getting more heated up. The staff officers were unable to let go of the idea of retreating the army, and even Gaius and Selphy who had been quiet up to this point were suddenly speaking to the war council.

“Aaaaaaaaah no way no way no waaaaay. Instead of jumping into that kind of crap I'd rather just go cut into the demon forces... Hey, I said it on impulse but should we just go do it? We can just go right now in a jiffy. Hey? Don't you think it's a good idea?”

Rumeya's tails were shifting around restlessly as she winked at them.

Seeing this, Lefille let out a grand sigh like she was fed up with her.

“Why are therianthropes all like this...”

“It can't be helped. They're just that kind of people.”

“Clarissa-dono is the peculiar one huh...”

“Seems so.”

“Yup.”

As Lefille agreed, Liliana also nodded her head repeatedly. While the girls were talking among themselves like that, suddenly the cloth covering to the tent was flung open. And at the same time, a soldier came jumping in while panting.

“I-I have a report!”

“What is it!?”

The one to respond, was the one at the centre of the war council, Weitzer. The soldier then caught his breath, and replied happily.

“Hero-sama is returning to the camp!”

Hearing that happy report, the tent was filled with relieved voices. Weitzer immediately restrained the others, and once more spoke to the soldier.

“And so, is Hero-dono safe?”

“Yes. She is walking towards the camp on her own feet.”

Finding a pause in their conversation at her own discretion, Lefille questioned the soldier.

“Is Hero-dono alone?”

“No, the young man in black clothing was with her. However, it seems that Hero-dono is lending him her shoulder as they walk...”

Hearing that report, Lefille and Felmenia bolted out of their seats.

“Is he wounded!?”

“Is he safe!?”

Pushed back by their menacing looks at the thought of a crisis, the soldier fell on his butt. But even so, Suimei's condition was a much higher priority for the two of them, and they pushed the soldier for answers without any restraint. While completely bewildered, the soldier somehow managed to answer them.

“Eh, ah, no. From the looks of it he didn't seem injured, but it wasn't a condition where you could exactly say he's safe either...”

“Get to the point! Speak clearly! Clearly!”

“It's extremely important! Please pull yourself together!”

“Don't say such unreasonable things you two. Come on, step back a bit.”

As Rumeiya was trying to soothe them, Liliana got straight to the point in an easy to understand way.

“First, let's go.”

And then, everyone inside the tent decided to take a break from the war council, and left the tent in succession.



After passing through the black wood forest, Suimei and Hatsumi returned to Alliance territory, arrived at the fortress, and were now within its protective walls. Hatsumi took a seat on a wooden box while Suimei plunked down onto the ground to take a break. Before long, Felmenia and the others came running over. Spotting their figures, Suimei waved at them with a smile.

“Oooh, I'm back.”

“Welcome back, Suimei-dono. It seems that you were safe.”

Felmenia replied in a somewhat relieved voice. And sitting as he was, he gave her a high five. On the other hand, Lefille put on a pleasant yet astonished smile as she spoke.

“You're always worn down to tatters huh.”

“I can't say anything back to that.”

“Welcome, back. Are you alright?”

“Oh. I'm super tired though.”

Due to the fatigue and the exhaustion of his mana, he wasn't able to move, but the damage he received had all been healed. Looking at this scene from the side, Hatsumi bent her head slightly to one side, and questioned Suimei.

“These people are?”

“My companions.”

“That's right.”

“Mhmm.”

“... Not that I care, but it's nothing but girls huh.”

“Eh? Well, that's right.”

“Fuu...”

While Suimei casually replied, Hatsumi looked at him suspiciously. Suimei however, couldn't tell why her attitude suddenly changed, and was just making a boneheaded expression.

“What?”

“Nothing. At any rate, aren't you too carefree? Despite coming to save me, I had to lend you my shoulder to return.”

“Ah? It can't be helped right? It was a pain to walk on my own.”

“How lame.”

“It's not something I should be saying after coming out to save you on my own, but. Whose fault is it? Whose?”

“Uu... If you say that, I can't put up a strong front...”

As Suimei looked at her with half closed eyes, Hatsumi could only groan with a 'Gunununu...' Since she was a serious person to begin with, if she was told something that was completely true, she couldn't say anything back. While they were having that little exchange, the next wave of people

came out of the tent. Spotting Hatsumi sitting on the box, Selphy leaped towards her.

“Hatsumi!”

With a delighted voice, Selphy embraced Hatsumi. Hatsumi was both surprised and flustered at the sudden embrace.

“Oomph! Selphy, just a little, if you suddenly do that...”

“Hatsumi... I'm glad you're safe.”

“... Thank you. I'm safe because of all of you.”

As Selphy raised her voice happily in relief, Hatsumi also replied to her with a relieved voice as she showed her gratitude. After her conversation with Selphy calmed down, Weitzer and Gaius, who had been watching from the side, called out to her.

“Hero-dono. Welcome back.”

“Aah, I'm back. Thank goodness you're all safe.”

“With this I can finally relax and have some booze.”

“That's all Gaius cares about huh.”

Going along with Gaius' carefree attitude, laughs began to burst out in their surrounding. Looking at them from the side, Suimei made a broad grin.

“Ooh, I properly accomplished my goal right?”

“... I see.”

“Yeah, you're really outrageous huh.”

On one hand, a complicated expression as he averted his gaze, and on the other, a pleasant and cheerful expression. During their exchange, Rumeya, who at some point in time had seated herself on a nearby box, called out to Suimei while smoking her pipe.

“Suimei. I heard you were borrowing her shoulder though?”

“That's it that's it! Just what happened!? For Suimei-dono to be unable

to move...”

“Certainly. If you had just gone to search, it is weird, for Suimei to be, unable to move.”

After Liliana raised her suspicions, next was Gaius.

“Was it demons?”

“That's, hard to imagine.”

After Liliana's declaration, each and every one of Suimei's party were nodding repeatedly. To them, no matter how many mere demons came flying at him, they wouldn't pose a threat to Suimei. Wanting to cut to the core of the issue, Lefille pointed her gaze towards him.

“So? Suimei-kun.”

“Aah, there was just a little formidable enemy that showed up is all.”

“By that you mean, a demon general?”

“Hm? Demon general?”

In reply to Gaius' question, for some reason Suimei cocked his head to the side. Looking at him act like that, Hatsumi made a completely stunned expression.

“There was one, right? Did you actually forget? You're kidding right? No matter how you look at it...”

Hearing Hatsumi's dumbfounded tone, Suimei started to think seriously with his head which had poor blood circulation at the time. Now then, just what were they talking about with that demon general? Making a groan as he thought of this, he looked up at the sky, then the ground, and then finally he remembered that there was in fact something like that.

“... Ah. Aah, AAH! Now that you mention it, there was that guy who used the shitty imitation technique!”

“Seriously...?”

Hatsumi's exasperated voice rang in the air. She didn't think at all that

he would just up and forget about it. Seeing her strike her forehead with her palm like she had a headache, Suimei could only make a bitter smile. The shock of fighting Eanru was just so big that he had completely forgotten about Vuishta. Judging that she wouldn't be able to get to the point with Suimei like that, Selphy turned to Hatsumi.

“Then a demon general really did appear?”

“Yes. We fought with a demon general.”

“We fought, but that kind of small fry wasn't really a problem. More importantly...”

“A-a demon general, a small fry... Small fry... is it?”

As Suimei treated matters concerning the demons like they didn't matter at all, Selphy began to mutter his words repeatedly in a dumbfounded tone from within her hood. To them, the demons were a major threat, so they couldn't imagine what Suimei was saying at all. It was not just her, both Weitzer and Gaius were frowning as well. As if to urge on the conversation to the next stage, Lefille spoke up to Suimei.

“From the way you've been speaking, some other opponent other than the demon general was the one to wear you down to tatters like that?”

“Yeah.”

After Suimei nodded, Hatsumi cut in.

“Thanks to Yakagi we were able to defeat the demon general successfully, but after that, he showed up right away.”

“And, just what was he?”

“He called himself a dragonnewt.”

“Dra!?”

“A dragonnewt!?”

Both Gaius and Weitzer yelled out in surprise as Hatsumi looked at the two of them curiously.

“... Is it bad?”

“Bad you say... It ain't bad but, no, rather than bad it's better to say...”

Gaius was seized by shock and unable to get to the point. Suimei looked around to get an answer from someone else, but every one of them was making a surprised expression. The only one who seemed calm was Rumeya, so he fixed his gaze on her.

“Haa... A dragonnewt huh. They're a race that live in the mountain range to the north of the Alliance. It's said that they have the strongest bodies among all beings in this world. Well, in reality, they are outrageously powerful beings. They're the type who don't stick their heads into worldly affairs though. Rather, you fought that kind of guy?”

“Yeah.”

“Don't tell me you also absurdly did him in?”

“Not at all. It took everything I had just to have it declared as a draw due to injuries. Though it was closer to a loss.”

“You're really beyond common sense huh.”

Even with the addendum Suimei slapped on to the end of his declaration, Rumeya's astonishment only deepened. As their exchange finished, Suimei looked towards Lefille.

“I'd like to get Lefi-san's opinion as a reference too.”

“I'm of the same opinion as Rumeya-dono. The dragonnewts are strong. Moreover, even though they live in a land close to the demon territory, not only have they not been destroyed, they've been spreading. Despite being completely outnumbered, they have enough power to put up a fight with room to spare.”

Hearing her say that, Suimei was reminded of Eanru's monologue when he showed up.

“Aah. Now that you say it, he said they were pests or something huh.”

“That's right... After seeing that, I can only nod and say that he was an outrageous guy.”

As the two of them remembered what had happened and let out a deep

sigh, Selphy brought up her doubts.

“But why was a dragonnewt fighting with you two?”

“Who knows? He said he wanted to take Hatsumi along, but we weren't able to get more out of him.”

“T-take Hatsumi along!?”

“He said something like needing the hero's power, I wonder what it was?”

As Suimei nodded his head heavily, Weitzer let out a thunderous shout.

“Bastard, why did you not get such important information!?”

“Ha?”

“It's an important matter which involves Hero-dono you hear!? To not get such an —”

“Aaah dammit just shut the hell up already. He wasn't the kind of opponent you could get an answer out of using force. It can't be helped right? Ah? Or are you saying that you wanna go give it a try yourself? From the beginning to the end it was nothing but a trauma festival for me you hear? It was a dragon, a dragon! Can you fight against that monster that can bring ruin to the world's seven billion people and the civilization they created!? AH!? AH!?”

“Th-that's...”

Suimei bore his fangs as he stared daggers into Weitzer in anger. With a 'Gurururu...' he even started growling like a beast at him. Seeing this, Felmenia and Lefille started to try and soothe him with a 'Whoa there.'

“Am I a horse!?”

“Please calm down Suimei-dono. This isn't like you...”

“I'll end up unlike myself with this crap!”

“Suimei-kun. You're starting to become incoherent. He's different from the opponent you fought in your world right?”

“He's different, but a dragon is a dragon! UGAAAH!”

“You can't act violently Suimei-kun (*Giyu!*)”

“GYAAAAAAAAAAAAH! Lefi-san I'm breaking I'm breaking I'm breaking you're pressing down too hard dammiiiiit!”

As Lefille pinned down both his shoulders, everyone around them were looking at them in bewilderment not just from their actions, but from what they were talking about.

*(Suimei, it's, not like him.)*

*(I think he must have been driven into a corner quite hard right? I have seen Suimei-dono act like this before too...)*

Felmenia was reminded of the time that Suimei came to this world when he went on a rampage in the audience chamber. At that time, Suimei also completely lost his composure at the unreasonable situation thrust before him. He at least had the self control not to go berserk when he was using magic, but as one would expect, such behaviour that was more fitting for one his age would come out once in a while. Before long, after Suimei managed to calm down, Gaius decided to move along the conversation.

“Did you at least get his name?”

“Y-yeah... He called himself Eanru.”

“Eanru you say...”

“Fuu? Now then, just where have I heard that name before...”

Gaius didn't seem to have a clue, but Rumeya seemed that have heard it before. Having suddenly realized, Selphy's face became completely pale.

“Selphy?”

“... I have heard that name before. Over a hundred years ago, there was a terrifyingly strong dragonnewt. At that time, he was the one who defeated the 'Man-Eating Evil' that nobody was able to take down.”

“That's who he was?”

“If I remember right, my master called that dragonnewt Eanru. It is

probably...”

“... Good grief, so that samurai-like guy was that kind of opponent—Rather, if it was something a hundred years ago then he has quite the long lifespan huh?”

Suimei let out a sigh like he was fed up with up, and Rumeiya answered him.

“The dragonnewts, elves and dwarves are all the same in that they have long lifespans. I've also heard stories of that man eating evil too, that dragonnewt has probably already lived a hundred or two hundred years hasn't he?”

“Uheeeh.... There's that many people in this world who live that long? That gives me chills.”

As Suimei acted out by grabbing his shoulders and trembling, Felmenia joined the conversation.

“Is it bad if they live long?”

“Back in my world most of the guys who live for a long time are dangerous, or rather that's the standard. Even those who live for a hundred years are all dangerous, super dangerous.”

“For Suimei-dono to go so far...”

While Felmenia made a grim expression as she muttered, Suimei recalled those monsters with long lifespans. This applied to leader of the Society, the chairman, the monster professor, and the Ten who Fell to Greed. They were all magicians who possessed dreadful power. During this pause in the conversation, Hatsumi suddenly raised her voice.

“Can we bring this talk to a close then? I'm alright, but...”

Hatsumi turned a somewhat timid look over to Suimei, and Suimei didn't bother putting up a strong front towards her consideration.

“I just want to sleep. Let's call it a night here.”

Guessing that Hatsumi was also tired, Suimei expressed his own desire to get some rest. It may be the case that a man should pretend to be tough

in these cases, but it would also do well for the soldiers' mentalities to give the hero some rest. Just as he was thinking of finding a place to rest and stood up, a presence suddenly appeared behind him. And as Suimei tried to confirm who that presence belonged to—

“Suimei-kun doesn't seem able to move. In that case.”

“Heh?”

Just as he thought he heard Lefille's voice, his arm was suddenly grabbed. And then, his body was pulled up. After being confusingly rotated and twisted in the air, when he realized what was going on, Suimei's body was placed on Lefille's back.

“Wai—, @×○△!?”

“Suimei-kun, you're speaking gibberish you know?”

“Whatever! What the hell are you doing Lefi-san!?”

“It seemed like it was troublesome for you to move around, so I thought I would carry you?”

He was thankful for her consideration, but because a man was being carried on a woman's back, he was getting weird looks from his surroundings.

“St-stop stop stop it! Let me down! I'm fine so just let me down!”

“No way. You're tired right? It's better not to force yourself.”

“Forget forcing myself, being carried by a girl is far too lame!”

“That can't be helped. It's because you used your power up to its limits.”

“That's not my...”

Fault, was what Suimei was trying to say, but then he suddenly noticed that Rumeiya was snickering at him.

“Ku, kukuku...”

“Wha-, you! Don't laugh!”

“But, you know....”



# Chapter 2

## Seeking the Hero's Weapon

With the third imperial princess of the Empire, Graziella Filas Rieseld now accompanying them on their journey, Reiji's party arrived at the self governed state of the Saadias Alliance. The self governed state at the west end of the northern region was a long and narrow territory which overlooked the ocean like Chile in South America.

The puzzling name of the self governed state of the Saadias Alliance came from their history of repeatedly joining and leaving the Saadias Alliance over administrative problems and events like the rise of the tyrant. Because of this, it's official name had never stabilized. Currently, its regional administration was entrusted to an autonomous parliament independent of the sovereign state Miazzen.

After arriving at the border, Reiji and the others boarded a carriage prepared by the Salvation Church, and were now headed towards the centre of the self governed state, the city of Attila. Following behind the carriage were the three knights from Astel, as well as several of Graziella's subordinates from the Imperial army. Riding in the carriage was Reiji's party of four. Because of the previous hostilities with Graziella, they thought it would be impossible to get along with her before leaving the Empire, but...

“Listen to me~! When we were in the audience chamber in the Empire, when his Imperial Majesty looked down at me, he was scowling you hear!? I didn't even do anything! Don't you think that's mean!?”

“Seriously. No matter who it is, he pressures them like that. He only holds it back a little towards relatives and close associates. Furthermore, what about that? He pushed this kind of duty on me. Despite always treating the words of the Goddess and the church as nothing but nonsense. It's only at these incomprehensible times that he lends an ear to some other guy. There's got to be a limit to his emotional instability.”

“And also! Duke Hadorious was it!? That guy is also quite evil! He throws people into traps right? And he takes hostages right? And he bothers Reiji right!?”

“Fuu. Every single one of those important guys are complete good for nothings.”

“Right~!?”

... For some reason, Mizuki and Graziella were having a convention for idle complaints inside the carriage. The targets of their complaints were the terrifying Nelferian Emperor and Duke Hadorious, and even Graziella had just called them 'good for nothings', but, setting that aside.

Matching the bumpy sounds as the carriage rolled down the road were their non-stop squawking voices as they raised an uproar. Titania looked over at the two of them curiously.

“... Mizuki, is surprisingly not a timid child at all it.”

Hearing those words that she was directing towards herself, Reiji responded to her from the side.

“Really. To think that little girl could let out those kinds of complaints to the one in front of her.”

“That's also the case, but I'm surprised that she's already reached the point of being able to talk with her Imperial Highness Graziella on equal terms...”

The one Mizuki was talking to was genuinely an authentic member of an imperial family. Graziella had previously told them not to be reserved, but in such a short amount of time it was still normal to at least speak politely and be hesitant of speaking to her in the first place.

The reason there was none of that going on could be said to be partially because she was simply ignorant. Since she was a modern day high school girl, she could not grasp the absurd concept of lèse-majesté at all. However, fundamentally...

“In general, Mizuki can just about get along with anyone. Whether it be

how she immediately closes the sense of distance between them or how the people she talks to somehow never think that she's being rude, it's one of Mizuki's good points.”

“You also know her bad points too right? Fufufu...”

“Hahaha... Well, yeah... It was all quite the disaster, in many ways.”

Reiji returned a dry laugh towards Titania's smile. Because the first thing that came to his mind when she mentioned Mizuki's bad points was what it was, he suddenly felt tired. Seeing this, Titania had an idea of what he was talking about.

“Could it be, that serious sickness I heard before called chuunibyou?”

“Yeah, it's a terrifying sickness. Mizuki's case was quite severe you see? On top of talking completely incomprehensibly, she would also bring about unthinkable danger along with her.”

“Danger, you say?”

“Yeah. Just like how when a butterfly flaps its wings and disturbs the air, by the time it reaches us it becomes a storm or something, the things Mizuki said had all kinds of ridiculous effects on her surroundings and would rebound no matter what it was.”

“I don't really understand your example, but I more or less understand what you are trying to say.”

“Un. Suimei called it a kind of curse that induced recognition bias, or a transmitted curse that becomes a repetitive spiral of fear or something like that.”

“Suimei said that?”

“Back in the early days, Suimei also said a bunch of incomprehensible things with a completely serious face. Though he was nastier, there was more truth to the things he said than what Mizuki would say. Whenever weird things around us happened, he would definitely go through something dangerous with us though.”

“... Reiji-sama. Those dangers, could it not be that Suimei was actually

the one causing those situations?”

“In a way you may be right. Mizuki would be four parts, my meddling would be four parts, and Suimei would be the remaining two parts of ten or something...”

“...”

Reiji looked out the window while gazing far away. Looking at his sorrowful figure drifting away like that, Titania had nothing more to say. While that was going on, Mizuki's idle complaint convention had ended, and she put on a smile as she drew closer to Reiji.

“Hey, Reiji-kun. What were you talking about with Tia just now?”

“Eh? No, nothing in particular.”

Reiji didn't think that she could have possibly been listening. But just as he was regretting the fact that he got carried away, a traitor appeared.

“Just a little about Mizuki's past. Reiji-sama was telling me about it right?”

“T-Tia!?”

“R~e~i~j~i~k~u~n. You know that I have a heap of stuff about my past that I don't want people to know right!? RIGHT!?”

“But most of that is just reaping what you sow...”

“That may be so! That may be so but~!”

Mizuki was gripping both of Reiji's shoulders while violently shaking him back and forth. As she was cutely getting her revenge on him, Graziella cut in to the conversation.

“Hou, I'm quite interested in Mizuki's past. Tell me about it too. It seems amusing.”

“It's fine if Graziella-san doesn't hear it!”

“What? Am I the only one being left out?”

“That's not it, but! Aah, geez! This is all Reiji-kun's fault!”

Yelling in distress, Mizuki just shook him even harder within the carriage. In the end, Reiji, the main culprit of her tantrum, was the one to calm her down. Seeing that scene, Graziella put on a smile.

“It doesn't get tiresome here huh?”

“That's true isn't it? The two of them are quite cheerful after all.”

After agreeing with a smile, Titania took a complete turn and made a serious expression. And then, she turned towards Graziella who was still watching Reiji and Mizuki.

“But was it really alright? Your Imperial Highness.”

“What was?”

“For you to take action alongside us.”

“Regarding that, did I not communicate that there was nothing that could be done about it because of the Goddess?”

“No, that may be the case, but what I am asking about is that with the current state of the Empire, is it fine for you to distance yourself from the Imperial Capital?”

Hearing Titania's roundabout question, Graziella shrugged her shoulders in exasperation.

“For a foreign princess to worry about our country is something else indeed. Could your Royal Highness Titania be plotting to grasp on to the weakness of the Empire?”

“While the demons' might is expanding, discord and antagonism between fellow humans is simply foolish. The crisis of an allied nation could be said to be the same as the crisis of one's own country.”

“That's certainly true.”

“So?”

“Aah, honestly speaking I did not want to distance myself. Because of that incomprehensible disturbance, despite the scoundrels out there decreasing in number, the power of the nobles also decreased and I

cannot deny that the war potential of the Empire has declined. Even if that was not the case, the mutual relations with all the neighbouring countries has become poor.”

“Last time, your Imperial Highness came within Astel's territory at your own discretion as well.”

“That may in fact have been overbearing, but in reality was it not a necessity? Because that man defeated the demons beforehand, in the end, the animosity towards me simply piled up though.”

It certainly was just as she said. Astel and Nelferia were allied nations. If they had fought together in that place against the demons, Graziella's actions would probably have been praised. Because she had done so without permission, she ended up being criticized for being hasty, but if one thought about it as a wager to improve the reputation of the Empire, then she wasn't a bad person. Kicking away Titania's poisonous words, Graziella gazed towards the direction of the Empire.

“... I have my misgivings. Now that the nobles that can step on the battlefield have decreased in number, if the demons launched a large scale attack on the Empire, it would be a serious blow to us. And with the current state of affairs, it is also possible that our allied nations would remain still during the whole affair.”

“In other words, the Empire would end up having to fight all on their own right?”

The reason she was troubled about being unable to get the cooperation of other nations was not only because she couldn't expect reinforcements. They would also lose the advantage of having supply trains from various locations. Not only that, goods, information and any support would stagnate, and altogether would provide a serious blow to them in battle. Because the Empire covered a wide territory, it could be said that it was vital for them to receive support from its neighbouring nations.

“Now just who is it pulling our hands from behind the scenes...”

Hearing Graziella mutter that in a troubled voice, one man came to Reiji's mind.

–Duke Hadorious.

Remembering the figure of that man sitting at the desk in his office, Reiji stood perfectly still where he was. His hunch seemed to have jumped out at him like an electrical signal. Seeing him abruptly standing there perfectly still and finding it strange, Mizuki cocked her head to the side and questioned him.

“Reiji-kun. What's wrong?”

“No...”

Without really seriously answering, Reiji started to spin around his thoughts. It was only a possibility. But it just may have been that case that Hadorious was making secret preparations behind the scenes. There was a possibility that he manipulated things so that Graziella came along with them.

In that case, back when the information about the demon invasion was leaked to Graziella, that would also have been Hadorious and would line up with Suimei's prediction. The annihilation of the demons was unexpected. But even so, he had used Suimei as a decoy from the very beginning, even if he ordered Gregory to take them somewhere safe, he could easily predict that they would return all the way to Astel. If they bumped into Graziella there, coupled together with taking of a hostage, he could smoothly carry out the same plan to have them go to the Empire.

However, in that case, the fact that Graziella linked up with them didn't quite mesh with the whole story. Hadorious wanted to keep Graziella in check, and sent them over to the Empire to keep an eye on her movements. To observe her movements, it should have been necessary that they remain put in the Empire.

On top of that, there was no consistency in Hadorious pressuring the church to make Graziella move. If Graziella became one of their companions, they would be able to move freely once more. If his original intent was to have Graziella move along with them it would be a different story, but it seemed far too roundabout. If he was going to put pressure on the church, it would be simpler to do so in the first place and have

Graziella accompany them on their journey when they met. Moreover, there was also the fact that Graziella's case came as a result of an oracle from the Goddess.

“The Salvation Church, and Duke Hadorious...”

Hearing Reiji suddenly mutter, Mizuki once more spoke up to him.

“What about them?”

“I was thinking the reason we're moving around like we are now might be because of those two is all.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just as her Imperial Highness said earlier, if someone is leading us by the hand, at the very least I think those two are involved.”

Reiji replied to Titania, and then Graziella cut in to the conversation.

“You mean to say that the Salvation Church and Duke Hadorious are connected and did something?”

“No, that would be hard to believe. In that case, it wouldn't have worked out in such a roundabout way like it did.”

“Fumu...”

Hearing Reiji's thoughts, Graziella began stoking her jaw. As expected, because it was something that involved her personally, it was something she couldn't afford not to brood over. On the other hand, Titania gave her own opinion of the matter.

“Duke Hadorious' territory is adjacent to the Empire, so having the Empire become isolated would probably seem welcoming to him.”

“Hou, that certainly is a blunt denunciation of a feudal lord from your own country is it not?”

“I hate that man.”

“Because you lost.”

“Uu!”

Stabbed by Graziella's bull's-eye, Titania let out an unusual groan. While they were having this exchange, Mizuki remembered hearing the same thing before.

“Tia lost? Ah, now that you mention it, Luka-san said something similar before...”

“It is nothing! Please do not pay it any mind!”

The princess of a nation was frantically trying to change the subject to the point where she was fluttering her hands around noisily. It was somewhat unbecoming of her, but even so, Mizuki didn't actually seem all that interested in it either.

“But, even if that is true, why would he do that I wonder? I can kinda get the church moving us around, but for Duke Hadorious...”

“I also don't know. Regarding this, it seems we'll need to talk with Suimei about it once more huh.”

“You're right. As expected, when Suimei-kun isn't here we get stuck like this huh.”

To their little group of three, the one who occupied the position of the brain, Suimei, was indispensable after all. As Reiji and Mizuki confirmed this fact, Graziella spoke to Reiji.

“At any rate, Reiji, you really value that man quite a lot don't you?”

“That man as in, Suimei? Un, well, I do.”

“Suimei-kun is really reliable when there is trouble going on. He comes up with views that we couldn't think of at all too.”

“At times where you would normally panic, Suimei is always perfectly composed after all.”

“But on the other hand he blows his cool at the weirdest times, and he slips away all the time too...”

If it wasn't for that... Thinking that with a bitter smile, Mizuki sighed. Graziella then brought her mouth closer to Titania's ear to talk with her in secret.

*(Reiji and Mizuki do not know of that guy's strength, correct?)*

*(Yes. However, they do seem to know that he is very cunning during critical times.)*

*(In other words, he was too meddlesome to be able to conceal it all huh. What a naive man.)*

*(The reason Suimei's conduct seems so unstable is probably because he is stuck between the things he wants to do and the things that he must do. If you think of it like that, even his actions up to this point make sense.)*

*(Hou?)*

*(Well, it's mostly because he's awkward though.)*

Titania let out her impression of Suimei. And when she realized, Graziella was looking at her strangely.

“... What is it?”

“No, I was just thinking that the reason you are speaking so bitterly about him is perhaps because you also lost to that man.”

As Graziella was implicitly pointing out that she was a sore loser, Titania yelled as her face turned bright red from shame.

“—I'm not really!”

“As I thought. My goodness, contrary to your fine appearance, you are quite the sore loser aren't you, your Royal Highness Titania.”

“You can't really say that about others! In the end, you were also completely outwitted by Suimei's plan weren't you!?”

Titania yelled to hide her embarrassment as she threw Graziella's words back at her. In the end, it didn't change the fact that the both of them were irritated at having more losses than wins, but both of them didn't want to admit this either. While they were quarrelling like that, Titania noticed that Reiji and Mizuki were watching her little outbreak intently.

“... What is the matter, Mizuki?”

“Uun. I just thought you unexpectedly get along is all.”

“I don't particularly get along well with her Imperial Highness Graziella!”

“That's right Mizuki. Don't misunderstand. I have no intention of making friends with her Royal Highness Titania.”

They both said the same thing, but the other two were already convinced.

“But you know...”

“Right?”

As Reiji and Mizuki happily nodded to each other, Titania yelled out once more.

“Even Reiji-sama!”

“... It is your fault is it not? If you did not ask such a thing in the first place, it would not have turned out like this.”

“Why are you acting like a victim!? Were you not talking non-stop as well!?”

“What did you say?”

“What!?”

The two of them began to intimidate each other as they quarrelled.

... In the end, until the driver informed them that they had arrived at the Salvation Church, the inside of the carriage was in a wild uproar from Titania and Graziella's yelling.

Because they had sent a messenger to the Salvation Church before moving, everything proceeded smoothly after they arrived.

It seemed that the relic left behind by the hero that Reiji and the others were looking for was being held somewhere other than the church itself. So after finishing their greetings with the head bishop, they once more boarded the carriage at the church and were brought to a large temple a little outside the city.

Many large stone pillars were lined up outside, a large building made of gypsum had been put in place behind them and deep inside was a large dome. It was like a merger between the Greek Parthenon and the Roman Pantheon.

As they drew closer, its impressiveness only grew all the more overpowering to them. Mizuki was no exception to this, and was looking at it like a world heritage sight as she raised her voice in deep admiration.

“Uwaaa~, it's amaaaazing!”

As she shouted, Mizuki started running around like a child. And then, Titania spoke to her like a mother speaking to a child.

“Mizuki, if you run around too much you'll fall over you know?”

“It's fine! The shoes I got from Suimei-kun are super high quality, so they're even more comfortable and perform better than sneakers from the other world! I'll be fine even if I hop and jump around! Look!”

Pointing at her boots made of some unknown animal's leather, she showed off as she began to jump around. Titania began walking towards her with an astonished yet gentle smile. Lagging behind a bit, Reiji, Graziella and the escorts followed after her. After a short while, they arrived before the entrance where a number of guides from the Salvation Church wearing religious habits were lined up waiting for them. This was likely because they were informed beforehand. One of the nuns representing the line of guides then stepped forward.

“It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I am the one who has been entrusted with the management of this temple, I am called Faylia. I welcome you wholeheartedly to our temple, Hero-sama, our guest from another world, as well as your Highnesses.”

After making her greeting, she bowed down, and then took off her hood. Revealed from underneath that hood, was white skin, white hair, and tapered ears. With green eyes and pink lips, she was a fair and fascinatingly elegant elf.

From her appearance, she looked somewhere in her late twenties or

early thirties. She wasn't dressed very elegantly, but the complexion of her lips was prominently luscious and she gave off an other worldly sense of sex appeal. While Mizuki was going 'So pretty~' from behind with a voice filled with fervour and admiration, Reiji stepped forward and returned Faylia's greeting.

“I am Shana Reiji. You have my thanks for granting us your time today while you were all so busy.”

“Thank you for your considerations, Hero-sama. However, we are not particularly busy here?”

“It's just a polite way of putting it, please accept it as my generosity.”

As Faylia made an impish smile, Reiji refreshingly smiled back. Looking at them from the side, Graziella spoke to the others.

“I see, he's a seducer.”

“It can't be helped with Reiji-kun. It doesn't matter who it is, that's just his default refreshing interaction mode.”

While Graziella and Mizuki were discussing such matters, Reiji began to follow after Faylia who started guiding them. It probably meant they were going to walk while talking. The inside of the temple was gloomy. The lights coming from the vicinity of the ceiling seemed like the sunlight shining through prison bars. It had the atmosphere of a cathedral in the morning and gave off the sense of a holy location. While walking, Faylia cut to the main point of the matter.

“I have already been told your story. You would like to take charge of the relic, correct?”

“Yes. I was hoping that you would allow me to use it no matter what.”

“I do not mind handing it over at all, but I do not know whether or not the relic that Reiji-sama is seeking will be of any help to you.”

“Regarding that, I have already been informed by El Meide's hero Elliot. It chooses its user, correct?”

“Yes. In the past, nobody has ever taken possession of the relic left

behind by Hero-sama, so I don't know if we will be able to be of much help to you or not...”

“I don't mind. First, please allow me to test out whether I can use it.”

Hearing his courteous request, Faylia replied with a brief nod and a 'Yes.' On the other hand, Graziella was looking around the interior of the building with a dubious expression.

“There's that kind of thing here?”

Hearing her doubtful tone, Titania spoke up to her.

“Your Imperial Highness, do you know of this place?”

“I've only visited here once before. Just like this time, I was also shown around, but having said that, there was nothing interesting at all. It's a statement that they didn't want to show me anything important.”

Saying that, Graziella frowned in discontent. If Suimei was around, it would be a remark that he would quip back at with a 'Well that's cause it's important, idiot.' Titania then took a look around at their surroundings as well.

“Certainly, it looks like there is nothing here, but...”

“Yes, there is nothing here. It is only used for the safekeeping of the relics deep inside, so the temple is mostly just for appearance's sake.”

“Heeh, so in others words it's just a big storage shed.”

“Mizuki, that's putting it a little too bluntly...”

Hearing Mizuki's grade schooler like impression, Titania acted like she had a headache and let out a tired voice. Mizuki on the other hand, didn't pay her any mind, and asked Faylia a simplistic question.”

“Faylia-san. This place is awfully pretty, but how long has it been around?”

“Ever since the tyrant was defeated. In those days, there was an urgent need to seal away those relics, so a small storage area was made. After that, we built the solid temple around it that we are standing in now.”

After a short delay, Mizuki found something strange about what she said, and cocked her head to the side.

“You say it like you saw it all happen huh.”

“Yes, since I did see it all happen.”

“Heh?”

Mizuki made a hysterical sound, but Faylia only looked at her with a gentle smile. Unable to tell whether she was being honest or not, Reiji felt obliged to ask.

“Um, I know that it is rude to ask about one's age, but... Faylia-san, how old are you?”

“I haven't properly counted, but I turned five hundred years old a little while ago.”

“Th-th-th-th-th-that many years!?”

“A-as expected of an elf...”

Reiji let out a confused voice, while Mizuki stood there dumbfounded with her mouth wide open. It had been quite a while since they came to this world, but this was the first time they had met someone who lived for more than a hundred years, so they were unable to hide their surprise. On the other hand, this seemed to be simple common sense to both Titania and Graziella, as they did not appear surprised in the least.

“Which means, were you acquainted with the hero of that time?”

“Yes. I met him when I was still in the early days of my life.”

“What kind of person was he?”

“Hero-sama at that time had three things he was famous for. He had a deep knowledge far beyond anyone else. He held a great power. And he saved this land from the hand of the tyrant.”

After walking for a while, they arrived at a room deep inside the temple.

“Is it here?”

“No, that which you seek is being kept under watch in a room further

inside.”

“Hm? There's something here? Faylia-san, is this not it?”

“Aah, that is...”

While speaking, Faylia took down a wooden box from the shelf. And then she opened it up in front of Reiji and the others so that they could see. Inside, there was something that had a shape similar to a pocket watch from the modern world.

Considering it would be easier for them to see for themselves, Faylia took it out of the box and handed it over to Reiji. As Reiji got a closer look, it really did look like a pocket watch to him. There were numerals written along the circumference which resembled roman numerals as well as a curved needles that looks like an hour and minute hand. The numbers written down were not from this world either, a completely mysterious watch.

“What is it?”

“It is called the Lachesis Meter. It was something left behind by Hero-sama along with the Sacrament.”

While listening to her explanation, Reiji looked for the crown of the watch, but there didn't seem to be any sort of spring mechanism to make it move.

“It's not moving but, how does one use it?”

“That's... We do not know that either.”

“You don't know? Was its use not passed down along with the item?”

“Hero-sama did not give us a detailed explanation of this item at the time. In our world, he said it probably wasn't relevant at all. Unlike the Sacrament, it seems to be completely meaningless to this world.”

“Completely meaningless, as in?”

“Nothing more than that, he said it is because the 'end of the world' hasn't started in this world.”

“The end of the world hasn't started?”

“Yes.”

The words left behind by the hero that Faylia relayed had a strange phrasing to it. The end of the world was an end result, it wasn't an expression used for a period of time. There was no beginning, the moment that phrase is used, everything was already over. Reiji and the others were all puzzled, and then Faylia offered her apologies.

“I also do not really understand. By saying the end of the world has started, he explained it as something like it was predetermined once it started, but everything after that was all in vocabulary that I didn't really comprehend. In the end, we didn't pay it much attention because it was irrelevant, and left it at that.

With that, Faylia brought her explanation of the Lachesis Meter to an end. Reiji and the others also judged that spending more time on it would be meaningless, and moved on to the main point.

“So, would it be fine to show us the weapon about now?”

“About that, I must offer my apologies. But we cannot go further in than this.”

As she gestured further into the temple, Faylia apologized. Her words and actions didn't match each other. Titania started with a somewhat sharp tone.

“What do you mean? I do remember you saying that you had been previously informed?”

“This is the hero of Salvation, is it not appropriate to cooperate?”

“No, I do not mean that we cannot hand it over. It is just that access to the Sacrament is strictly controlled. The door has been sealed by Hero-sama's magic. And so, to undo the seal, it is required that myself and several specialist mages perform a ritual. To undo the seal, it requires close to half a day.”

“So we can't go through yet?”

“Yes. After the preparations have been completed, we will let you through, but that will likely have to wait until tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow... That's quite strict huh.”

Graziella must have felt like they were on a fool's errand, as she acted like her stiffened shoulders were suddenly loosened. She was probably thinking that if they weren't going to hand it over right away, there was no need to guide them at all today. And then, Mizuki cut in to the conversation.

“It's supposed to be something that can't be used by just anyone, so why do you have to go so far?”

“Hero-sama said that it was something that should not exist in this world. He told us that it was something that had a tremendous power that could twist the principles of the world. And thus, so that its power could not be studied and recreated, it was sealed along with the tyrant's relics.”

Faylia's explanation was somewhat majestic, or perhaps excessive to Reiji. So holding onto those doubts, he questioned her further.

“And just what is that tremendous power?”

“From what I have seen, it was a power that could freeze all creation.”

“All creation?”

“Yes. Hero-sama said that it was able to interfere with anything and everything in the world. And just as he said, there was nothing in existence that the Sacrament's power was unable to freeze. The other heroes also said that the Sacrament was some sort of special exception. As long as the conditions were met, they said it was a weapon capable of killing gods.”

“K-killing gods, you said?”

“Are you saying it is such an excessive weapon that it would bring about such conceit?”

Hearing Faylia's words, Graziella and Titania showed their surprise, and indignation. To the citizens of this world who lived under the

Goddess Alshuna, the phrase 'killing gods' had tremendous implications. As if covering for the hero, Faylia shook her head.

“No, it's original purpose seemed to be different.”

The one to get a hint from her words, was Mizuki.

“Could it be, something related to that 'end of the world' you mentioned?”

“Yes. The Sacrament was made to evade that event, as a result, one of the side effects of that made it a preposterous weapon though.”

“That kind of thing, is further in here...”

Reiji gazed beyond the door which led further into the temple. And then, what he was thinking about, was the weapon that lied beyond it. A weapon made to evade the end of the world, that could save the world. That kind of thing was further inside, and he was about to try and take it within his hands. However, the thought that he would not be deemed worthy was coming and going deep within his heart.



The ritual to undo the seal would begin that night, which meant the seal would only be removed the following day. Reiji and the others parted with Faylia for the moment, and once more boarded the carriage to return to Attila.

Inside the carriage, there was a strange stuffy atmosphere which made it feel hot. It couldn't be helped. The explanation they heard from Faylia would agitate anyone. Even Titania who was always calm was unable to calm down and was frequently moving around her legs restlessly.

Similarly, Reiji was also unable to cool his excitement. It was possible that he would attain an extraordinary weapon. It was also something that nobody was able to use up until now. He didn't have any sense of being one of the chosen, but to think that he could be something special did feel a little good. He wanted to get it into his hands as soon as possible. He wanted to try it out. While thinking of this, he gazed at the palm of his hand. And then, Mizuki suddenly called out to him.

“Hey hey, Reiji-kun.”

“Hm? Mizuki, what's up?”

“There's something that's on my mind from what Faylia-san told us just now, did Reiji-kun not notice?”

“Notice what?”

After Mizuki put extra emphasis on her last words as she asked, Reiji returned her question, and she made a grim face as she continued.

“Un. Earlier, that person, Faylia-san showed us that relic and called it the Lachesis Meter right?”

“Un. That's right, what about it?”

“Meter, isn't that a word from our world? It's English. Also Lachesis, if I remember right, it's the name of a foreign god.”

“I don't know much about the names of gods, but I do think you're right about 'meter.’”

But, Reiji didn't really think that was something that they needed to be concerned with. And as he looked at Mizuki with a curious gaze, she started to show her frustration at the fact that he couldn't tell.

“Au... Try remembering it properly, Reiji-kun.”

Reiji did just as he was told, and tried remembering. As he remembered what happened, he didn't think there was anything strange about any of the actions Faylia took when she was talking about that relic. If Mizuki had something in particular to doubt, it was those words Lachesis Meter. She certainly said those words. There was no mistaking it. But—

“Ah! The movements of her mouth!”

As Reiji realized in a surprised voice, he suddenly jumped to his feet in the carriage. Seeing that he finally figured it out, Mizuki was happily nodding her head repeatedly.

“Yup, that's it. Faylia-san. She properly said Lachesis Meter. In English—In other words, she used words from our world.”

“I see. So those were words from Mizuki's world... Your Royal Highness, try saying them yourself.”

Because it was something brought over from another world and did not match up with anything in this world, they had no equivalent phrase to describe it. Because of that, Titania's words would not be translated and come out exactly as she spoke with a somewhat strange and accustomed pronunciation.

“Fu...”

“Ku...”

Hearing Titania's weird pronunciation, Mizuki and Reiji were unable to bear it and were gushing.

“Please don't laugh both of you! Good grief!”

“Sorry sorry.”

Titania's had become completely red from embarrassment as Reiji honestly apologized. On the other hand, the one who made her say it, Graziella, was smirking with a mean spirited smile. Titania huffed as she turned her gaze at Graziella. Looking at the two of them like that, it didn't look like they got along poorly at all. But setting them aside...

“... I see. Then the person who brought that over to this world is a human from our world.”

If it was an object named with words from their world, it was naturally a consequence someone bringing it over from their world. Though Reiji came to that conclusion, Mizuki spoke like it was still too soon for him to arrive at the proper answer.

“That may be right. But in that case, you know?”

At that time, three heroes were summoned to this world. It was said that one was the one who held the Sacrament, and the other two were mages. And all three of them came from the same world.

“... Then in our world, it would mean that there were also mages.”

The truth that he arrived at was absolutely shocking. Reiji

unintentionally held his breath. He couldn't believe that those people that came up in novels existed in his world in secret. Just by thinking about it, he wasn't able to describe his feelings at all. While he was having those indescribable feelings, he could hear a creepy chuckle to his side.

“Fufufufufufufufu, amazing amazing amaaaaazing! Reiji-kun Reiji-kun! There are mages in our world! It's like the curtain to a great dream has been rolled up!”

“Mizuki, that's corny...”

“Whatever! You don't need to retort every single time!”

Mizuki puffed out her cheeks back at Reiji's gag. But as he would expect, she was happy, she immediately smiled broadly and couldn't stop grinning.

“With this Suimei-kun won't be able to just say I'm a chuunibyou! Rather, I'll finally be able to prove that I was the one who was right!”

“Looks like it... My condolences to Suimei.”

Her laughter echoed through the carriage and completely drowned out the young man's pitiful sigh. In contrast, the other two who were listening to them from the side were thinking that Reiji and Mizuki were the actual pitiful ones here though. While looking at them, Graziella spoke up.

“But to think that the hero at that time and two others were also summoned from the same world.”

“It just means that kind of thing can happen is all. There's the exception of us three as well. It might be because it's just easier to summon people from our world with that ritual.”

Reiji was thinking along those lines, but Mizuki seemed to have a somewhat different opinion, and made a know it all smile from the side.

“But we still don't know right? It's only the stage where it's a possibility. It's also possible that it is a parallel world.”

“Parallel world?”

“Un. They are worlds that are almost identical to the world we live in,

and each one holds a different future. The me in this parallel world ended up getting summoned here, but the me in another parallel world may not have been summoned at all.”

“U-n... It's quite complicated isn't it?”

“I see, it is isn't it?”

Wrinkling her brows, Titania was making a stern expression as Mizuki returned a bitter smile. As expected, a world that had not developed much didn't have enough imagination to understand what she was talking about.

“But Mizuki. If there are many other worlds like that, doesn't that means there would be multiple versions of me? There's no way that could be.”

“But there's this whole other world isn't there? I don't think it is something you can just flatly deny like that right?”

“Does that have any connection to the hero summoning?”

“Don't you think it's a big event that we were summoned to another world? Going back and forth between worlds, no matter how much science develops from here, I don't think it's something that can be accomplished.”

“Fumu...”

Hearing Mizuki's explanation, Graziella seemed somewhat convinced. Suddenly, she drew closer to Titania's ear.

*(If we ask that guy, we may be able to find out all about this.)*

*(That's right. If it's Suimei, he probably knows about it. But...)*

Seeing Mizuki act like she had a victory over Suimei, if she found out the truth, there was no mistaking she would be completely shocked. Titania could picture it clearly in her mind, the image of Mizuki screaming 'Breach of friendship! Breach of friendship!!'



After staying the night at an inn in Attila, Reiji and the others once more set out for the temple which kept custody of the relic they went to receive the previous day. While waiting in the room they were brought to before, Faylia arrived later than planned.

“I apologize for making you wait.”

“No, don't worry about it. More importantly, has the seal already been released?”

Faylia nodded back to Reiji's question.

“Yes. We finished releasing all the seals this morning. It is now possible to enter at anytime. Then, by all means.”

Saying that, she extended her hand towards the door. Urged on by her actions, Titania suddenly called out to the knights following behind her.

“All of you, wait outside. Gregory, please take care of them.”

“Ha.”

At Titania's command, Gregory acknowledged her while bowing. On the other hand, it seemed the Luka was quite interested in the relic and was somewhat fidgety while looking like she wanted to go in, but Roffrey simply soothed her with a 'Let's have them show us later,' as they left.

Graziella also ordered her soldiers to standby at the entrance. Watching them do so, Mizuki seemed to have thought of something, and brought herself closer to Reiji to talk in secret.

“Gregory-san and the others don't seem to get along poorly with the Empire soldier's huh?”

“You're right. They're soldiers from allied countries, so maybe it was just needless anxiety on our part.”

It was one of their worries that came about when Graziella came along. They had apprehensions that it might end up breaking out into a fight, but because they drew the line quite distinctly between them, they had not collided at all up until now. And then, perhaps because they were heard, Titania and Graziella joined in on their secret conversation.

“The Empire is an allied nation at the least, it's just that it doesn't show on the surface.”

“The ones following me are the ones most suited to give me counsel. They are all skilled soldiers who have a record of long military service. As for Astel's knights, Gregory-dono is present. He should be able to keep them in line.”

“Ah, ahahah...”

The two of them seemed to have a firm grasp on their internal affairs. When she said on the surface, she was implying that in reality, they were shooting sparks at each other below the surface. Having discovered this unknown truth, Mizuki couldn't say anything back and just simply laughed.

As they followed Faylia down a candle lit corridor, they came upon a staircase headed downwards.

“It's underground?” “Yes. We'll need to descend a little, but it is just beyond here.”

Saying that, they began descending the staircase, and partway down, the appearance of passage completely changed. Up until now, it had the same motif as the rest of the temple and was made of the same materials, but the walls were now made of bare rock and resembled a cave. Captured by the sensation of entering a limestone cavern, they followed after Faylia, and came upon an enormous boulder.

“Is this... A grotto?”

“We're inside the temple, right?”

The storage area of the temple looked completely different from the rest of the temple. Reiji, who held doubts about this, stepped forward and asked Faylia about it.

“Faylia-san. Why is only this part of the temple made differently?”

“Regarding the location of the seal, it was the heroes' idea. They said something like, if the location of the seal took on the shape of a temple, it

would mix with the Goddess' mysticism, and the sealing spell would weaken. And so, they had to make another mystical space, or something like that.”

“Hoeh?”

Mizuki made a strange puzzled sound. Just like her, Reiji also didn't really understand what was being said. Seeing the confusion on his face, Faylia continued speaking as if she read his mind.

“What Hero-sama told us, was that the sealing spell was originally a technique used to suppress the power of gods, so the power of a god and the power of the sealing spell would end up weakening each other or something along those lines.”

“Tia, is that so?”

“My apologies. This is also the first I've heard of this.”

After asking Titania, Reiji shifted his gaze over to Graziella. But she also did not appear to know, and only shrugged her shoulders as she shook her head. Even for those two who had a firm understanding of magic, this seemed to be somewhat incomprehensible.

“Now then, please step back a little.”

Urged by Faylia, Reiji and the others distanced themselves from her. And then right as they did, Faylia muttered some words in front of the boulder, and a magic circle rose to the surface around it. A high pitched buzz suddenly assaulted their ears. Before long, the giant boulder made a sound like it was being dragged along the ground, and started to move as it split to the sides. Because the air inside the boulder was released, a stink like a rotten egg had just been opened flowed into the air.

“Uguu... This is somewhat harsh.”

Graziella reflexively grimaced at the stench. Unexpectedly, Faylia also pinned down her nose and turned away from the boulder.

“This stench is because of one of the books the tyrant possessed. Because of that book, the surroundings are always covered in moisture

and end up decomposing.”

Hearing that explanation, Mizuki let out an anxious voice.

“I-is it safe?”

“Yes. Regarding anything that leaks out of it, there is no longer enough power to bring harm to the human body.”

“Thanks goodness...”

As Mizuki expressed her relief outwardly, Reiji was doing the same within his heart. Faylia then pointed at the culprit of the stench with her finger.

“This is the book that the tyrant had been holding on to that I just mentioned.”

Beyond Faylia's supple finger was a blackish bound book that was left in place on top of a pedestal. The book had a somewhat ominous atmosphere around it, and just by looking at it they somehow felt depressed. Looking closely, despite the fact that the pedestal was made of metal, it had melted somewhat and had stalactite like drippings coming down from it and gave a glimpse of the abnormality of the book.

Graziella seemed intrigued by the book, and drew nearer to it. Finding fault with her actions, Faylia raised a fierce voice to restrain her in a menacing attitude.

“Please wait!”

“What is it? Suddenly raising your voice like that.”

“No, excuse me. That is something that must never be touched, so I ended up putting a little strength into my voice.”

“Must never be touched?”

“Yes. That is something that must never be touched. If a human touches it even once, the evil god which manipulated the tyrant would take them over and turn them into a servant. And then, that nightmare would repeat itself once more.”

Hearing Faylia's explanation, Mizuki raised a puzzled voice.

“Eh? Wasn't he defeated and everything was solved?”

“The tyrant died, but the existence which drove him mad did not seem to be defeated. Because it was a god, it was not something that humans could possibly defeat, or something like that.”

“What about the Sacrament that you explained to us yesterday? Wasn't that a weapon that could kill gods?”

“Hero-sama said that because the main culprit was in a place they could not reach, they could not be defeated.” “I see. So it ended up getting sealed here.”

Graziella seemed convinced, and after taking a glance at the book, stepped back towards Reiji and the others. Certainly, if it was such a dangerous object, anybody would want to erase it from the world. Exactly because they were unable to do so, it had to be sealed. As the introduction of the tyrant's relic was finished, Faylia pointed out another pedestal.

“And over there, is what you have been seeking.”

Placed atop a metal pedestal just like the book, was a small box. Seemingly unaffected by the malicious aura of the book, the pedestal was still pristine. There was no signs of any deterioration. After Faylia drew nearer to it, she quietly picked up the box and showed it to them.

—And then, just as Elliot had said, inside the box was an ornament. It resembled a brooch and its design looked like it was based on a feather with a silver metallic lustre. And the most noticeable point of it, was the blue gem placed right at its centre.

“So this is the Sacrament. It's so beautiful...”

“A blue gem. Looks like a lapis lazuli.”

The mysterious blue sparkle entranced all the women present... Or so Reiji thought.

“... What? Is there something on my face?”

“Ah, no. It's just that I thought it looked pretty. Doesn't Graziella think

so?”

“Umu. All I'm interested in is whether or not it can be used.”

“...”

The third imperial princess of the Empire didn't seem to have much interest in fineries. In spite of it looking like jewellery, she didn't seem to care at all about its beauty. She also dressed quite roughly, and probably didn't really care much about being fashionable. As if nothing mattered unless it had some form of utility. Graziella then spoke up to Faylia.

“Is this all?”

“Yes. This is all that was left behind.”

“If there was something else that looked useful I was hoping to take it though.”

As Graziella stated that, Faylia shook her head.

“The items that the heroes used were all things we couldn't use. Even if they left them behind, we would be unable to put them to any use.”

“Is that so?”

“On top of the magic they used being different from ours, they used very high level techniques as well. Among them, the technique to use the Sacrament seemed to be of the highest level, but the only one that may have been usable to us was also just this one relic.”

After hearing her story, Reiji spoke up next.

“So Faylia-san. How do we use this... As a weapon?”

“I also don't really know, but when Hero-sama changed it from an ornament to a weapon, he held it in his hand and said some words. It's probable that those words were the keywords used to awaken the Sacrament, but...”

“So what were those words?”

“My apologies.”

Faylia bowed down deeply as she apologized. And then, Titania spoke

up next.

“Did you not hear them?”

“I heard them, but I couldn't figure it out. It seemed to be a sound only the one who used it would understand.”

“So doesn't that mean nobody can use it?”

“I was told that someone who could use it would just know. How about taking it in your hand for a start?”

As Faylia said that, she picked up the Sacrament and walked over to Reiji. He would know. In other words, it meant he would be chosen by the weapon. Whether the weapon had a will, or whether it could only be used by someone who met certain conditions, Reiji didn't know how it worked, but as she said it was something to just try out and see. As he stepped forward to receive it from Faylia, Mizuki suddenly raised her voice.

“Reiji-kun!”

“What's up?”

“I was hoping that I could give it a try first~... Or something.”

“Eh... EH!?”

“I can't?”

“Un... Well I don't really mind, but...”

Though he said that, he was actually reluctant to do so considering Mizuki's previous criminal record. Naturally, that criminal record he was thinking of was her chuunibyou period. Having gained permission, Mizuki yelled in joy. As Reiji made a bitter smile, Graziella approached him.

“Is it alright?”

“Well, if I don't let her then Mizuki will pout.”

“And what if Mizuki is granted ownership?”

“Well in that case we'll just need Mizuki to try her best right?”

“Kukuku, despite coming here because you sought power, if it became Mizuki's then you'll end up losing face.”

“You're talking about it like it's amusing.”

“If it ends up like that it will be a funny story after all.”

Graziella was acting happy, but on the other hand, Titania was making a severe expression as she drew nearer.

“Your Imperial Highness, do you intend to make Reiji-sama a laughing stock?”

“You're making quite the scary face. It's because you make faces like that that Reiji is frightened of you right?”

“Eh!? Reiji-sama doesn't think that I'm frightening!”

“No, I don't really...”

And she figured out that she was being taken for a ride by Graziella.

“Your Imperial Highness!”

“Wait a sec, don't just forget about me! I'm about to awaken a legendary weapon here! Watch properly!”

After stomping on the ground since nobody was paying attention to her, in a complete turn, she began creepily laughing like she was a villain about to take into her hands a treasure which could conquer the world. It was rather ominous to look at, but Faylia simply looked at her with a warm smile. It was like she was looking at a small child dreaming of being a hero, the calm, pleasant smile of an affectionate mother. And then, as Mizuki took the Sacrament from Faylia's hand—

“Fufufu, oh Sacrament! Answer my call~!”

And then she lifted it to the sky.

“Recognize me! Just recognize me! Fuuuuu! Fuuuuuu!”

Even as she lifted it up and yelled, the Sacrament didn't do anything at all. And with this, the calamity that would be Mizuki's regression back into chuunibyuu territory was somehow averted. In exchange, Mizuki was

puffing out her cheeks on the verge of tears with a mortified expression as she huddled down into a nook next to the pedestal.

“Then, this time is Reiji-sama's turn.”

“Un.”

Urged on by Titania, Reiji retrieved the Sacrament from Mizuki. The Sacrament was about the size of his palm. Since it was made of metal, it was somewhat cold to the touch. However, while feeling this sensation in his hand, he could also sense some sort of power from it. It was something different from heat, something that wasn't quite mana, a mysterious pulsation.

*(Just from looking at it, I can feel its power swelling...)*

This object in his hand, that shining radiance, was hope. The light of hope. No matter how far into the depths of despair they were, this would give those who looked upon it the power to live another day, it was the beautiful blue light which showed them tomorrow. And right now, Reiji would release its power, and make it his own. And then with that power, he would defeat the demons, and restore peace to this world.

The words needed to grant such thoughts, did not come to mind. However, if he left it to his mouth, perhaps... Such a hunch came to his mind.

Trusting in that hunch, Reiji lifted the Sacrament, and opened his mouth.

—And just as he did...

Suddenly, directly behind them, at the entrance to the grotto, a loud destructive sound rang out that shook the entire grotto. Reacting to the shock and the sound, every single person present turned towards the entrance, and a cloud of dust was floating there.

The cloud drifted as it drew nearer. To protect their lungs, each and every one of them sealed their mouths and partially closed their eyes. Before the cloud could completely seal their vision, it split in two and they could see a hand extending out of the opening. And before long, from that

cloud, a single man appeared.

The tall figure swiped his hand to the side as if he found the cloud of dust annoying. He had a slender face and an exquisite beauty to him, his lips were dyed red in a crimson like colour. At a glimpse one could mistake him for a woman, but his exposed upper body revealed a tightened chest, so he was without a doubt a man. He had copper like rusted chains wrapped around his arms, legs and torso. At the tip of his slender fingers, he had long nails like those of an animal. He had white hair that was similar to Faylia, but unlike an elf, his ears were rounded. His eyes were a bloody red which gave him an indescribable eerie atmosphere.

From his heightened perspective, the man glared down with his red eyes at Reiji and the others. His gaze was cool-headed, like he was looking at them as if they were beings that he held absolutely no compassion for. Because of that, as if his body was bound by the tension, Reiji was unable to move. This seemed to apply to everyone else as well, as they all looked at the man with a surprised expression while completely tensed up. As the mysterious man was gazing at everyone present one by one, Faylia was the first to speak up.

“... There should have been a strict order for nobody else to be allowed through here.”

“So it seems. That's why I forcefully made my way through. Just like this.”

“F-Forcefully... You say?”

“It is exactly as it sounds.”

“Who are you? Bastard.”

At Graziella's sudden question, the man abruptly began laughing. He was smiling like he heard something pleasant... Or rather, it was more of an atmosphere where his scornful laughter was leaking out.

“Is something strange?”

“You would ask my name, you offering? A mere 'meal' dares ask my

name?”

“M-meal?”

“That's right. A meal. Every single one of you damn humans. From the elderly to the babies, every single one of you are nothing but free range pigs. Offerings.”

The man declared this audaciously in an arrogant tone. However, that nonsense that Reiji would normally just laugh off felt like it was a complete reality for some reason. He must be a demon. Even though that thought floated through Reiji's head, he couldn't sense the power that was held by demons from that man. The man before his eyes looked like a human no matter how he looked at him. However, the red light coming from his eyes, and the way he made apparent that they were only mere humans to him stood out clearly. And just as he was doubting that man's identity...

“—My name is Ilzarl. I am one of the demon generals who assists the Demon Lord Nakshatra.”

As those words reached their ears, everyone jumped backwards like they were repelled. Even Mizuki who was not accustomed to fighting had done so. They really were repelled. It was due to the overpowering fighting spirit that Ilzarl fired out. The phrase demon general just didn't match up with the man's appearance, and perhaps because she was unable to believe him, Faylia muttered out like she was trying to find answers.

“A-a demon general...? No, more importantly, why are you here...?”

But there was nobody there to answer her. That voice filled with fear only rang in the air. And then, Graziella seemed to have recalled something important.

“Wait. Bastard, what happened to the ones who were inside the temple?”

“Aah, those guys are spread on the ground here and there. I ate a few of them, but since I only dealt with most of them haphazardly, there might

just be a few of them who are still alive.”

“Ku!?”

“You, ate them?”

Both Titania and Graziella raised surprised voices at Ilzarl's shocking words. Looking at their expressions, Ilzarl made a face like he was having a hard time understanding why they were like that.

“What is there to be surprised about? Just now, I called all you bastards meals did I not?”

“So you're a demon who eats people?”

“That's right. Strictly speaking I'm not a demon... But that is inconsequential to offerings like you. More importantly. There should be an object called the Sacrament here right?”

His gaze was sharp. As if that gaze was commanding him, Reiji looked down at his hand. And just as he caught himself doing so, it was too late. Ilzarl recognized that the Sacrament was in Reiji's hand.

“So that's it. I heard it was a weapon, was it just that guy's misunderstanding...? Well whatever, hand that over to me.”

“No, I won't hand it over.”

As Reiji said this, he pulled out his orichalcum blade and stepped forward.

“You would stand against me, offering?”

“I am a hero. The hero Reiji.”

“Hou? So you are a dammed hero? Now that you mention it, I can feel some of the Goddess' power from you.”

Reiji was surprised that he could sense such a thing. And then, Ilzarl said something that could not be allowed to pass.

“... However, in that state, you are still far too plain. As a meal, you are far too early to consume.”

Ilzarl's mutter sent shivers down Reiji's spine. It was the natural fear of

predators that any living being held. Even though he held the form of a human, he was looking at them like they were nothing but meals. Rajas was also certainly strong. At that time, Reiji was also gripped by fear. However, the level of fear he felt from Ilzarl was different.

He was reminded of monsters he saw in stories back when he was a child. The drawings of those monsters were often comical in many ways, but for an inexplicable reason, what always drove fear into his heart were the monsters who ate people. It was just the same here. Even if it was a human, the fear of a predator was far beyond any other fear he possessed, it was beyond explanation. While Reiji was seized in place as he trembled lightly, Titania began to move.

“Reiji-sama, I will support you!”

“I got it... Mizuki! Fall back as much as you can! This demon is dangerous!”

“U-un...”

After confirming that Mizuki had fallen back, Reiji gazed into Ilzarl's domain as it loomed around him. And then, he could hear a chant from behind him in a beautiful tone.

“—Oh Wood. Admonish and pressure my enemy. The serpent that is born from the great forest. Now at this time, obey my will, and irrationally obliterate the strong. Solid Snake Bind Murder.”

After reciting a chant, and firing a keyword, Ilzarl's surroundings swelled up, and tree trunks like thick branches of ivy burst from the ground and stretched out. It looked like magic from the wood attribute. The trees and shrubs grew out as they wrapped around the surroundings and moved about like a serpent as they entangled Ilzarl's arms, feet and torso. It was quite the powerful magic.

The trees were still growing, not only were they entangling the target, they seemed intent on crushing him. To shake off so many trees would be difficult. Eventually, the growing tree trunks entwined with each other and formed a single solid trunk. Ilzarl's figure completely vanished. And the one who fired that magic...

“Faylia-san!?”

“I will also fight. I will provide support, so while you have the chance—”

“—If that is support, it is support that couldn't even be compared to shit. With mere trees, did you really think you could do something to me?”

That exasperated mumble rang through the air. And the voice's owner, was the one who should have been trapped within those trees, Ilzarl. That reliable looking powerful magic fired off by the elf was blown away. In an instant, thunder roared through the cave, as an outbreak of red lightning tore through the trees. And from there, Ilzarl appeared while leisurely rubbing his neck. It was as if nothing had happened to him at all.

“—Wha?”

“It had no effect...”

Faylia's surprised voice piled on top of Reiji's panicked one. Immediately following that, still standing there listlessly as he was released from the spell, Ilzarl was making a tired expression like he was being forced to do a tedious job.

“I'll start with you.”

“Eh—?”

As Ilzarl's gaze shot through Faylia, he swung the thick chain that was wrapped around his torso. Completely disregarded the mass of the copper chain and the laws of physical motion, it assaulted Faylia accompanied by red lightning.

“—Oh wood. Clad yourself in that sprouting power and become my shield! Little Forest Bunker!”

Right in front of Faylia, multiple pillar like tree trunks sprouted up, and shot upwards diagonally. The tree trunks were not only thick and heavy, but they were densely packed with mana, so they were likely far firmer than they looked. And then, because the wall that sprouted up was inclined, it was extraordinarily strong against attacks from the front—Or

it was supposed to be.

“As I already said. Mere trees.”

The chain wrapped in red lightning broke through the wall of trees like they weren't even there. And in no time at all, they twined around Faylia and bound her completely. It all happened in the blink of an eye. She didn't even have any time to react. Wrapped up in the chains, Ilzarl easily lifted Faylia up into the air as he swung her around, scrubbing and slamming her against the stone walls many times over before finally flinging her aside. Faylia bounced off the stone wall like a ball and came flying back towards Reiji and the others.

“Faylia-san, no way...” “Fa-Faylia-san!”

Mizuki quickly rushed over to her side and began casting healing magic on her. On the other hand, Ilzarl was not taking any action at all. It was as if he was waiting for them to bite back at him. There was no reason to ask why. There was enough of a gap between their abilities that Ilzarl could easily attack at any time. Ilzarl did not hold a single doubt regarding his victory.

As Ilzarl stood there with an air of composure, this time, Reiji began closing in on him. Shuffling his feet a little at a time, he closed the distance between them. But even then, Ilzarl was not agitated in the least. After shuffling all the way into striking range, Reiji unleashed a slash at Ilzarl in an instant. It was a vertical strike like lightning. He was aiming for Ilzarl's shoulder. However...

“How light.”

“Wha!?”

Lightly raising his left arm with composure, Reiji's orichalcum blade came to a complete stop. In spite of striking him on his unprotected bare arm, the blade did not pass through any of his skin at all. Reiji didn't hold anything back. It was a strike he made with all his might. However, it had no effect at all. Even Rajas wrapped his arm in that dark power to repel this blade. But here, his strike was being sneered at like it had no meaning whatsoever.

Seeing that result that he had never seen before unfold right in front of his eyes, Reiji was unable to move for a single instant due to shock. And immediately coming down upon him, was Ilzarl's right palm. No, it was his nails. Those nails which looked sharp enough to be used as blades came charging in along with that large hand as it loomed over Reiji. Reiji promptly put out his orichalcum sword.

“G-guu...”

By a single hair's breadth, the nails came to a stop. And at the same time, a terrifying amount of power pierced through his body and blew out behind him. That power blew away a cloud of dust like a squall to his back. If it weren't for the divine protection from the hero summoning ritual, he would have been unable to endure that strike and would have been blown away to the stone wall and died.

“So you can react. Despite being so weak you put up such a futile struggle...”

“N-not yet...”

Ilzarl took advantage of his height, and pushed down. A dreadful amount of physical strength was contained within his arms. Stuck between Ilzarl's hand and the ground, Reiji's body began creaking. His bones were making an ominous sound like they were about to crack. His feet began sinking into the grotto floor.

He couldn't escape. He couldn't even ward it off to the side, Ilzarl's power was just far too strong, it took all his effort just to endure it. An unpleasant sweat was pouring down his brow that felt worse than any regular or cold sweat.

When he paid attention, he could sense mana swelling up behind him. It was Titania's support. However, maybe because it didn't have much power, Ilzarl did not even shift his gaze, and only indifferently looked down on Reiji. The wind magic was fired off, but even though it directly struck Ilzarl's body, he did not stir a single inch. Seeing that play out, Titania let out a bitter groan.

“Ku... Magic is practically useless...”

“I will do it. Your Royal Highness, go save Reiji.”

“—Ku, understood.”

After Titania acknowledged her, Graziella stepped forward and unleashed her mana.

“—Oh Earth. Become the crystallization of my tyranny. Take hold of unyielding power and crush the one before me. Thus, become a monument which will praise their glorious death.”

Graziella's chant resounded through the grotto. Before he knew it, Reiji caught sight of Titania's figure closing in. Her hands were hidden behind her back as she ran towards him.

“Tia!?”

“Reiji-sama! Ward him off with all your might! After that leave it to me!”

“U-un!”

Honestly obeying Titania's instructions, he put all his strength into pushing Ilzarl's hand to the side. Immediately following that, Reiji's body was caught by Titania and thrown to the side. As Ilzarl's hand struck the ground, Graziella fired out her keyword.

“Crystal Raid!”

The gypsum on the ground rose to the air and broke into a countless number of splinters, and then accelerated like cannonballs as they rushed towards Ilzarl's completely open body. Since earth magic had a good amount of weight behind it, it had more destructive power than other magics. And then, because the stones she was firing were tapered into a sharp point, they worked well against bodies of flesh... Or they were supposed to anyways.

“Even this amount of destructive power is futile!? You damn monster!”

The many pointed stones flying at Ilzarl struck him and fell to the floor right as they did. As the mana vanished from them, the stones were reduced to pebbles. Along Ilzarl's body, there was not a single wound

present.

“—Oh Earth! Become a crystallization of my tyranny! Take hold of unyielding power and crush the one before me, sharpen like the blade of a sword! The monument which praises their glorious death, is a shining brilliant sword marking their grave! Crystal Raid Refine!”

Graziella let out a different chant from the magic she just used. All the rocks that floated in the air extended and became thin and sharp like swords. As Graziella swung her thrust out arm to the side, rocks once more flooded towards Ilzarl.

“Then how about this!?”

“Fuu, it doesn't matter how much magic you fire woman, it is futile! KAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!”

And right at the moment the stone swords reached Ilzarl's body, he fired out a voice loud enough to shatter their eardrums. The sound waves shook the entire grotto, but more importantly, everything born of Graziella's magic fell to the ground exactly where they were.

“Ridiculous! To repel magic using only his voice...”

As Graziella muttered in a dumbfounded state, Ilzarl gaze captured her. Having blood thirst and fighting spirit turned towards her, Graziella panicked and jumped away from where she was.

“Ku... This is a bad location. I can't use the Devil Connect here...”

She muttered in a bitter tone. Because of where they were, her trump card which teleported a massive rock could not be used. In grief at not being able to use all her powers, she tried to retreat to the back.

“Too slow.”

After casting his gaze on her, he must have identified her as prey. His leap far surpassed the distance of Graziella's retreat, and he closed the distance between them in a single breath.

“Shi—!?”

“Look out!”

“Reiji-sama!?”

Witnessing Graziella's crisis right before his eyes, Reiji separated himself from Titania's arms and leaped. He was charging right towards Graziella. Seeing his companion in danger, his brain rang alarm bells and accelerated his body.

After stepping in, Ilzarl unleashed his right leg. Graziella's face was steeped in despair. Titania and Mizuki's voice filled the air. And as Ilzarl's kick was flying in to decapitate Graziella, Reiji swung his sword at that outstretched leg with all his strength.

“UOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOH!!”

It felt like he struck a mass of hard metal. Due to the sheer difference in strength between them, he was unable to blow back that leg. However, he did at least dampen its power somewhat. And on the spur of the moment, Reiji made his decision. The moment he used up all of his strength, Reiji let go of his orichalcum sword and jumped at Graziella to break away.

Holding tightly on to her, the two of them tumbled to the ground. Because he had leaped with all his energy and covered for Graziella, his back was knocked against the ground a countless number of times. As their vigour weakened and they came to a stop, Graziella yelled as she came to an understanding of what just happened.

“Are you an idiot!? Why did you save me!?”

“Why you say, cause you were in danger, I just...”

“Just what!? You're a hero! What do you intend on accomplishing by covering for me!?”

Seized by the pain and swaying, while his consciousness had gotten hazy, Reiji was thinking that for the arrogant Graziella, it was a somewhat unexpected reprimand. She was speaking in a way like she was telling him that he was underestimating their enemy, but she properly understood that it was imperative that the hero's safety should take a priority.

—Sorry. The word naturally came to Reiji's head. That was not just

intended for Graziella, but also for Titania and Mizuki who continued to believe in him, and also for those important people that weren't present. The reason he wanted to apologize didn't need to be said.

Reiji heaved Graziella off to the side.

“You complete moron—!!”

“Reiji-sama!!”

“Reiji-kun!!”

It's fine like this. And just at the moment that he convinced himself, he could feel a terrifying presence approaching from behind.

“Covering for a woman!? What a boring way to meet your end, hero!”

“Ku...”

He was going to die here. Just as he came to that conclusion, a blue wind suddenly blew past his eyes.

“Mu?”

Just as he thought that he heard a puzzled voice come from Ilzarl, Ilzarl leaped backwards. Seeing this, Reiji promptly turned around. Cutting in between himself and Ilzarl, was Titania, with two swords crossed at the ready.

“Eh!? Tia!? What's with those swords...”

“Leave that for later Reiji-sama! For now use all your strength to fall back!”

Recognizing the meaning behind her words, Reiji retreated from the battle.

Before he knew it, Titania had covered her mouth with the collar of her overcoat and had her swords prepared in an underhanded grip. And just as he was thinking of that, Titania vanished from his field of vision. Just as if she had teleported, she appeared behind Ilzarl and charged in.

As Ilzarl sensed her presence and turned around, Titania vanished again without making any attacks. And then, she once more appeared

behind Ilzarl's back, and this time, she truly intended to strike, and Ilzarl used his chains to protect himself and stop her strike.

“Tch, buzzing around...”

Ilzarl muttered with an annoyed voice. And then, Titania's figure vanished again.

“Amazing...”

Reiji inadvertently muttered a childlike admiration from his mouth.

Titania was moving around like she was toying with Ilzarl. Even with Reiji's kinetic vision that he gained from the divine protection of the hero summoning ritual, he could just barely make out her movements. The flying copper chains were repelled by her sword, and whenever she closed in she would continuously assault him with sword strikes from both swords.

In response, Ilzarl was taking evasive action. Even though he just stood there and blocked Reiji's sword techniques, he didn't seem to want to be hit by Titania's, and was stepping in a way as to escape her blade. Moreover, Titania's sword techniques held a peculiar characteristic in the way they drew an arc in the air with her slashes, so dodging those required him to move much more than dodging a regular sword slash.

Titania's slashes showed no signs of stopping. Finding an opening in Ilzarl's defences, she came soaring in. Immediately following that, she let out a crossed slash from her blades right at Ilzarl's face—and then landed on the ground after leaping back.

It certainly looked like her mithril swords caught Ilzarl right in the face. However...

“Even though you don't possess the divine protection of the Goddess, you put up a much better fight. Also—”

All that her slashes were able to catch, was single layer of skin on Ilzarl's cheek. In spite of being right in front of Titania's eyes, Ilzarl fearlessly wiped away the blood with his finger and gazed at it as if to check.

“It's been a long time since I was dealt a wound, but to think it would be something from a mere human.”

“Don't underestimate me!”

“But, that's as far as you go.”

Titania howled back at him as she broke into a dash and closed in once more. Ilzarl meanwhile, simply casually waved his hand. It was a sharp attack from his nails. In an instant, matching the number of his fingers, five enormous slashes assaulted the bare rock, forcing Titania to come to a halt. Looking closely, Ilzarl's chains were floating and their tips were divided into ends. The divided and floating chains were shaped like anchors, and wrapped around Titania's vicinity before plunging into the ground. It was just like a chain cage.

“Tia!”

“—Ku! Oh Earth! Surround me and become a solid protective wall! Absolutely none shall pass even even after this life is extinguished! Room Wall Raising!”

Immediately following Titania's chant, a wall of mud formed between her and the chains right as red lightning came pouring in. As the mud wall was wrapped up in the crimson and jet black flickering, it was struck repeatedly by lightning and the wall was completely blown away, it crumbled far too easily. Titania's body was now exposed, and in an outbreak of white smoke, her figure vanished.

“TIAAAAAAAA!”

Completely drowned out by the roaring thunder, Reiji screamed as loud as he could. However, there was no voice that called back to him.

“N-no way...”

Reiji could hear Mizuki mutter in despair. Every single person present shared her feelings and were holding their breath.

... A cloud of white smoke was rising up clad in red lightning. The red lightning was a powerful attack which easily destroyed Faylia's magic.

And what was struck by it, was Titania's slender body that did not have the divine protection of the hero summoning ritual. Nobody thought that she could withstand it. However, as the white smoke dispersed, the figure of a girl on her knees appeared.

“N-not yet...”

“So your defences made it by a hair's breadth. However—”

Pulling up the chains on the ground, he wrapped them around Titania. And then, shaking her off like an annoying pest, he threw her towards Reiji and the others.

“Ga, Haa.... ah...”

Unable to move her body, she bounced across the ground. She was headed right towards the pedestal where the tyrant's relic was being kept, and just like that, Titania crashed against it and sent the book flying off the pedestal.

The book landed right at Ilzarl's feet. His eyes were attracted to it as it came to a stop, and Ilzarl stooped down to pick it up. Seeing this, Faylia, who was still being supported by Mizuki, yelled.

“That's!”

“What? What's wrong with this?”

“Y-you mustn't touch that!”

Her scream seemed like she was trying to protect herself, but that was not the case. If it was just as Faylia said, anyone who touched that book would become just like the tyrant. If a demon general did so, the outcome would be unimaginable.

“Fuu, certainly there is an ominous feeling coming from this.”

“If you understand that then...”

Don't touch it. Please don't touch it. I'm begging you. She was trying to say those words, however...

“But—It's not like I don't have any memories of this kind of thing.”

Rejecting her wish, Ilzarl picked up the book. However, nothing changed. Ilzarl only scrutinized the book as nothing went as Faylia had said.

“... Why? After touching that, how are you staying sane...?”

“Regarding that, it is a privilege of this body. At any rate, to think there is another power similar to Zekaraia...”

Ilzarl was meaningfully muttering as he tucked the book on his back using his chains.

“I will be taking this—Now then, the only ones who can move properly here are, the bastard hero, and that woman in the back right?”

“Kuu...”

Ilzarl was gazing at both Reiji and Mizuki, and began walking towards them. He dealt with Graizella, and also easily defeated Titania who was able to put up such a fierce fight. He was a monster. Without a shadow of doubt. Right now, Reiji did not have a sword in his hands. Because he let go if it earlier, he was unarmed. Even if he fired magic, he didn't think it would have any effect. There was absolutely nothing left that he could do.

“... Reiji, take Mizuki and run away.”

“Eh...?”

“If a hero dies here, then everything will be lost. I will hold that guy back. Go.”

“B-but.”

As Reiji hesitated, Titania got back up and followed after Graziella.

“R-Reiji-sama. It is just as her Imperial Highness says, don't mind us and just run away.”

“No way! I can't just leave everyone behind!”

“Your concern is needless. Her Imperial Highness and Faylia-dono are both here with me.”

“Reiji, you go do what it is that you must. Would you have him take that

weapon and kill you as well? If even one of the bastions known as the heroes falls, the demons' fervour will only grow ever stronger.”

“B-but.”

“You should have that resolve. If you don't want to abandon anyone else. Go. At this rate, everyone here will only die in vain.”

“ ... ”

“In the worst case, use her Royal Highness as a shield and run away.”

Graziella grinned as she showed her teeth. She was likely intending to convey her composure, but in this situation, Reiji could only hear it as her heroic determination.

“Have you finished your little meeting before you die?”

A shadow was drawing nearer at a composed pace. To Reiji, it looked just like a grim reaper. As he was right now, it was an opponent he could never win against. His only choice was to run away. Just as they told him to. Even if he didn't want to, there wouldn't be a single person who would forgive him for his egotistic attitude.

“No—”

And then, he suddenly realized. No, he still had the Sacrament that he put away before drawing his sword. But, he didn't know whether or not he could use it. There were special words needed to awaken that weapon, and they didn't come to Reiji's mind.

“Ku...”

Reiji ground his teeth at his helplessness. Graziella and Titania's voices were urging him to leave. Mizuki was looking at him with a worried gaze. As the time where he had to make a cruel choice drew nearer, he could hear a whisper in his head. Is it really alright to run away? What do you intend on doing by not demonstrating your power here? What will you do if you cannot save them? The only thing that could be whispering to him, was the object in his hand. Thus, tightly, as tightly as he could, he gripped the Sacrament. And...



Reiji was also still gripped in surprise, and as he casually turned around, he could see Mizuki's cheerful face filled to the brim with energy. Immediately following that, he could sense a presence jumping in, and exactly where he was just standing, an enormous copper chain passed by in a flash.

“Fuu. So that's why he called it a weapon. I see, that's quite the amusing object huh...”

As Ilzarl leisurely let out his impression, his sharp gaze still did not appear clouded in the least. Reiji then turned the Sacrament towards that man whose attitude had not changed at all since the very beginning. And then, as if the Sacrament was responding to Reiji's will, it sucked in his mana, and began moving.

The two white circles which were crossing each other diagonally began revolving in opposite directions, and the porcelain wings let out a pleasant chill along with particles and a vapour formed of mana that crawled up his arm. It began moving like an internal combustion engine and those vibrations were passed through his hands.

The reason why he was unable to suppress the shaking, was either because of the sword itself pulsating, or because he was trembling from the irrepressible urge as he eagerly awaited to use it. A shining blue magic circle formed at his feet. And as he swung the sword to his side, the air touched by the tip of his blade formed a blue crystal trail and scattered into tiny pieces.

The spread out crystallized chain froze the air and ground before him. It felt like it wasn't accompanied by any sense of intensity. Compared to the magic used by Titania, Graziella and Faylia, it was relaxed, and he could barely feel any power from it. But that gentle power was tremendous.

“K-ku—!?”

The moment the crystals were about to reach Ilzarl, he must have sensed the subtleties behind it and leaped away. The tip of the chain that did not make it far enough away was frozen, became blue, and then shattered. That chain which broke through Faylia's powerful magic was

destroyed with ease.

“The crystal sword Ishar Cluster...”

The name of the sword suddenly came to his mind. Faylia said it was something that could freeze anything in existence, but that was wrong. It was likely that by the power of that sword, objects simply took a frozen shape.

... However, for some reason, he could see Ilzarl's movement become sluggish. The sword's manifestation, the use of its power, even though he had shown plenty of openings while doing so, for some reason he couldn't sense Ilzarl aiming for those openings. Was it simply the negligence born of the composure of the strong? While Reiji was thinking of such things, he firmly gripped the Ishar Cluster's grip and leaped towards Ilzarl.

“Eh? Eeh!?”

And just then, Reiji let out a surprised voice. He was leaping at a speed that he never experienced before. He went much further than he thought he would at a much faster speed. That action which exceeded his control caused him to panic in the air. Thinking it would be bad at this rate, he fluttered in the air and stuck out his left hand to land, then spread out both his legs widely and used those three points to brake against the ground. Slowly chipping away at the vigour of his movement, sand and dirt was being kicked up behind him as he slid across the ground.

“I stopped...”

Without bumping against the wall, Reiji let out a sigh of relief. And then, he suddenly realized that he was full of openings—

“Behind me!?”

“Eh...?”

As Ilzarl yelled in shock, Reiji let out his bewilderment. When he realized, everyone was looking at him in surprise. It was like something unimaginable had just happened. Looking at that, he thought to himself that it was impossible, as a guess came to mind. It wasn't just Reiji who was surprised at his movements, the reason their surprise came later than

his, was because nobody was able to react. The reason Ilzarl's reaction seemed so slow, was probably because Reiji's own senses had been accelerated.

Holding that conjecture to his chest, he concentrated his gaze on Ilzarl's movements. And just as he thought, he felt that Ilzarl was moving much slower than before. It was slow enough that he had some composure to react towards them. And then, for some reason, seeing those movements, that absolute despair that he had been clinging to earlier from the difference in their power had vanished into thin air.

The copper chain which came flying at him was blocked by the Ishar Cluster. He could feel its weight with his arms, but he was able to dampen it in a way that could not be compared to the time he caught Ilzarl's nails.

“This is, the power of this sword—” “... I see. That's why that guy said it could even reach Zekaraia. To think it could lift up a mere offering to at least be able to put up a fight.”

Reiji could hear surprise in Ilzarl's voice, but he still seemed to be quite composed. Certainly, the despair that came from their difference in power was no longer in Reiji's mind, but even so, he could still get the sense of a dominating strength coming from Ilzarl. In this case, he should fully unleash the power of the sword. As Reiji decided this, he stabbed the tip of the Ishar Cluster into the ground with all his strength.

“OOOOOOOOOOOOOH!”

Along with a roar, the Ishar Cluster began to radically suck his mana out, and the ground began to crystallize with enormous looking crystal ores. Without specifically wrapping around Ilzarl, they encroached upon the entire grotto. Ilzarl resisted and wielded his chains wrapped in red lightning to fend it off, but the smashed crystal would continue spreading, and eventually even the chains that were being used to smash the crystals began to freeze. At this rate, he could do it. He could cross swords with him. And just as Reiji was thinking that...

“—Eh? Uu, Ah... Wh-what...?”

Suddenly his vision was shaky. It was as if he was suddenly struck by

dizziness. And just like that, his knees gave way and he staggered like he had no more strength in his body. And then, the domain of crystallized blue ore shattered as one and vanished.

“Reiji-sama!?”

“My body... All the mana, was sucked up...”

“With this much power, it is obvious it would require a significant amount of mana. It just means that this weapon is more than you can handle.”

Thrusting forth a phrase like he knew all about it, Ilzarl drew closer. And once more, there was nothing that Reiji could do.



Ilzarl was once more closing in on Reiji who had excessively used his power. This time, he would no longer be able to get away. Watching this happen right before her eyes, Mizuki was driven by an impatient feeling.

It was exactly the same as when they fought Rajas. Once again, she was tasting her powerlessness. However, in this place, because she was a hindrance, she had no choice but to fall to the back. If it was like that, was there any meaning to her following along saying that she would help him? As she asked herself, that question floated up in her head and vanished.

—Do you wish to fight?

Suddenly, she heard those words from somewhere.

“Eh? Who?”

While supporting Faylia who was sweating from the pain, she searched for the source of that voice and looked around. However, naturally, it was not the voice of anybody present. As she was completely bewildered by that situation, the voice once more rang out of of nowhere.

—Tell me. Do you wish to fight? Or do you not?

She couldn't understand what the intent behind that question was. But Mizuki's answer had been determined a long time ago.

“I also, want to fight. I want to be useful to everyone...”

Immediately after putting her true feelings into words without a hint of lying, Mizuki's consciousness slipped away into the darkness.



In another sudden turn of events, right as Reiji fell to his knees.

BAAA~~~~~AANG!

With a completely strange and incomprehensible sound, the air between Reiji and Ilzarl exploded.

“U-uwa....”

“W-what is it this time!?”

Reiji covered his face from the explosion in front of him, while Ilzarl leaped back from where he was standing, but the explosion chased him all the way to the grotto wall. And then, Reiji could hear something behind him...

“FUHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!”

It was a familiar voice, a loud laughter that he remembered hearing before, and it rang through the entire grotto. Reiji suddenly had a terrible feeling and immediately turned around. And there, he could see Mizuki standing, with her arms crossed, making a haughty pose while firing out her loud laughter.

“M-Mizuki!?”

“O-oi, what's the matter all of a sudden, Mizuki!?”

Titania and Graziella both fired off baffled voices towards Mizuki. And the answer that was returned to the two of them was...

“My name is not Mizuki!!”

Hearing that nonsensical declaration, a '!' and '?' was surely floating inside everyone's heads. And then, as everyone returned their bewilderment with a 'Then who are you!?' all at once...

“—Every single one of you! You shall do well to listen carefully! My

name is Io Kuzami! The ultimate ruler who controls everything in all these three thousand worlds, the Holy King of the Heavens, Io Kuzami!”

And then, what followed her declaration, was Reiji's shriek.

“WHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!?  
EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEH!?”

Reiji had completely forgotten that he was sitting on the ground exhausted of mana, and let out a tremendous voice. To him, this situation was the most impossible thing that could happen. Seeing him completely lose his composure, Titania called out to him in complete bewilderment.

“R-Reiji-sama?”

“M-Mizuki-san! Mizuki-san! That's, just, wait, this isn't the time for this!”

“What are you saying!? If not now then when would you say it is the time!? FUHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!”

Just how was she in such high spirits? Completely denying Reiji's words, she began laughing with extreme vigour. Seeing this mysterious situation, Ilzarl, who had retreated back to the wall, looked daunted as he let out a somewhat astonished voice.

“What? Did you lose your mind?”

“What a rude fellow. This mind of mine has not been lost in the least!”

Saying that, Mizuki suddenly pinned down her left eye.

“It throbs... It aches... This left eye of mine. It is throbbing sonorously as it furiously demands I obliterate the scoundrel who has wronged me...”

Looking closely, one of Mizuki's eye was shining with a golden glow. Even though both her eyes should have been the same colour up until now, before Reiji knew it, they had become heterochromatic just like she always admired long ago.

“Hear me, oh half naked man! From here, I shall grant you a fate beyond this plane and drop you into the eternal glacier known as the depths of hell born of God's twisted mind!”

“ ... ”

“You should feel honoured! For soon you will be lining up before the great Demon King! FUHAHAHAHAHAHA!”

Mizuki thrust her finger at Ilzarl as she made that declaration filled to the absolute brim with self confidence. On the other hand, Reiji was also pointing his finger at Mizuki, and was flapping his mouth open and closed like a fish. As for Ilzarl, as expected, her boasting didn't sit well with him, and he seemed rather irritated. His feet sank into the ground as he stepped forward firmly, and he fired out a terrifying presence.

“To think that you would be unable to understand the exquisite words that come out of this mouth of mine! You absolute fool with inadequate brains! Take this!”

And just as she said that, a colossal amount of mana was released from Mizuki's body.

“Eh!?”

“What!?”

Those surprised voices came from Reiji, as well as Ilzarl. On one hand, was the close friend who had travelled along with her all this time who was surprised at her irregular quantity of mana. On the other, was the enemy in absolute shock at the dreadful amount of mana being released by the one before his eyes. As Ilzarl put himself on guard, Mizuki began chanting.

“—Oh flames and earth. Become glorious and raise an innocent voice. My temple stands firm in this place, become the red hot iron next to the full blown furnace, and flood over all before me. Follow my hand, Cathedral Forge!”

Oh flames and earth. What Reiji heard was a composite spell that he had never heard before. And the keyword she used, a cathedral forge. Immediately following those words, multiple stone pillars shot up from the ground around Mizuki. Before long, with her standing atop its centre, right up to the limits of the immense grotto itself, a small temple took

form. And just as Reiji was thinking of that, the stone pillars became red hot, and as they overflowed, magma was born in the surroundings.

“Climb up! If you bastards waste any time then you will also be caught in the flood of this incandescent red blood of mine!”

“Eh? Ah, un!”

Following Mizuki's direction, Reiji and the others climbed up to her position. And soon, the floor of the grotto sank into boiling red lava, turned into a tsunami, and rushed in at Ilzarl.

“This is bad, we won't be able to breathe! Mizuki!”

Seeing the tremendous ratio of magma present, Reiji panicked. At this rate, the gas and heat generated by the magma would burn all the oxygen in the air and they wouldn't be able to breathe. He immediately complained to Mizuki to urge her to stop her magic, but...

“Do not fear. Even in such a sealed space, as long as you remain within this Cathedral Forge of mine, you need not worry about air. Though there seems to be an exception outside as well—”

“An exception?”

“Cast thine gaze upon that.”

Saying that, Mizuki pointed out Ilzarl with her gaze. As Reiji lined up his sight with hers, he could see the magma around him exploding, and appearing from that explosion, was the demon general Ilzarl.

“This destructive power is...”

While Ilzarl was muttering, he looked at his own hands carefully. He was certainly covered by that flood of magma, but perhaps because of some sort of resistance, the only change was that his skin had reddened slightly. It was almost akin to a simple sunburn.

“No way, even after being drowned like that there's practically no damage...”

“A monster through and through.”

Reiji could hear Titania and Graziella's terrified voices. On the other hand, Mizuki was letting out a creepy laugh.

“With those circumstances, only his skin was slightly injured is it? Kukuku, as one would expect, demi-ogre. To withstand that magic with curable wounds, it looked to me as if you shook off this magic of mine with only your mana. Such a profound black even deeper than the darkness thrust forth by the King of Hell, you may accept my praise.”

Mizuki's declaration as she became intoxicated with her imagination dealt a painful blow to Reiji. However, Ilzarl seemed to be ignoring that.

“It has been a long time since I've seen someone who could properly use magic. It reminds me of the howl of the dragonnewts.”

“Do not group me together with such a thing! I am the Holy King of the Heavens! A unique existence throughout all heaven and earth!”

She unleashed fearless words in a haughty manner, but Ilzarl didn't seem to really pay her any mind, and snorted. And then, he made an expression like his interest was waning.

“You really are prattling on about nothing but incomprehensible things, you mere offering. But, whatever.”

Saying that, for some reason, Ilzarl turned his back to them. And then just like that, he started to head towards the exit of the grotto. Seeing that, Mizuki looked at him with a disturbed gaze.

“Why are you resigning? Did you not want that Sacrament or whatever it was, bastard?”

“I can eat offerings like you whenever I want. If I'm going to do so, it would simply be best to do so 'when it is perfectly ready.' Until then, I will leave that Sacrament or whatever in your hands.”

“I do not mind even if you do not wait you know? Or perhaps you fear this power of mine?”

As Mizuki repeatedly fired off provocative words, Titania called out to her indicating with her eyes that it would be bad to continue.

“M-Mizuki...”

“Do not fear. If it is I, then he is an opponent who can be defeated.”

Without looking back at her, Mizuki spoke out while still completely focused on Ilzarl. Having regressed back into her chuunibyoutai state, she was completely filled with an inexplicable level of self confidence.

“You mere offering. Don't speak with such conceit. I'm saying that I will let you off. You should simply shiver in place like the others.”

“... Fuu.”

As Ilzarl shot over a gaze that felt like it could kill someone, yet Mizuki let out a snort in dissatisfaction. And then, Ilzarl squinted his eyes, and muttered something.

“... Just doing what that guy says, now that I think of it, it would just peeve me too.”

Nobody could hear what he said. All Reiji could somehow sense, was that his voice was somewhat discontent.

... And then, the back of the demon who easily handled the power of the hero and his companions vanished. Before long, Reiji and the others were struck with relief, and completely loosened their bodies that had stiffened due to the tension.

“W-we're alive...”

Reiji's hands couldn't stop shaking. Titania and the others also seemed to be completely spent, and all loosely dropped their shoulders as they stared at the entrance to the grotto dumbfounded.

“Seriously, to think he just up and left...”

“Just what did that demon want to do...”

Ilzarl only came in, laid waste to the area, and left. He seemed to want the Sacrament, but perhaps that priority was fairly low to him, and in the end he didn't bother stealing it. Suddenly, Reiji remembered something more important than that.

“That's right! Mizuki!”

“What is the matter? Suddenly raising thine voice like that, my beloved fiancé.”

“Fi-Fia!?”

Reiji was completely stunned by her shocking declaration and was unable to speak. Seeing that he was magnificently bewildered, Mizuki cocked her head to the side.

“What? Is there something strange?”

“Strange you say!? It's strange! What's been going on with you just now, seriously!?”

“There is nothing going on though? On the contrary, just why are you so perturbed?”

Saying that, Mizuki was broadly grinning with a smile like she was just toying with him. Reiji was completely bewildered and could not tell what she was thinking at all. Suddenly, Titania then called out to him.

“Reiji-sama, more importantly, shall we get out of here? There is Mizuki's matter, but I'm also worried about Faylia-dono's condition as well as Gregory and the others.”

“Aah, un. Got it...”

Titania's suggestion was the most reasonable thing being said. However, while carrying on to a deep anxiety that could not simply be summed up in words, Reiji lent his shoulder to Faylia and left the grotto behind.



–Speaking from the results, Astel's knights and the soldiers Graziella brought with her from Nelferia were injured but there was no threat to their lives.

From what Reiji heard from them, after seeing them off deeper into the temple, Ilzarl suddenly pushed in. At first they thought he was just someone shady, and the monks from the Salvation Church simply turned

him away, but Ilzarl began to eat those monks as he scattered them around, and a battle broke out. The spell casters from the church weren't able to deal with him at all, and every last one of them that tried to fend him off seemed to have been eaten.

But, perhaps because he ate his fill, by the time Gregory and the others arrived he seemed to have lost interest, and didn't even put much effort into fighting. If there was something to be thankful for, it was just that.

Currently, everyone had been treated by healing magic and were resting in a separate room together with Faylia. As for Reiji and the others, they were borrowing a room within the temple and gathered together. Remembering the fight with Ilzarl, Titania let out a sigh.

“He was a preposterous opponent wasn't he?”

“The demon general, Ilzarl... We have to face that kind of opponent from here on huh.”

Reiji's words that were not intended for anyone in particular had no strength behind them. Ilzarl was just that much of a terrifyingly formidable enemy. Thinking of that demon, his own powerlessness, and his own foolishness at extravagantly saying that he would fight despite such powerlessness, were things that he fully understood now.

The fact that they had to fight against strong enemies was something he understood back when he fought Rajas. Naturally, he was resolved to do so. But for them to be so overwhelming, for an opponent to show up where he was unable to do a single thing, it was beyond his expectations.

He was able to attain the Sacrament. However, the weapon had reverted back to its form as an ornament, and even if he tried turning it back into a weapon, it would not so much as budge. If he once more came across that demon general like this, he would only be completely at a loss once again.

Was it really all right like this? This question filled his heart with anxiety. He wasn't the only one gripped by anxiety. Both Titania and Graziella were the same. They were both depressed as they thought about the fight with Ilzarl, and their usual energy and forward facing outlook could not be felt at all.

Ilzarl and the Sacrament were both important matters, but Reiji set them both aside for the moment—

“Fumu, what is the matter? My dear fiancé for whom my justice known as desire burns hotter than a scorching dragon's heart as he sleeps at the bottom of the earth, and is more valuable than the great existences known as angels which are servants of mine. For a while now, your complexion has been rather poor you know?”

“Whose fault is that...?”

“Are you implying that it is a fault of mine? What a rude way of talking... Well, I shall let it be.”

Mizuki's speech and conduct were one thing, but in the end, there really was something different about her. Even following the flow of her attitude as she haughtily named herself Io Kuzami, it only brought about a recollection of unease for Reiji.

And what stood out the most was her eye. One of her black eyes was giving off a golden shine and become heterochromatic.

Ever since they left the grotto, she always had her arms crossed with a haughty attitude as she acted happily. Currently, she was in the room they borrowed in the temple as Reiji looked at her with a complicated expression. Titania and Graziella were also unable to hide the fact that they were thrown out of order as they looked at her.

“How should I put it, Mizuki, isn't it about time you put an end to that setting? Isn't it the dark history of your past?”

“I am not Mizuki. I am the Holy King of the Heavens, Io Kuzami.”

“That's why I'm saying that's enough of that setting. I got tired of hearing it a long time ago... Uuuu, we're not getting anywhere like this.”

Mizuki... No, Io Kuzami was unabashedly firing off numerous painful words at Reiji's ears and left him at his wit's end. As he remembered that turbulent past, he couldn't help but have a headache. However, Io Kuzami seemed completely unaware of any of that.

“There is no setting, in reality, it is exactly as I say. I am the unique existence throughout all heaven and earth, the supreme ruler who supervises all children who are born under the heavens, the Holy King of the Heavens, Io Kuzami after all.”

“Every time you open your mouth the setting is just getting grander and grander... Aah, as I thought it's the Mizuki from that horrible period...”

As Reiji groaned in anguish for a moment, he looked back over at her.

“Hey... Mizuki.”

“How often must I repeat myself? I am not Mizuki.”

As Io Kuzami once more denied his words, this time Titania called out to her.

“... Um, are you really not Mizuki?”

“Umu. I am genuinely not the true proprietor of this body known as Mizuki. I am the holy one descended from the heavens who receives the wishes of all who live on this world.”

What's genuine about it? What's holy about it? Reiji was mumbling in his own mind but couldn't bring himself to say anything as he winced at her words. And then, Graziella questioned him with a curious expression on her face.

“Reiji. I don't really understand what's going on with that Io Kuzami but... Could you explain it?”

“... Do I have to?”

“I know it is something that cannot be helped, but for the time being, right?”

“How do I say it, it's embarrassing to talk about...”

“Why are you embarrassed about it?”

“It happens right? Look, like when you're sitting happily together with your family and the TV just starts playing things concerning adult matters or something...”

“I don't understand those expressions from your foreign world though.”

“I can't think of any other good examples.”

As Reiji hesitated to explain, Io Kuzami puffed out her chest in pride and spoke for herself in an awfully happy tone.

“So be it. If you wish to know about myself, I shall inform you. Everyone other than my fiancé should humbly bow down and listen.”

“Who's going to bow? Just talk.”

“Aah, she's going to say it... You're going to frankly confess huh, Mizuki...”

As Reiji started muttering in despair, Io Kuzami took a daunting pose atop the bed. As all three people present resisted asking whether that was really necessary, after Io Kuzami finished lording over them with her gaze, she proudly cut to the main point.

“My name is the Holy King of the Heavens, Io Kuzami. I have awakened to guide the worthless beings known as humanity who have run rampant on this boring world to the true realm of darkness. I am the absolute ruler of the black flame darker than the abyss which grants death equally to all in existence, my other names are the Grand Ripper, the Death Child... right?”

“Don't ask me! I don't know!”

“Certainly, I had about three other names granted to me though... I am the one who boils all the malice in the world into an equal jet black darkness using that Pandora whose name is karma to...”

“You don't have to say it! You don't have to say anymore, so please!”

Reiji blocked his ears. Perhaps because his anguish had transferred over to Titania, she was rubbing her temple with a severe expression.

“... I don't understand why, but just listening to her gives me a headache.”

“You get a headache precisely because you can't understand, Tia...”

The two of them were suffering equally, but on the other hand, Graziella seemed to be thinking about it seriously—

“Reiji, your Royal Highness. Could it be that Mizuki was possessed by something strange? Didn't that elf mention it earlier? The reason the King who ruled over this area became a tyrant was because he was possessed by a tyrannical will.”

“Now that you mention it.”

“Could you not group me together with such a thing?”

And as Reiji remembered, Io Kuzami was furious with dissatisfaction. True, if he grouped them together, he would feel sorry for the tyrant.

“I shall say this beforehand, but I did not even touch that book, and in the first place, did that one who served he who holds the fist which conquered the devil, which shook the heavens and earth from top to bottom and spread his name across the universe, satisfied with atrocities greater than God, greater than Satan, the god of demons, not take it with him?”

Io Kuzami was probably referring to the demon who named himself Ilzarl. Certainly, Faylia had said that the origin of the tyrant's possession was that book itself. But rather than that, if the tyrant did end up possessing Mizuki, there was no point in digging up Mizuki's past which was hidden in the darkness. As Reiji wrinkled his brow wondering just what was going on, Titania drew closer to him. And then, she brought her mouth close to his ear.

“... Reiji-sama, what do you think?”

“Perhaps, and only perhaps, inside Mizuki, another personality other than herself was born or something?”

“Another personality?”

“Un. It's a mental illness called split personality disorder. When humans undergo tremendous stress, they're unable to keep their mind in balance and a personality other than the original personality is born.”

Reiji gave Titania a simple explanation of a single cause of split personality disorder. Graziella, who also heard this explanation from the side, cut in to their conversation.

“So that is the situation that Mizuki is in right now...? Fumu. Certainly, at that time, the demon had fired off a tremendous amount of fighting spirit. It isn't strange to think that it would have done her in mentally.”

“Is there a way to turn her back?”

“It's not like I'm a doctor so I don't know... But, I heard that people with such disorders sometimes switch personalities, or when they're released from their stress the new personality integrates back in with the old one. After a certain amount of time we may be able to find a way to resolve it.”

“So it doesn't mean that Mizuki's personality just vanished.”

“That's only speaking theoretically though...”

Titania felt a slight sense of relief in her chest. And then, suddenly, Io Kuzami cut in to their conversation herself.

“Talking in secret only amongst yourselves? Include myself as well. Allow me to listen to your foolish predictions that are tinier than a grain of rice.”

“No, if we include Mizuki right now, we won't be able to move the conversation along, so I'll refrain.”

“Mizuki. Do not worry. Until you return to normal, I'll help you to the best of my abilities.”

“So you have finally ignored me. Nothing but insolent fellows here.”

Io Kuzami let out her dissatisfaction with a snort. However, after making a dissatisfied expression, she suddenly showed a fearless smile.

“More importantly. My dear fiancé, is it fine for you to only worry about myself?”

“Eh?”

“That.”

What Io Kuzami was pointing at, was the pocket of Reiji's blazer. Inside that pocket, there was the Sacrament as well as the thing called a Lachesis Meter he received from Faylia. Wondering what was wrong with that, Reiji reached into his pocket, and – tick.

“Eh – ?”

He recognized the sound of a clock hand ticking in his head. He heard it, would not quite match the phenomenon he just experienced. It was as if the sound resounded directly deep within his ears.

“Reiji-sama?”

“Did you, hear that just now?”

“Hear what?”

Titania was making an expression like she didn't know what was what. She did not seem to have heard the ticking. And after a short pause, Titania questioned him again.

“Reiji-sama, did you hear something?”

“We didn't hear anything though.”

Graziella surveyed the area alertly as she tried to search for the source of any sounds. However, the sound could currently only be heard by Reiji. On the other hand, Io Kuzami was simply grinning widely like before while smiling like she was toying with him. As she smiled and narrowed her eyes towards his hand, Reiji opened the lid of the pocket watch. And just as when he first picked it up, there was a curved hour and minute hand inside. However...

“It's moving...”

When he first opened it, it was certainly different. The curved needles were now moving, only ever so slightly, but it was roughly just about every minute.

“What a sinful measuring device. As if to say that everyone is destined to perish, and then making such an object as if to rebel against it.”

“... Mizu, or not, Io Kuzami-san, what is this to you?”

“This is the scale which measures the apocalypse. It is a magic relic which represents the rivalry between the unwinding future and the rebellion of the current day.”

“... Faylia-dono did say something like that huh. Something about the beginning of the end of the world right?”

“In other words, you just repeated what Faylia said in an exaggerated expression?”

“I cannot deny the exaggerated expression... Well, take it however you like. You are only able to do so at this time after all.  
FUHAHAHAHAHAHA!”

As Reiji looked at the Lachesis Meter with a stern expression, Io Kuzami broke into laughter. Her laughter gradually grew louder and louder, and obstructed Reiji's thoughts. Unable to bear it any longer, he screamed at Io Kuzami.

“Can you be a little quieter Mizuki!?”

“Will you remember it properly already! My name is the Holy King of the Heavens, Io Kuzami! It is absolutely not Mizuki! Absolutely not!”

“AAAAH DAMMIT! DAMMIT! DAMMIT! Why did it end up like this!? SUIMEI! SAVE MEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!”

Io Kuzami's loud laughter and Reiji's shriek of despair echoed through the building. This all happened during the evening, one week after Suimei fought Eanru.

# Chapter 3

## The New Enemies

In the end, the battle against the demons in the northern Alliance had ended in the form of the demons' temporary retreat.

During the battle, the various countries of the Alliance had suffered a considerable number of casualties, and each of their forces had also temporarily retreated to reorganize themselves. And so, the conclusion was that the battle between armies ended in a draw due to injury.

Meanwhile, because of the incident during the battle where the demons unexpectedly targeted Hatsumi specifically, having heard the story, the king of Miazen requested Hatsumi and the others to return, and intensified the defence of the capital city.

Though when it came to the opponent who overwhelmed both Suimei and the hero Hatsumi, they were bound to fail no matter how many soldiers they gathered, but this was about the only defensive plan they could put in place. Soldiers were gathered from Miazen's domain, and patrols were going around the city to the point where one could say that they were overdoing it.

Apart from that, the royal court also seemed to still be vigilant towards Suimei, but currently, doing anything about it was out of the question, and partway it ended up taking the form of them ignoring him and neglecting the circumstances.

A few days after Suimei and the others left the scene of the battle, Kuchiba Hatsumi returned from the battlefield after it was determined that there was a break in the fighting with the demons. And now, she was visiting a certain place on her own.

That place was the lodging house of Twilight Pavilion. It was the building Suimei and the others were renting rooms in. Hatsumi went up the double staircases that were installed in the entrance way, and

following the leather covered handrail, she headed towards the guest room. Before long, she arrived before her destination, and knocked on the wooden door.

“Umm, may I come in?”

Saying this despite having already gone through the foyer was somewhat strange, but since she was here to visit someone, Hatsumi just felt like saying it. After a short while, a girl's voice was accompanied by quiet footsteps approaching the other side of the door. And then, the door opened.

“Coming. Ah! So it was the Alliance's Hero-dono.”

“Yes. Umm, if I remember right, Stingray-san... right?”

“Yes, it has been... not all that long, correct?”

The one to appear before Hatsumi was Felmenia Stingray. She spoke with a tone like she was pulling at her memories to which Hatsumi made a calm smile, and Felmenia returned her a dignified expression. Taking on the same attitude of the people of this world before a person of certain standing, Felmenia put her hand to her chest and bowed.

“Welcome, Hero-dono. We wholeheartedly welcome you to these lodgings.”

“Eh, ah, yes. Do treat me well.”

Hatsumi hesitated just a little at the sudden change in correspondence, but Felmenia's appearance immediately crumbled as her expression softened up.

“Incidentally, could it be that you are by yourself? With no escorts?”

“Yes. I sneaked away on my own. If anyone came along, that in itself seems like it would be troubling.”

Hatsumi said this as she made a bitter smile. It may have been somewhat rude, but she must have been exhausted. None of the people from the palace thought well of Hatsumi going over to visit Suimei. After coming back to town, she had tried to visit him multiple times, but the

king and the cabinet ministers seemed to have passed down orders to the guards to contain the hero within the palace because of the incident where she was targeted. So her only choice was to find an opening and sneak out. It was somewhat ironic, but she truly thought that this was actually the safest place to be right now— But setting that aside.

“Well there's no use in just standing around as we talk, please come in.”

Felmenia spoke up as she opened the door and pressed it against her own body to open the path for Hatsumi.

“It seems I'll finally be able to relax. The palace and streets are all nothing but guards guards guards guards. Just where did they all come out from...?”

“That is just how dire the times are. And so, Hero-dono, what have you come here for today?”

“I thought I'd drop by to give my thanks for coming to save me the other day. The guild master said that he would probably be in the guest room around this time, so I came by.”

“Is that so? Suimei-dono should currently be in his room sorting through some documents. If you wait, I do think that he should be here before long?”

“Then I'll go ahead and wait a little.”

Guided by Felmenia, Hatsumi took a seat on a chair in the guestroom. It seemed that they had planned on gathering here, as Felmenia already had tea from this world prepared. After Hatsumi took a sip, she could suddenly hear the sound of the door opening.

“Oops, Hatsumi-jou. So you came over?”

The one to appear was Lefille. At the sight of an unexpected visitor, she was making a surprised expression. Hatsumi then stood up from her seat and greeted her.

“Good day. You were called Lefille, right?”

“Yes.”

After Lefille nodded with a bright expression, Felmenia explained the situation to her.

“It seems she is here today to express her thanks for the other day.”

“That's quite courteous of you. Sorry for making you come out all this way.”

“No. I already said it last time, but allow me to thank you again for the reinforcements. Thanks to that, we were able to return safely.”

Following along with the standard Japanese etiquette, Hatsumi bowed down to show her gratitude. Having taken that as excessive gratitude, Felmenia started waving her hands as if to say she was exaggerating.

“It was nothing. All we did was provide assistance to Suimei-dono. If you are going to relay your gratitude, please give it to Suimei-dono.”

“Aah. If Suimei-kun didn't say he would go, those reinforcements probably wouldn't have shown up after all. It is only proper that he should be the one thanked for it. Please do not pay us any mind.”

The two of them were speaking modestly. From their attitude, Hatsumi could just vaguely feel like there was a wall between them. It was practically the first time they met, so it couldn't really be helped, but it felt like they were being vigilant about something else.

As Hatsumi continued sipping at her tea while holding on to such thoughts, judging that the time would be appropriate as Lefille took her seat, Felmenia broke the ice in a somewhat timid manner.

“Umm... Hero-dono, would it be alright for me to ask something?”

“Yes? What about?”

“It's about Suimei-dono, umm, what is your relationship with him?”

“It seems we're cousins. Did you not hear about it from Yakagi?”

“That's, certainly we had inquired about it, but...”

“Is something wrong?”

“Ah, no...”

Felmenia awkwardly averted her gaze, it seemed it was something difficult for her to ask. Hatsumi couldn't tell whether her roundabout manner of asking was supposed to make her realize or say something, but as she was making a curious expression while thinking about it, this time, Lefille spoke up.

“You can't be so sluggish about it. Hatsumi-jou, I'd like to frankly cut to the point. What do you think about Suimei-kun?”

“Wh-what, as in...”

Hatsumi twitched like her chest had just been pricked. Being asked what she thought about him, that kind of context came to her mind. And then, to show that she was right on the mark, the one who had asked her, Lefille, continued speaking with a somewhat embarrassed and reddened face.

“U-umm, that's, you know... That is to say, do you love him or not, as a man...”

“H-Hero-dono, what do you think about Suimei-dono!?”

As if jumping on the wagon, Felmenia bent forwards out of her seat with a dire expression. Both of them were quite serious, but...

“Wait a sec here! Why are you asking me that kind of thing?”

“Because to us, it is an important matter.”

And with that, Hatsumi finally had an inkling about just what kind of intention they had in asking such questions. At the same time that she realized, Felmenia and Lefille also somehow seemed to sense just how Hatsumi thought of Suimei.

—And then, Hatsumi, Lefille and Felmenia each reacted...

“Fuu.”

“Hou.”

“Mumumu...”

And they began glaring at each other with grim expressions. All three of

them were looking at each other like rivals.

Just then, having finished organizing his documents, Suimei arrived. After coming to a good stopping point in his work, he was in a good mood and entered the room while humming a song. And for some reason, three beauties were shooting sparks off at each other right before his eyes.

“Eh... What's this? What's happening?”

And so, the battle concerning the thickheaded magician, had just begun.



—Liliana Zandyke had recently developed a strange 'cuddling habit.'

After she started grouping up with Suimei and the others, whenever her loneliness became unbearable, she would cling on to one among those three. It was likely that it ended up like this because she became aware of what it was like to be spoiled by others. She had not experienced it much up until now, but when she was alone at night, or when she suddenly remembered the time before Rogue picked her up, she would start thinking it would end up like it was before, and it would become very painful for her.

At those times, she would be embraced by one of those three, and her depressed heart would calm down. Even though she was well passed the age to do so and she knew she shouldn't, Lefille said it was something she could only do now, so there was no reason to hold back, that she should regain all the times she couldn't do so since she was born right here as she hugged her.

Loneliness was something that could settle in without any specific trigger. On this day, it wasn't any different.

“Who, should I pick, today.”

While walking towards the guest room, Liliana was thinking about who to have fawn over her. If everything was going as usual today, everyone would have finished what they had to do and should have begun gathering in the guestroom to have some tea while relaxing.

This was something that Liliana had settled on, but her cuddling partner was decided by rotation. If she clung on to a single person all the time, she would end up being a nuisance, so after having Lefille fawn over her, next would be Felmenia, and after that would be Suimei. She also took into account their own situations when choosing a partner and would jump the rotation to accommodate them.

For the last few days, Suimei had been rather busy organizing all the data that he brought back from the black wood forest regarding the hero summoning ritual. Because of this, she had been leaning on the other two, so today she was planning on using him, but—

“Suimei, please cuddle with... me?”

—Just as she opened the door to the guestroom, what came into sight, was three young girls glaring at each other while firing sparks from their eyes, and the figure of Suimei shuddering excessively.

Just from seeing that situation, the intelligent Liliana was able to discern everything that had happened in this room. The fact that her voice was somewhat drowned out by the sound of the door opening was a stroke of good fortune. Misunderstanding that she just entered the room in good spirits, the young girls looked towards her briefly without saying anything, and returned to their standoff.

Suimei, who was trapped in an atmosphere which could be said to be akin to a bed of nails, looked at her with a relieved expression like help from the heavens had just arrived. And then she could hear it, Suimei's awkward and pathetic voice.

“L-Liliana huh. What's up?”

In reply to his question, Liliana began to shut the door from the outside.

“It's, nothing. I will, go back. Good, bye...”

“No, wait. Don't go back. No goodbyes. Stay here. I'm begging you.”

“Don't mind me. Please, do your best.”

“Oioioioioi! Didn't you come here because you needed something? You

said something right? You just said cu-something or other right?”

Having noticed that Suimei was trying to cling on to Liliana to stay in the room, all other gazes were now focused on her. Perhaps because they had sensed something, setting aside Felmenia and Lefille, the hero Hatsumi who had come to visit out of nowhere was rather scary. And then...

“That child, Liliana-chan, right? I feel like I just heard that girl say cuddle though...”

So she was heard. Hatsumi was glaring at Suimei with her eyes half closed. A hero's ears were truly something to be feared. Since Suimei knew exactly what those words implied, his voice croaked as he replied.

“Ah! Aah that's! That's, umm...”

“Hey you, don't tell me you've been doing indecent things to such a small child?”

“There's no way I would do indecent things to Liliana!”

“Then what was that just now?”

“Eh? No, umm, that's...”

As Hatsumi watched Suimei hem and haw, her eyes sharpened abruptly. It was just like she was looking at some lowly insect. Even Liliana couldn't help but shudder at that sight. However, Suimei, who permitted her to cuddle with him, was absolutely not doing so with wicked intentions in his heart. Precisely because he had lost his family, he understood just what her loneliness was like. And to relieve her of those feelings, he allowed her to cling on to him.

However, in this deadly atmosphere where the intensity of the hero was doubled from having just figured out Felmenia and Lefille's feelings of love, before she could finish explaining, Hatsumi would surely spontaneously snap and kill Suimei.

Seeing that Suimei was hard pressed to give an explanation, Hatsumi began stretching her hand out to the sword at her waist. As the sound of

metal separating from one another rang out from her waist, Suimei raised his voice in an unprecedentedly pathetic way.

“Umm, you see...”

“Umu, that's actually...”

Felmenia and Lefille were also finding it hard to throw him a rescue rope. Speaking practically, it was true that Liliana came here asking for a cuddle after all. They didn't seem to be able to deceive her at the spur of the moment. Therefore, the only one who could break through this situation was Liliana.

Right now, Hatsumi was closing in on Suimei with a dreadfully menacing look and pressure that easily surpassed that of the demons. She was just like the Demon Lord. Liliana was certainly not the only one who thought so. She had never seen the Demon Lord, but there was no other being she could compare it too. And then, Liliana forced her way in between the two of them.

“—Hero Hatsumi, it was not cuddle, but 'cudgel'. I came here to get a more detailed explanation of the cudgel magic that Suimei had thought me, so I said 'cudgel magic, could you teach me more?' You must have misheard me.”

At the tension of confronting the hero, Liliana's report had become somewhat mechanical. However, it was still quite the lame excuse. Hatsumi's grim expression did not change at all.

“Fuu. If that is the case, then why do the three of them seem to be having a hard time saying it?”

“A magician's magic is a secret art. It is necessary to be able to keep one's mouth shut around anyone at a moment's notice, so the three of them must have hesitated to speak out of habit.”

“But.”

“Hero Hatsumi. In the first place, do I look like I'm at the useless age where I need to be cuddled?”

Liliana shifted Hatsumi attention to a new point. This would be the gamble which decided the outcome. The prize was a slight sense of relief, and the chip was Suimei's life. And so, Hatsumi was at a loss for words as she groaned with a 'Uu...'. Liliana's physique was on the childish side, but because her speech was rather mature, Hatsumi must have judged that she was not in fact at such an age.

“I see. You're right. Sorry.”

“I must also apologize for saying something that would cause such a misunderstanding.”

Bringing it to an end, Liliana bowed her head quickly. With that, Hatsumi would not kill Suimei. She had won the bet. But, a thought then suddenly came to her mind. Now that this had happened, she wouldn't be able to cuddle with Felmenia or Lefille either until Hatsumi left.

“Ah...”

She was already at her limit for waiting for a cuddle. Grumbling with an idle complaint in her mind with a 'Suimei you philanderer...' she swelled out her cheeks lightly.

“So, you three, just what's going on...? Though without asking, I can somewhat, guess...”

“That's it! You three have been kinda weird for a while...”

“Suimei, please be quiet.”

“Gufuu.”

Shushing Suimei, Liliana returned her gaze over to Hatsumi, who averted her gaze childishly.

“It's nothing, there's nothing going on with me.”

And then, Lefille, who had been keeping a watchful eye on her, spoke up.

“Hou? Is that so?”

“Eh!? That's, um...”

Seeing Hatsumi in bewilderment, Lefille cast her gaze over her. And then, in a complete change of attitude like she was retracting what she had said before.

“There's nothing going on... is it?”

Hatsumi fired her gaze here and there and was unable to calm down. Watching her, Felmenia made a grim expression.

“You aren't speaking clearly huh.”

“... By the way, Hatsumi-jou. Don't you just have the choice of Prince Weitzer?”

Hearing Lefille's question, Hatsumi's face became bright red as she immediately denied her words.

“I don't have that kind of relationship with Weitzer! Rather, when you say it like that you make it sound like I l-l-l-l-l-love this guy or something!”

“Am I wrong?”

“You're wrong! Both Weitzer and this guy are wrong!”

After clamouring that everything was wrong, Hatsumi puffed out her cheeks in an angry expression and turned away. It was completely obvious that she was just being stubborn, but only Suimei couldn't figure this out. On the other hand, Lefille also seemed a little embarrassed as she tried to speak once more, and had become somewhat awkward as she did.

“Th-then, there's no problem with us getting along with Suimei-kun, right?”

“Th-that's...”

Getting along. Since the interpretation of those words covered a fairly wide range, she seemed to be having problems denying it. And during this, Suimei, who still didn't really understand what was going on, joined the conversation that he should have just stayed out of.

“Hey, Hatsumi, I don't really get it, but isn't it fine not to be so mad?”

There's nothing wrong with everyone getting along nicely right?”

“... Getting along you say, just what do you mean when you say that?”

“Eh, I mean...”

As Suimei struggled to answer, suddenly Hatsumi completely puffed up. And then, she started shouting in indignation.

“What!? Despite saying 'it's my role to go save her!' I heard it from Selphy!”

“Heh? Eh? What? No, I remember saying that, but.”

“Didn't you say you were going to protect me!?”

“That's true, but, isn't it normal? We're family.”

“It's not normal!”

“Eh? Eh?”

Because he received a completely different reply from what he was expecting, Suimei was perplexed. To him, he recognized it as standing up to protect his precious family and could likely not think of any other reason behind it. However, because he was being denied so vehemently, he had lost any sense of comprehension. And then, having heard what Hatsumi said, Felmenia pressed in on Suimei.

“Suimei-dono. I would also like to ask in detail just what you were thinking when you said those words.”

“I'm also curious. Yeah, very curious.”

“Say it clearly!”

The three of them were steadily drawing closer to Suimei. Looking at it from the side, it felt quite pitiful, but he was just reaping what he sowed.

“U-uh, um, um, um... Hey, everyone, if you raise your voices and kick up a fuss, you'll be a bother to other people, so could you be a little quieter and amicable...?”

Suimei attempted to change the subject, but...

“It's alright, Suimei. Just a moment ago, I put up a sound isolating barrier, around the entire guestroom.”

“Ooh! Thank... What, oi that's not it! That's not my intention at all!”

“Was I wrong?”

“No it's not like you're wrong, but rather... D-dammit, Liliana! That was on purpose wasn't it!?”

Liliana was currently making the thumbs up gesture that Suimei had taught her about before, and then suddenly flipped it over. Fall into hell. It would not be allowed for Suimei to run away. Liliana had to give up on her cuddling. He had to pay with a sufficient amount of his own suffering.

“M-my allies...”

“You don't have any, because 'If you cut somebody, your body will be wet with blood.’”

Hearing her repeat the words she said once before, Suimei's shoulders drooped as he was crestfallen. However, the circle of girls closing in on him didn't slow down.

“Hey, Yakagi... About what we were talking about, just what's going on?”

“No, aren't you just misunderstanding something!? I just simply want to protect my family, there's no particular meaning other than that...”

“That kind of thing can only give birth to misunderstandings!”

“Umu. It seems I'll have to give you a sermon on making that kind of vague expression.”

“Suimei-dono! Nothing will be conveyed if you don't speak properly and clearly!”

Even though they were just shooting sparks at each other, the three of them were now scowling at Suimei as a gang.

“Why are all of you suddenly colluding...”

And for a while, Suimei was stuck on the receiving end of their nagging

and sermons.



“Well, it's about time I go back.”

“... I'll see you off.”

As Hatsumi expressed her intent to return to the palace, Suimei gave a response with no energy behind it and a pale face. For a while now, he had been going through the terrible experience of being pressed on for answers and being given sermons, so he was pretty much on the brink of blacking out and was completely disheartened.

In spite of it being the afternoon and being quite bright outside, only the spot where he was standing was dark and gloomy. After Hatsumi finished her parting words with everyone, Lefille and Felmenia also stood from their seats.

“We'll come along as well.”

“That's right. Shall we see her off all together?”

“Eh...? Umm, I should be fine on my own though...”

Before she knew it, everyone intended on going with her, but Hatsumi thought it would be a bother to them and declined. However, their intent was not just to escort her.

“That's, not it. If everyone surrounds you, it makes it harder, to be discovered.”

“Ah, I get it!”

Hatsumi clapped her hands as she heard Liliana's suggestion. She was somewhat uneasy about hiding herself with only a robe. If everyone created a wall around her, then the fact that the hero was present wouldn't be easily exposed to the military police. Having settled on their plan, Suimei and the others surrounded Hatsumi and left the lodging house. After walking down the street towards the palace for a while, Hatsumi suddenly apologized to Lefille.

“I'm sorry about earlier. I ended up shouting all kinds of things.”

“We don't particularly mind. There's no need to apologize.”

As Lefille refreshingly replied, Suimei made a 'Huh?' like he was objecting, but Felmenia simply scowled at him. Remembering what he had gone through with a frown, he ended up completely disheartened and was unable to say anything more.

“... Good grief, it's Suimei-dono's fault for saying things that would cause a misunderstanding... Hero-dono, many things were said earlier, but let us get along from now on.”

“Eh? Get along?”

To Hatsumi, she seemed to have recognized them all as rivals. So when she heard Felmenia's proposal, she was somewhat perplexed. Seeing her like that, Lefille shook her head as she replied.

“This is this, and that is that. It's best to split it up when thinking about it.”

“That's how it is.”

“... That's right isn't it. Un, please treat me well.”

“I don't know what you're all talking about, but it's welcome if you're all getting along...”

Finally, the conversation settled in a gentler direction. Breathing in the air that had begun to calm down, Suimei let out a deep sigh of relief. And then, having sensed something going on, Liliana called out to him.

“Suimei, it's noisy up ahead.”

“Un?”

Following Liliana's report, Suimei focused his eyes forwards. It seemed like there was some sort of uproar happening further down the street.

“What? A riot in broad daylight? Oioi you're kidding me right?”

It was at the scale where it could be considered a riot, well beyond a simple quarrel. Even from afar they looked to be rampaging quite violently and they could also hear a chain of scream like yells. On top of

that, they could also hear the dangerous sound of angry roars growing gradually louder.

“I wonder what happened?”

“This can't be anything peaceful.”

Spotting a man running away from the uproar, Suimei questioned him as they passed by.

“Excuse me. That thing going on ahead, did something happen?”

“I-I dunno. Those guys, just as we thought they were preaching like always, they suddenly got violent.”

“Those guys?”

“I don't really get it myself. But if you wanna know go ask someone else.”

Saying that, the man quickly ran down the path behind Suimei and the others as he ran away from the uproar. Seeing that they weren't making any progress like this, they headed in the opposite direction of the waves of people coming their way. Gradually, the people they saw were beginning to understand the scale of the uproar and were running away one after the other. Eventually, what appeared before them...

“These guys...”

“We saw them before, the guys from anti goddess religious group or something, right?”

As they came upon a break in the wave of people, the ones standing before them in the large gap, were several figures carrying metal canes and wearing white religious clothing. Just as Lefille had said, it was members of the suspicious religious cult that they saw in town before.

There wasn't just one or two of them. They were acting together in considerable numbers as they struck the canes in their hands against the ground, letting out loud noises as they tore down the edges of the eaves and fences from the surrounding houses.

Furthermore, not a single one of them was talking, they were acting in

complete silence. As if they were enacting violence as a silent assembly line, they repeated their destructive actions and gave off a somehow indescribable eerie atmosphere.

From their surroundings, they could hear angry roars and restrained voices like 'What the hell are you doing!?' and 'Stop!' ringing through the air. But they ignored those voices as if they couldn't hear them at all. Before Suimei and the others arrived, there were probably many people who attempted to persuade them. However, all of those efforts seemed to have ended in vain.

“They're coming, this way.”

“What do... well, there's no need to ask huh.”

“Isn't it obvious that we're going to subdue them!?”

“Naturally.”

As Suimei was about to ask, Hatsumi and Lefille simply declared it as a foolish question. And after they took the initiative and stepped forwards, they began to beat up the various armed cult members. Hatsumi used her sword while keeping it sheathed to precisely strike her opponents' vitals to stop them from moving. Lefille was also using her enormous sword from within its sheathe, and was striking the cult members as if pinning them to the ground. They could hear shrieks akin to frogs being smashed fill the air.

Before the skill those two possessed, the cult members were at their wit's end as they collapsed on the spot. They weren't able to oppose the two girls at all, and just as they thought that they had finished resolving the uproar, they realized that people wearing the same clothing were pouring out of the alleyways.

“Wait a sec, just where are these guys all coming out from...?”

As Hatsumi's baffled voice reached his ear, Suimei looked for where all the cult members were popping out of and put in practice a far sight spell. He used his vision to chase the wall of white clothing all the way to its source, and then...

“Oioioi... This isn't the only goddamn place these guys are rampaging around!?”

“What do you mean?”

“They're rioting in the same way as these guys all over the city in every direction. Looks like they haven't gotten to the palace yet though...”

But even so, they were still all over the city causing an uproar. After Suimei reported this, Hatsumi knocked down the cult member in front of her, and turned around.

“Yakagi, where's the most extreme spot?”

“Wait a sec... Around the weapon shop district. The guys over there aren't just using canes, but they've also got other weapons.”

“They've probably stolen the goods from the workshops there. Suimeikun, what about the movements of the military police?”

“Looks like it's taking all they've got just to chase down the white clothed guys appearing all over the place... Rather, there's not enough of them? Normally there's so many of them loitering around, didn't security get strengthened after the case last time?”

“This is just a guess, but I think they're probably around the palace.”

“So, because of that everywhere else is basically defenceless? Even so, there's too few... Ah.”

As Suimei made an expression like he suddenly figured out something from his own words, Felmenia questioned him.

“What's the matter?”

“Suimei, also noticed, right?”

Suimei silently nodded back to Liliana. It wasn't just them that had noticed, Lefille also exchanged looks with them and nodded. And then, Suimei explained things to Felmenia and Hatsumi who had not realized what was going on.

“It's likely that they're mixing in with the supplemental guards or

something.”

And from that straightforward explanation, Hatsumi's expression warped like she just remembered something unpleasant.

“Uwa, it's like the modus operandi of a certain terrorist organization.”

“Aah, I agree completely.”

It differed slightly to what she was referring to, but it certainly did seem like the terrorist acts that they heard of happening in the West. Mixing in with refugees, travellers and immigrants to sneak past national borders, they would carry out terrorist acts. This trick could be said to be similar to what was going on here. Having finished taking care of the cult members in the immediate area, Suimei called out to Hatsumi.

“So, what are you going to do? Go to the palace?”

“You said the weapon store district was dangerous right? I'll go there.”

“You would huh~.”

As one would expect of her sense of responsibility. That serious side of her hadn't changed at all compared to before she had lost her memories.

“Then, I will open, a path.”

As Liliana said that as she tottered along as usual, she thrust out her index finger towards the cult members in the direction of the weapon store district. She brought her arm in line with her line of sight and held it up perfectly horizontal to the ground. And then, she pushed her finger forward ever so slightly.

“Bang bang!”

Immediately after making those imitative sounds from her mouth, the cult members in a straight line from Liliana's finger were thrown into the members behind them with terrifying force. Within the lump of white, screams started to come out one after the other.

“Ugeh!”

“Oi, what are you, guha!”

“Wh-what!? O-oi! Bufuu!”

Because they were all bundled together, naturally, they kept crashing into each other in succession. Even so, Liliana continued going 'bang bang!' in a childish way, so the cult members' predicament wasn't ending. Since it was an attack with no physical substance, the cult members at the front weren't even building up any spells as they were blown away. On the other hand, Felmenia made a curious expression as she saw this play out.

“Suimei-dono, what was Lily using just now?”

“That is a kind of exorcism magic. It's magic which makes use of the ethereal body. It takes one's soul shell and extends it to directly strike the opponent's soul shell.”

Speaking of exorcism magic, there were many spells which fell under that category, it covered a fairly wide range. It made use of a so called out of body experience to manipulate one's own ethereal body as a kind of exorcism technique.

Depending on whatever was beyond one's finger or cane, it gave the soaring ethereal body directionality, and that extended ethereal body would push away the opponent's soul shell, causing it to go flying. Because the soul shell and the physical body had an inseparable bond, when the soul shell was sent flying, the physical body would be pulled along, and both would get sent flying together.

It fell under the category of an astral attack, and could be said to be quite the powerful magic. As Suimei went through this explanation, for some reason, Felmenia raised a dissatisfied voice.

“... You never taught me this magic.”

“Come to think of it, you're right huh.”

“Not just 'come to think of it.' Why didn't you teach it to me?”

Felmenia seemed angry at the fact that she wasn't taught this magic as she drew nearer with a critical tone.

“Don't pout just cause I taught things a little out of order...”

“It's not just a little!”

“Technically it's not a particularly high level thing either.”

“Even so!”

She started yelling. She was for more obstinate than Suimei imagined. In a surprisingly unusual turn for her, she was being quite selfish. While they were having this like exchange, Hatsumi cut in between them and spoke up in a slightly critical voice.

“Wait a sec, can you leave that talk for later?”

“Y-you're right. My apologies...”

“They'll collapse, soon. When a hole is opened, let's start running.”

At Liliana's instructions, the group started running and crossed the bridge, and before long, they arrived at the weapons store district. Naturally, there should have been the cult members that Suimei had seen through his magic, but—

“The uproar settled down?”

The street was lined with stores and smithing workshops, so it had a rather eccentric look compared to other districts, but right now, it was surprisingly desolate. The signs and boxes left outside the shops showed signs of being destroyed, but they couldn't hear any violent noises in the area. It was as if a storm had passed through the area completely.

“Hey, you said this was the most intense area.”

“Yeah, up until now it was, but... Now then, just what does it mean?”

Suimei observed their surrounding dubiously. There was nobody around. Were the people of the district and the dwarves who ran the shops hiding indoors? The fact that even the violent cult members were not around was still quite the mystery. While he was looking around, he saw a shadow walking towards them from the front. They were not alone. He could hear several footsteps. So they've come. While Suimei was thinking of that, what appeared along with several white clothed cult members was...

“This is...”

“So it's come to his.”

“How, unexpected.”

“Oioi, seriously...?”

Felmenia, Lefille, Liliana and Suimei all raised surprised voices at the sight of the person standing at the centre of the cult members. And that person in question...

“—I have been awaiting your arrival. Hero of the Alliance, Hatsumi Kuchiba.”

With cult members at her back, speaking like she knew Hatsumi would come here, deeply tied to Suimei and the others, was Sister Clarissa. Only Hatsumi did not know who she was, and showed a puzzled expression.

“A cat eared, sister...?”

“I am called Clarissa. I am pleased to make your acquaintance.”

Saying that, Clarissa bowed elegantly towards Hatsumi. Hatsumi however, after seeing everyone else's reactions, questioned Suimei.

“Hey, someone you know?”

“Well, just a little bit of a connection is all. However—”

While Suimei was replied, Lefille threw out a question like she was pushing for answers.

“Sister Clarissa. Are you aware that the ones behind you are the ones causing a disturbance?”

“Yes. I am fully aware.”

“From what I see, it seems you are not unrelated to them at all. Just what does this mean? I'd like to get a convincing answer from you.”

As Lefille intensely asked for a reply, Clarissa was not the one to do so.

“... Haa. There's nothing particularly convincing about this though.”

“Jill!”

As Jillbert let out a sigh, she feebly came out of an alleyway. And then, as if to clearly declare she was in the other camp, she took a position right next to Clarissa. She was dressed the same as always in easy to move clothing. However, on top of her dainty shoulder, was an unsuitably large halberd. It had a fat and long grip that seemed too large for her palm and an axe blade and spear tip which could be said to be a massive lump of iron large enough to cover Jillbert's entire figure if she put it in front of her. As she dropped the halberd from her shoulder to the ground, it shook the ground along with a loud and dull noise.

“Yo, legal loli.”

“I keep saying I don't get what you're saying at all you damn pedophile... Rather, you're surprisingly calm about this huh.”

“Well yeah. Just from the way Sister here said Hatsumi's name, I've largely grasped the situation after all.”

Seeing that Suimei had come to a conclusion, Hatsumi turned to him.

“Yakagi, what's going on?”

“It's deja vu. Isn't it kinda similar to when Eanru showed up?”

“Ah!”

Hearing that, Hatsumi realized that it was somehow similar to the previous situation. Seeing her let out a surprised voice, Clarissa spoke up.

“If you have realized, then it will save us some time.”

“Then Sister, does that mean you are a companion of the dragonnewt who attacked Suimei-dono and Hero-dono?”

“Yes. It is exactly as White Flame-dono says.”

“And so these guys are also your allies. For a sister of the Salvation Church to bring along members of an opposing organization, it's quite ironic isn't it?”

“Certainly. It is perfectly ideal for a funny story.”

Clarissa began giggling in a refined manner. On the other hand, Suimei

and the others recognized them as enemies, and were each preparing for battle. Seeing them do so, the one who seemed least excited about it was none other than Jillbert.

“Aaaaah, why did it come to this...”

“Seriously. Jill, if you're on that side, then it means you're also an enemy right?”

“That's how it goes huh. Honestly I'd rather not, but...”

From Jillbert's way of speaking, she seemed completely unenthusiastic about the whole situation. As one would expect, there were parts of her that felt sorry to have to antagonize Lefille who she got along rather well with. As if scolding her, Clarissa raised her voice.

“Jill. There's no use in complaining.”

“I know there's nothing that can be done about it, but... I was just thinking why the flow ended up bringing Lefi and the others in opposition to us.”

“Do you still not understand?”

“Ah?”

Hearing Clarissa's puzzling declaration, Jillbert made a curious expression. Clarissa then turned her gaze to Hatsumi.

“Hero Hatsumi. We are in need of your power. Could you possibly come along with us?”

“The reason?”

“Right now, I can only request that you come along.”

“I refuse. I have things that I must do, please go ask someone else.”

“Even if I say, that it must be by all means?”

“Even so, I refuse. Do you really think I can trust people who do things like this?”

Exactly as expected, negotiations had broken down. Just from the fact that they acknowledged they were Eanru's companions, it was already clear that it was out of the question. After Hatsumi, Clarissa then tried to

arouse Suimei's interest.

“As for Suimei-sama and company, I would like you to be silent and overlook us but.”

“I refuse.”

“Seems so.”

As they showed clear hostility towards her, Clarissa simply nodded like she understood.

“Clara, even if you don't ask that, after all this time, the answer was obvious. Just from Eanru's report that he's the hero's relative, there was no need to question whether they would oppose us.”

“It was just in case.”

Clarissa calmly replied to Jillbert's frank opinion, and then...

“—Well then, I shall be Lefille-san's opponent.”

“Sorry.”

“There's no need. Jill, please take care of Suimei-sama and the others.”

Immediately after they decided who each of them would be taking on, white clothed cult member appeared from the surrounding alleyways with perfect timing. Seeing that they were surrounded, Suimei's group formed a circle with their backs to each other.

“If they're that asshole dragon's companions, then we can't be careless.”

“You're right. Setting that aside, how will we move?”

“First we should create an escape path so that we can get away safely no matter what happens. As for who should do what...”

“Just as she announced herself, I will take on the Sister.”

“Lefille. Please, be careful. The Sister is likely, a therianthrope of the liger clan.”

“As I thought, the liger clan huh...”

Lefille agreed with Liliana's conjecture. Having heard them, Felmenia

was also making a sour face as if she was biting down on her teeth.

“Hey, Liliana, what's that liger clan?”

“They're therianthropes who are the ancestors of all the cat beast races. Among all the beast races, it is no exaggeration to say that they are the strongest.”

“Uwa, seriously...?”

“After the dragonnewt we now have this, what the hell...”

At the appearance of another powerful race, both Suimei and Hatsumi let out disheartened voices. In complete contrast to them, Lefille spoke in a warlike tone.

“A worthy opponent then.”

Lefille bore her fangs and muttered fearlessly. Suimei then took a look around at the cult members surrounding them.

“We should do something about the white clothed bunch first. Menia, please keep an eye on Jillbert.”

“Understood.”

While Suimei and the others were busy discussing their plans, the white clothed gang was slowly closing in. As Lefille leaped out towards Clarissa, Clarissa put her hands into her opposing sleeves.

—A hidden weapon. As Lefille put herself on guard from that premonition, Clarissa took her hands out. And on her fingers, was a red and yellow powder which almost resembled paint pigment. Rolling up her sleeves, Clarissa drew sharp lines with her fingers along her face and arms and drew out peculiar patterns on herself.

“That's...”

Suimei squinted his eyes as he felt he had seen that pattern before. And just as he thought it couldn't be, Clarissa's preparations had completed. She extended sharp claws from her fingers, and her canines grew long enough to reach her chin. Seeing Clarissa's transformation, Hatsumi and Suimei both raised their voices in shock.

“S-sabre toothed tiger?”

“Oioi, a Smilodon ain't a cat...”

While the two of them stared in wonder, a ferocious mana began drifting around Clarissa's surroundings. It was as if a predator's blood thirst took on a plain and visible form in the air. This atmosphere that she brought about reminded Suimei of something he had seen before.

“... Totemism.”

“I'm surprised you know.”

Clarissa had clearly heard Suimei's quiet mutter. With a smile, she confirmed his suspicions. On the other hand, Suimei made a surprised and stiff expression.

“That's my line. Why do you know that kind of thing, Sister?”

“Regarding this, let us just leave it as a secret.”

“Shit, there really is something behind all you guys...”

As Suimei groaned bitterly, Clarissa's opponent, Lefille, called out to him.

“Suimei-kun! What is that!?”

“Totemism is a technique categorized under sensory magic in our world! Using various symbolic items, it's a technique that mimics the power of flora and fauna and takes them in. In the Sister's case, she's probably receiving divine protection from the face paint and body paint she just used! In most cases the subject of power comes from beasts, but...”

“In other words, the power the Sister received comes the liger clan's ancestral beast, the sabre toothed tiger, right?”

By ancestral beast she likely meant the being from which the therianthropes' beast-like parts were based on. Clarissa likely possessed that power to begin with, but from that totemism, her power was likely strengthened several times over.

Just from the fact that she was a therianthrope, there was no mistaking that the Sister had a close relation to the ancestral beast and its symbols. And then with the ritual she performed, the two conditions for completing totemism were cleared. However, the main problem would be...

“Totemism is magic from our world, but because the principle of the spell is quite primitive, it isn't impossible for it to be established in this world. However, you know?”

“Just now, the Sister recognized the name Suimei-dono used, the word which came from Suimei-dono's world. In other words...”

It meant Clarissa, no, Clarissa's group had some sort of connection with that world. Suimei had come to this conclusion, and thought back on Romeon's case. Around this group of people, there seemed to be a shadow flickering over them that had some sort of relation to Suimei's world.

Before long, Lefille and Clarissa clad themselves in fighting spirit.

“Clarissa Liger. Here I come.”

“Oh spirits which reside within my body. Answer my will...”

No sooner than Lefille finishing her chant, a whirlpool of red wind ravaged the blue sky as it built up around her. On the other hand, the moment Clarissa unleashed her fighting spirit, her ferocious mana manifested and was emitted into her surroundings like silver slashes.

And then, they collided. Lefille was letting out powerful slashes one after the other, but Clarissa was evading them with sharp and fast movement and would return those slashes with fierce attacks from her claws.

Perhaps because she was strengthened by the totemism, or perhaps because of the ferocious mana forming a sort of barrier around her, it was as if Lefille's red wind had no effect at all on Clarissa's surroundings. Normally, that red wing would have just blown Clarissa away and Lefille herself could ride that wind to perform radical movements to bring in a decisive attack, but both were no longer possible.

Her combat ability was on par with or beyond Lefille's. In other words, Clarissa possessed combat abilities which could rival the demon general Rajas. While observing their battle with sidelong glances, Suimei and the others were each dealing with the cult members swarming in on them in their own ways. Hatsumi with her sword, Felmenia with wind magic, and Liliana with the exorcism magic she was using before, they were routing them one after the other.

As for Suimei, he was snapping his finger as the violent sounds he created played out like a rhythm while he continuously unleashed his attack magic. In a flash, all the white clothed cult members around them had been left sprawling on the ground.

“That's the end of the idiots surrounding us! I'll come and help... Eh, wha!?”

Just as Suimei started yelling at Lefille, a magic circle suddenly appeared at his feet. Even though Suimei was able to manifest magic circles, he couldn't recognize it at all. The words, numbers and design were all brand new to him. However—

“My foot is sinking!? Oi, it can't be, this is... A hole to the spirit world!?”

As if he had stepped into a bottomless bog, Suimei's body began sinking into the magic circle. He attempted to struggle and use flight magic, but was unable to escape from the magic circle. The spell's structure seemed to be interfering with Suimei's magic and negating it, and his body had sunken halfway into the ground.

“Suimei-dono, take my hand!”

As Felmenia thrust out her hand, Suimei brushed it off with a severe expression.

“You can't! If you grab on to me you'll just get dragged in!”

“But!”

“I'll manage somehow! I'll be right back, so Menia, you and the others take care of...”

Before he could finish talking, Suimei sank away into the magic circle. With a ripple like he had fallen beneath a surface of water, the magic circle trembled. Seeing this happen before their eyes, Felmenia and the others had expressions touched by shock and despair as they muttered.

“S-Suimei-dono...”

“Impossible, Suimei was...”

“Wait a sec, you're kidding right...”

The fact that Suimei was caught by magic was as big of a shock to them as if heaven and earth were reversed. And then, faced with that truth, they were more flustered than ever before.

“Just now, who could have...”

There was someone around who was able to cause a magician of Suimei's calibre to fall. As Felmenia looked at her surrounding, there was nothing she could see which gave off that impression. And that only amplified her panic.

“Felmenia. We'll talk, after. Right now, everyone should focus, on the enemies before us.”

“There's already only one left.”

Liliana and Hatsumi called out to Felmenia and urged her to focus on Jillbert. And then, Jillbert suddenly lifted her left arm into the sky.

“Unfortunately, I'm still here.”

Saying that, Jillbert snapped her fingers and more cult member appeared one after the other from the alleyways. Seeing that they kept coming and coming no matter how many they defeated, Hatsumi let out a groan.

“There's no end...”

“Ain't that obvious? The hero of Salvation, a magician on par with Eanru, the Shrine Maiden of Spirits, and mages who represent their countries, with all of you as opponents, there's not enough no matter how many we bring.”

Jillbert swung her arm down. Immediately following that, a powerful wave of power was unleashed and gave birth to a violent wind. As it blasted forward, the ground broke apart and was blown away. The first to react to Jillbert's attack, was Felmenia.

“—Wind is my guardian. Fill the outer circumference and repel those who face me!”

As Felmenia instantly put magic into use, the shockwave and huddled lumps of earth were repelled from their surroundings. Seeing that, Jillbert made a broad grin like she was praising them.

“Ou, as expected.”

“What, was that just now...?”

“That? It's nothing, I just swung my arm. There's nothing to it, that damn dragonnewt can do something similar too.”

Suggesting that her technique wasn't anything special, she spoke frivolously. The others could barely imagine just how much strength would be needed to bring about such a result.

“Alright, here we go!”

Jillbert rotated her waist and brandished her weapon high right where she was. Even though she was quite far away, she seemed to be aiming for something. Hatsumi immediately called attention to the others to take into consideration a slash outside her actual range. However, completely skirting her prediction, Jillbert swung her halberd with power from her whole body, and just the axe portion of the weapon separated from the grip and was sent flying.

“Wha!? A chain weapon!”

“Damn right! It's my special chain halberd. Hey hey you better dodge it well!”

Hearing Felmenia's surprise, Jillbert replied in an elated manner. The axe was attached to the grip by a chain, and along with the sound of the chain rubbing against itself, the axe came flying in. Using the centrifugal

force between the axe head and the grip, Jillbert changed the trajectory of the axe head drastically many times and had it come straight down on top of Felmenia and the others.

As the attack came in from a blind spot, Felmenia immediately jumped out of the way to evade. And then, the axe head fell to the ground like a meteor with such power that it was like an explosion as it sent the earth flying, scattering boulders all over the place. Felmenia endured the wave of destruction, but groaned bitterly.

“What a completely muscle-headed fighting style...”

“I've only known how to fight like this since I was a kid. Well, I'll let it pass that I don't have any brains.”

With a smile, Jillbert returned the axe head to her grip as Liliana stepped forward.

“Felmenia. I'll back you up.”

“Tha...”

“Aaaah! You stay away! I don't wanna fight with little kids!”

Just as Liliana stepped forward, Jillbert suddenly started making a fuss. She didn't want to fight against Lefille, she didn't want to fight against children, she was an opponent with many openings.

“Then, it's fine, if you don't fight.”

“But I can't do that either! Aaaaaaah dammit! Oi, White Flame, don't you dare use Liliana Zandyke as a shield you hear?”

“Of course!”

In response to Jillbert's commanding tone, Felmenia yelled back like it didn't even need to be asked. And then, to cope with that situation, Hatsumi jumped out.

“Felmenia-san. I will take the front!”

“My apologies, Hatsumi-dono!”

Making good on her word, she immediately ran past Felmenia and

bolted towards Jillbert at full speed. Her sword was still in its sheathe and held at her waist so that she was able to draw at any moment. She was planning on letting out a slash while running, but as she was running, something like a meteor came flying in.

“Ku—”

In no time at all, Hatsumi reacted by drawing her mithril made large sword and blocked the strike. The silver blade collided with two orichalcum daggers. Looking down the tips of the daggers, there was a young girl in pure white religious clothing with a hood covering her eyes. She was holding on to orichalcum daggers in a reverse grip, and was attacking continuously. Before that violent storm of attacks, Hatsumi responded in kind. Despite it being two blades against one, she handled it skillfully while slowly falling back. Once in a while she could see the eyes of the girls under the hood, but those eyes seemed somehow hollow, as if she was not focusing on anything.

“So you're saying you'll be my opponent?”

“...”

She questioned the girl, but received no reply. Just like the other white clothed members, she reacted like she didn't hear anything at all, but in some way it was different. Even so, Jillbert was the one to answer Hatsumi.

“That one's one of your companions.”

For a moment, she thought of Selphy and the others upon hearing the word companions, but she immediately realized another possibility.

“A companion you say... You mean this person is also a hero!?”

“That's it. Appropriate for the opponent of a hero ain't she?”

Hearing that question like she was being made light of, Hatsumi returned a sharp scowl with a glint in her eye. The little girl's eyes were completely hollow, it made her think that her will had been taken. In other words...

“If I go along with you people, I'll end up like this huh.”

“If you refuse to cooperate, yeah.”

After saying that, Jillbert once more held her halberd at the ready. This all happened as the setting sun hung over them ever unchanging.



“Lefille-san. I can perceive both anger and panic in your sword.”

On top of a triangular roof, Clarissa had her back to the madder red setting sun as she looked down on Lefille while admonishing her. Some time had passed since the beginning of the fight and it was quickly approaching the evening. As Lefille squinted while looking up at the dazzling setting sun, she returned those words with a question.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Exactly as it sounds. Your sword is mixed with impatience. It isn't to the level where it could be called clouded, but it is not in equilibrium.”

Lefille snorted as she denied Clarissa's words.

“I've fought an enemy before who would use such wiles. Because they struggled for supremacy against their opponent, they would play a cowardly hand by speaking nonsense to shake up their opponent and seize the thread to victory.”

“This is a warning. Lefille-san mentioned victory, but I have no such victory to attain from this battle. If you understand our objective then you should naturally understand. Besides, have you not already realized? Just by mentioning victory in this battle, you are already panicking about your own victory.”

“... I'd rather you not speak like you knew what I was thinking.”

“It wouldn't hurt your ears to listen to my warning from above. I also have such memories. There is nothing more bitter than hearing an unneeded meddlesome warning and conducting yourself as the one in the strong position.”

It was certainly a shrewd manner of speaking. To hear a warning in the

middle of a battle was in fact, above all else, simply irritating. Having that pointed out on top of that only needlessly increased Lefille's irritation.

She wanted to use her sword skills to shut that mouth. However, it wasn't something that she could do easily, and that increased her irritation even more. The place that Clarissa was standing was not out of reach for Lefille. But even if she unleashed a wave of red wind from her sword, it would never actually hit Clarissa. Thus, Lefille had no choice but to listen to Clarissa's know it all speech.

“Lefille-san. Only by accepting such advice are people able to attain strength. For anyone and everyone to gain strength that would never lose out to anyone, that is my wish. No, that is our wish.”

Clarissa was making a grand speech about things she wasn't even asked about and truly looked like a priest from the Salvation Church giving a speech. However, Lefille had something to say herself.

“... Sister, I shall also give you some advice. Voicing your opinion to one you are fighting against is something you do after you win. Only after they are pressed down to the ground and battered to the point where they cannot speak do you have the privilege of making such a speech down on them.”

“Certainly. It is exactly as you say. I am greatly obliged for your advice.”

“–Tch.”

She listened attentively. She extended her gratitude. Though Lefille made her declaration severely, Clarissa respectfully bowed back to her from atop the roof. To be shown such an attitude in such a situation only rubbed Lefille's heart the wrong way.

“However–”

Using that as a preface, Clarissa scoffed at Lefille, and then–

“If you obsess over such pride which isn't useful for shit, you'll only stain that body with defeat. There is not the tiniest amount of merit in dying in vain like a piece of trash.”

Clarissa's words were completely unimaginable compared to her usual courteous attitude and had suddenly become vulgar, and seething. You're making a misunderstanding. As if her words were implying that, Lefille felt a chill run down her spine. And then, that seemed to have marked the end of Clarissa's chatter as she leaped off the roof in a flash and headed directly towards Lefille.

Her speed had easily surpassed that of a beast and couldn't be captured by eye. Her movement itself was the same as the line drawn by a sword in movement. She passed by Lefille's flank, and let out an attack that Lefille could not actually distinctly identify as her claws or fangs.

“Ku...”

All Lefille could see was the after image of a slash as it passed her and she chased it with her sword. However, because she was unable to perceive her opponent, her slashes were all reckless. Every strike with her sword which had no idea where its target was held enough power to kill. But a sword that was just swung around hoping it would hit its target would never actually do so.

“Haa!”

Predicting the path of the afterimage, Lefille unleashed her sword clad in red wind. But no matter how much she raised her voice as she swung, her sword only ever cut the air. Because of this, panic began to scorch her back. At this rate, she would lose. As that thought came up in her head, Lefille tried to shake off those feelings in her heart. She couldn't simply accept defeat. She had promised herself to never lose again.

“In that case...!”

If she couldn't hit, she just had to make it so she could. It was the very premise behind the phrase 'throwing away one's flesh to break their bones'. She would ignore what happened afterwards from the very beginning and hang everything on the exact moment her slash could reach and make sure it was a killing blow. Making her determination, Lefille stood before the attack lunging in at her, and brought out an attack with all her might.

“OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOH!”

However...

“Too naive.”

As her sword missed, along with sense that something had slipped in close to her, a critical voice was thrown at her.

“Guah!”

And then, Lefille was blown away at her wit's end by the shock that assaulted her. She could see that she was struck with an elbow. On the spur of the moment, she was able to avoid a strike to a vital area, but she still suffered the full brunt of the attack. Just like that, she tumbled across the ground. She could hear Felmenia and the others screams as well as Jillbert's angry shout. Her consciousness faded for an instant, but determined that she could not faint here, she reeled in her consciousness by sheer willpower, and used the force of her tumbling to stand upright.

“As one would expect of the Shrine Maiden of Spirits it seems.”

“Tch...”

Clarissa swept her claws to the side as if shaking the blood off of them and began walking forward in a calm manner. Her movements were overflowing with a surplus of composure. Those movements which were in complete contrast to her usual behaviour felt like they were once more driving those words Clarissa had said deep into Lefille's mind.

Suddenly, a magic circle drew itself on the ground. Seeing that familiar scene, Lefille, Felmenia and the others bit down on their teeth and put themselves on guard. However, what eventually appeared out of the circle, was the one who had fallen into a magic circle earlier, Suimei.

“I don't know who the hell it was, but they sure fucking did it huh...”

Down on one knee, Suimei appeared while quietly and vulgarly letting out his anger. He had changed into his black suit, but didn't seem to be injured in any way. Seeing this, Lefille called out to him.

“Suimei-kun, so you were safe...”

“Yeah... Ah, oi! Are you alright, Lefi!?”

“Somehow or other.”

And after Lefille put on a smile like she was forcing herself to do so...

“— But, it's probably correct to say that I was defeated.”

Rubbing the soles of her feet across the ground while kicking up dust to the side, Clarissa was closing in right before Lefille. As Lefille spoke in an irritated tone, she glanced at her from the corner of her eye bitterly.

Judging that Lefille was no longer able to move, Suimei covered for her. As he did, Clarissa seemed be quite wary of fighting with him, and jumped back to put a large distance between them. In that interval where she took a wait and see attitude, Suimei called out to the others to check up on them.

“Menia, how's your end!?”

“S-somehow...”

“Hatsumi!”

“I've got my hands full here!”

“Tch...”

Felmenia had deployed defensive magic in response to Jillbert's enormous chain halberd. As she couldn't tell just where the attacks were coming from as the small dwarf manipulated the weapon in the sky, her barrier extended in every direction. With Liliana supporting her right behind her, the two of them were doing everything they could to try and locate the point of impact.

They were able to defend, but that was all they could do. Right near them, Hatsumi was swinging around her sword and was pinned down in a fight against a small girl covered in white clothing.

— The only option before him was to somehow deal with them one by one.

Coming to that answer as a way of coping with this situation, Suimei

raised his mana at once as Jillbert let out a cry.

“Oi, Clara!”

“I know.”

Clarissa responded to Jillbert, and took her distance from Suimei once more. Jillbert also returned the axe head of her halberd back to the grip and stood next to Clarissa.

“Jill, don't let your guard down. Suimei-sama defeated Romeon, and was deemed worthy by Eanru.”

“Just as I was thinking why this kind a guy could do that, I see, this ain't 'the normal him.' He's thrown away his damn mask.”

Seeing Suimei's power right before her eyes, Jillbert stuck out her tongue at him. The two of them were also brimming with an intense fighting spirit. Seeing Jillbert's power as she also held nothing back, Suimei returned her words in kind.

“You can't really say anything about hiding behind a mask.”

“Well, you got a point.”

As Jillbert honestly accepted his point, Clarissa once more made a proposal to him.

“Suimei-sama, could you not simply take Lefille-san and the others with you and withdraw?”

“That's my line Sister. I don't know what you're trying to do, but maybe you should just think of another way to do it. Can't something be done about that?”

“If we could do so...”

And just as Jillbert was giving her answer, the flow of events suddenly changed.

“—Clarissa, Jillbert. That is enough. Step back.”

From the sky, the deep voice of a man suddenly came down on them. As Suimei looked up at the madder red sky and turned his gaze to the source

of that voice, he could see the shadow of a person standing atop the point of a gabled roof.

“Tch, another damn—Ah?”

While he was in the middle of cursing, Suimei noticed something strange. The sun was setting, in a short while it would finish setting, but even so, if one stood atop a roof where there was no cover, their figure should have been completely clear. However, the one who ordered Clarissa and Jillbert to retreat had a somewhat hazy figure as if he was a mirage. The man's voice once more passed down to the two of them.

“Let's go.”

“Is that alright?”

“The opportunity has passed. If we tarry, unnecessary things will get involved.”

“What do you mean by—”

Just as Clarissa questioned the mirage man, suddenly, they could hear a sound of a nightingale chirping. And immediately following that, the world shook. It was a mysterious shaking of the air unlike an earthquake, and then, the chirping of the nightingale transformed into the sound let out by an enormous amount of iron creaking.

“... A mana field vibration with this kind of timing?”

Suimei raised a perplexed voice. As a magician, this shaking was a phenomenon he was very familiar with, but he couldn't suddenly understand what could have caused it in the current situation. Moreover, compared to the shaking that was born when he used magic, it left him with an inexpressible sense of discomfort. On the other hand, Jillbert raised a shock voice at this completely unusual phenomenon.

“Wh-what is this!?”

It seemed to be her first encounter with such a phenomenon, as she was bewildered by the shaking that was different from an earthquake. This also seemed to apply to Clarissa who was standing next to her, as she

looked around the surroundings while being vigilant of Suimei and the others.

“Calm down, Jillbert, Clarissa.”

“But Gottfried-sama!”

“There is no problem. This is within the range of our assumptions. The shaking will calm down soon and things will settle down.”

And just as the voice said, the shaking eventually calmed down. After confirming that everything had settled down, Felmenia called out to Suimei.

“Suimei-dono! What is this?”

“No, I don't...”

Suimei didn't have a single clue as to why the phenomenon broke out or what circumstance this shaking was going to bring about. Mana field vibration was something that occurred when a high order existence manifested or was an omen of the outbreak of grand magic. But the current situation didn't apply to either of these outbreak conditions. However, it did in fact happen, and was a notice of some change occurring. Then just why did it happen? As Suimei questioned himself, he suddenly realized what 'time' it was.

“I see, it's dusk!”

It was the ambiguous time between the afternoon and the evening, twilight. At this time, it was possible for existences known as 'apparitions' and 'beasts of the apocalypse' to manifest in the physical world. As if to affirm his thoughts as correct, the sun set in the opposite direction. Becoming a veil of darkness, an indigo blue wave slowly crept over the ground dyed by the evening sun as black spots appeared all over that darkened region. And then, from those spots, pitch black beasts sprung forth.

“Wh-what is that!?”

Pitch black beasts—apparitions were sprouting out of the black holes

one after the other in the area, shocking Hatsumi. On the other hand, Lefille was relatively calm compared to her, and observed the beings whose identity she was unfamiliar with.

“Dogs... No, wolves?”

“There are, somehow, creepy.”

That pitch black figures likely reminded Liliana of the sinful figure and the sinister being. As the apparitions came into sight, she reflexively hid behind Lefille.

Certainly, just as Lefille had muttered, the beasts had a figure that resembled both dogs and wolves. Their bodies were dyed in black which looked like shadows of darkness. The portions where the eyes seemed to be were a hair raising blood red, and the shadows around them were swaying around. Felmenia stared in wonder at the figure she had seen once before.

“This is, the monster which showed up at the Royal Castle before... No, phenomenon was it? If I remember correctly, they were called Twilight Syndrome.”

“Yeah. In other words, an apparition. The one you saw before was something called a B-grade, and this is the smaller version of it. In other words, a C-grade.”

Magicians called the part dog, part wolf beings before them Twilight Syndrome, and classified it as a C-grade apparition. The first time this phenomenon was observed was in France, and the first ones to appear came from the phrase 'entre chien et loup,' which established their general concept.

This 'between a dog and a wolf', was also a metaphor meaning between safety and danger which gave form to the phenomenon itself, which was as ironic as it could get. The movement of the overflowing apparitions had no sense of regularity, sometimes they simply lurked in the shadows as their red eyes shined, sometimes they would howl during the setting sun from a domain which couldn't be reached, or like now, they would take aim at those before them.

This didn't only apply to Suimei's group, Jillbert and Clarissa were no exceptions. As the apparitions closed in on them as they followed the shadows, Jillbert clicked her tongue.

“Tch, those things are also coming this way.”

“Leave them be, Jillbert. Those are things that can only be defeated by sword saints and magicians. It would be useless to raise your hand here. It is fine to pull out.”

“I get that, but...”

“Gottfried-sama...”

At this rate, wouldn't it be bad? As Clarissa appealed to him like that with her eyes, the mirage man standing atop the roof refused her nonetheless.

“No. There is no need for us to defeat them. Even if we do nothing, that man will do something about it. There is no way he cannot. And there is no way he will not. Isn't that right?”

Pausing there, the mirage man next words were...

“—Disciple of the magician king Nestahaim, modern magician.”

As he spoke as if he knew of Suimei's lineage, Suimei yelled out to the rooftop in a fluster.

“You know!?”

He yelled, but the mirage man would not reply. It was as if he was simply toying with Suimei with his words. And even though that man's face was unclear, he could see a light smile floating on that face.

“Everyone, we're pulling out.”

At the mirage man's command, Clarissa, Jillbert and the white clothed cult members began retreating.

“Wait! Answer my—”

“I have no obligation to answer, but that's right, I'll at least tell you one thing. We are the Universal Apostles, you'll do well to remember that.”

“Univer...?”

As Suimei was making a perplexed expression, perhaps to prevent any pursuit, the mirage man began chanting a spell.

“Code Pragmatic. Kenon who resists flames and carries mass. Using those concepts, obey my words, become one, and turn to mud.”

He was using the mysteries, the moment Suimei sensed this, the space between Suimei's group and Clarissa's group was filled with a light made of mana as it drew figures and symbols. And then, flames began flying out of it at random. The instant the flames spread into the area, everything was covered in a heat haze and transformed into red mud. And just as the red flames spread, so did the red mud, creating more flames in its surroundings, and stood as a wall between them and the approaching apparitions. The apparitions were hot on Clarissa's heels, but in the end, they were unable to break through the domain created by the mud.

And the one who was most surprised at seeing that spell being used, was Suimei.

“That spell just now...”

He didn't have any recollection of the symbols and figures that were drawn by the mana, but the spell just now was not magic which used the elements of this world. In other words, it was something more in line with his own magic. Moreover, it was a spell that he suddenly understood as he recalled something similar.

“Suimei-kun! I don't know what you're so shocked about, but now isn't the time to be standing still!”

“Y-yeah! You're right!”

As Lefille called out to him, Suimei focused on the apparitions that were headed towards them. He didn't have time to think about it right now. Before he realized, the veil of darkness was already quite close to them, and the apparitions were just about to attack.

“—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. Truth Flare!”

Felmenia unleashed her white flames upon the apparitions. And though the white incandescence mowed down the apparitions, they calmly remained where they were as if nothing happened.

“Suimei-dono, what should we do about this!? Even though I used magic there wasn't much effect...”

“Fall back! These guys can't be defeated with regular magic! Menia, take Liliana with you and go to the back!”

“U-understood!”

Following Suimei's orders, Felmenia took Liliana who was hiding behind Lefille and took her to the back where the darkness had yet to reach. And then, Suimei yelled towards Lefille.

“Lefi, you fall back too! These guys are special...”

“Please wait. Let me test it out.”

Lefille didn't fall back, gathered her red wind at the tip of her sword, faced it towards the shadows where the apparitions were closing in from, and unleashed it. The red wind which held a portion of the spirits' powers had an effect against apparitions. The ones caught in the turbulent red wind gushed pitch black blood from their wounds as they crumbled to pieces.

“I can do it. Leave these ones to me.”

“Wow... Yeah, got it. And then... Hatsumi?”

Suddenly, Suimei realized that his childhood friend was not nearby. He shot his gaze around looking for her figure. Just where was she? And just as he found her figure, she was already surrounded by apparitions.

“Wha...”

Even though she was definitely right next to them just a moment ago, just how did she manage to get so far away? Within the dark domain, Hatsumi was driving her sword skills into the constant swarm of

apparitions. However, it was like her slashes had no effect at all on the apparitions. She was able to strike them firmly and push them back, but she was unable to deal a single wound.

—When apparitions attacked humans, it was possible to take measures to deal with them by pushing them away and protecting oneself. However, because the phenomenon itself wasn't something that can be removed from the world like that, the 'phenomenon' called Twilight Syndrome could not be erased with simple sword skills.

“These things just keep multiplying...!”

While beating back the apparitions with her sword, Hatsumi's uneasiness began to show.

“Hatsumi! It's no good, fall back! I'll do something about...”

“Even if you say that, at this rate these guys will even go over there!”

At those words, Suimei finally realized. Hatsumi was standing at the side of the bridge. And on the other side, there were many people. On this side, the only ones present was Suimei's group, so they could manage one way or the other. But if even one apparition slipped through the bridge, it would become disastrous. If they used numbers to attack the apparitions, they would be able to effectively attack to a certain extent, but...

“Shit, if just a little more time passed it would be easy, but...”

The sky was still bright, it wasn't yet completely the evening. Even if he tried to use the magic which called down the starry sky, it wouldn't do anything. It was irritating that he couldn't defeat them all at once. While thinking of that, Suimei used his magic to deal with the apparitions one by one while running towards Hatsumi, and then...

“... Kyaa!”

As Hatsumi's balance was destroyed, an apparition tackled her, and sent her falling to the ground. And then, before the girl on the ground, the apparitions which held the figures of dogs poured in on her all at once.

“Ah...”

From her mouth, a breath mixed with despair came out. But for some reason, not to mention running away, she was completely unable to move at all as if her hands and feet were bound. Looking at the apparitions with a frightened gaze, her hand holding the grip of her sword clattered as she trembled.

“Shit! HATSUMIIIIIIII!”

Seeing that she couldn't move, Suimei came flying in without caring about his own well being.



–She was knocked down by the apparitions. Up until that point, she believed that her heart was still firm. But just as her body fell to the ground, suddenly, her body was dominated by a fear that she couldn't identify.

The apparition's fangs, their claws, the moment she thought those things would kill her, her hand trembled, her heart trembled, and suddenly her body could no longer move.

Even when she stood to face the demons, even though she should have faced this kind of crisis many times before, for some reason, she was unable to move as if her hands and feet were bound. 'I'm scared. There's something scary in front of me.' As those words pounded within her head, she was no longer able to do anything.

And then, she suddenly realized. Was this not the same as when she had fallen down at that time? An emotional trauma. The thought that the beings before her eyes were just such thing to her came to mind. Precisely because she noticed such a thing, she was no longer able to move.

As she sensed the apparitions were about to leap in on her, she shut her eyes as tightly as she could. She was terrified. However, the pain that was supposed to come did not arrive no matter how long she waited. As she opened her eyes at that strange though, a young man in a black suit was right before her. Yakagi Suimei. He was carrying a silver katana in his hand as he breathed roughly. Perhaps because he was injured when he covered for her, the shoulder of his suit was torn to pieces.

“Ah—”

What she saw, was the same as a before, just as when he faced off against the dragonnewt, that back that was held out to her. The one she saw in her dreams many times, that back that should have been in her past that she couldn't remember.

How many times has it been now? How many times had he come to save her just like that? Other than when she was wandering alone in the forest, when the dragonnewt appeared, it was probable that the number of occasions that this had happened that she could not remember was countless.

Her appearance was disappointing. Even though she also thought this at that time, why did she always content herself with that back? Even though she was supposed to have become stronger. Even though she had learned the sword, continued to do nothing but swing it earnestly, and should have become able to fight. Despite all that, she was trembling just as she was. Was this state the appearance that she desired?

“—It's wrong.”

That was it. Because she hated being the only one who was protected, she wanted to become strong. Because she thought that if she remained as she was, she couldn't remain by his side. And she wouldn't be able to walk alongside him to protect others. That's why...

“—The me right now, is different.”

That was it. That's why, so that he wouldn't leave her behind, she thought she would become strong. Yes, that's why—

“I tried to get stronger with a sword...”

Yes, immediately as those words naturally came from her mouth, everything that she forgot came back like surging waves. Just who she was, where she had been. Who she was with, what she had been doing. That past, those feelings. Every single memory without exception returned. While dazzled by the raging stream of memories, she gripped her sword strongly and stood up as Suimei called out to her in concern.

“Are you alright?”

“Yes, I'm fine. Sorry for causing you so much concern recently.”

“...?”

As he looked back at her with a curious look, she repeated herself once more.

“I'm alright now.”

“Hatsumi, did you?”

Just from her words, he seemed to have noticed. As Suimei looked at her in shock, she focused her aim on the apparition that was leaping in at his flank, and then—

“My heart is the phantom of my sword's blade, and becomes a technique to break the three kleshas that poison the heart of man. Cast my body away like a rock, and give my life to the steadfast Kurikara...”

The Phantom Sword of the Kurikara Dharani. Those words she quietly recited were the words passed down along with those sword techniques, the dharani. It wasn't a chant like the ones Suimei would use, but once she recited them, her heart would calm down, and her consciousness would be completely focused on her word.

An apparition couldn't be defeated by a simple sword, it wouldn't even damage them. However, it was possible to use the sword to ward them off and push them aside. As the apparition thrust forward its pitch black fangs, she sent it flying with her sword technique. Immediately, other apparitions were closing in from all four directions, but without panicking, she returned her sword to its sheathe. And then...

“—The Phantom Sword of the Kurikara Dharani, the Summit of Zen, the Enlightening Long Sword that Leads to Serenity.”

As she muttered just like she was reciting a dharani, she drew her sword. In the instant that she did, she swung her sword twenty four times. And every single one of those strikes were driven into the apparitions.

All the ones in her surrounding could see was a flash of silver lines in her surroundings. Every single apparition who leaped in were sent flying into the sky by her sword technique. And in no time at all, Suimei unleashed shining magic at them and the apparitions immediately crumbled to pieces.

“Hatsumi... So your memories returned huh.”

Within the remains of the lingering memory of mana scattering around them, he made a relieved face as if something unexpectedly happy had just happened before him. And then, Hatsumi looked back at him as she spoke confidently.

“Suimei. I have a barrel full of complaints that I want to tell you, but I'll at least start with my gratitude. Thank you.”

She was being a little rebellious, but she did intend to convey her gratitude as much as she could. But for some reason, he was making an expression like he was shuddering.

“Y-your big brother wants to be forgiven from being hit though~.”

“... You sure can talk, seriously. And since when were you my big brother?”

“Eeh, but back in the day.”

“That was then, this is now...! But.”

Saying that, she recalled the time that she was saved by him.

“That time, was also a dog wasn't it?”

“...?—Aah, now that you mention it something like that happened too... Well, setting that aside.”

As Suimei signalled her to step back with his eyes, she shook her head.

“I hate that. I'm not running away.”

“But.”

“I'll prevent them from reaching the other side, so take care of defeating them.”

She would also fight. She wanted to fight at his side. And as Suimei sighed like he was giving up, he then made a fearless smile.

“Leave it to me.”

With those reliable words, Hatsumi set out to do what she had to. She repelled all the apparitions who were trying to cross the bridge. She was unable to defeat even one. Fully aware of this, she knocked the apparitions down, and then, Suimei thrust his hand towards the darkened sky. His preparations seemed to have been completed. And then, he released his mana, and opened his mouth.

“Velam nox Lacrima Potestas. Olympus Quod Terra Misceo Misucui Mixtum. Infestant Militia. Dezzmoror Pluviain Cessanter. Vitia Evellere. Bonitate Fateor. Lux de Caelo Stella Nocte.” (Within the curtains. The majesty of the tears flowing in the night. Decorate heaven and earth with its symbol. Infest towards the present irrationality. Dazzle and rain incessantly. The lamented one is evil. The extolled one is virtuous. That which disturbs all comes from the radiance beyond the distance, from the twinkling stars.)

A countless number of magic circles of all sizes were floating in the night sky and moved as if they were guns pointing towards their targets. And then, the moment Suimei let out those last words, 'Enth Astrarle—' (Oh starry sky, fall—), light overflowed as far as the eye could see.

... And after that light calmed down, the apparitions vanished without a trace. Even the spotted black holes in the ground had completely vanished as if they weren't there in the first place.

The quiet night town returned to its previous state. It was as if everything that just happened was nothing but a waking dream. The surroundings had become so calm that it left one to think of it that way.

“It's over huh.”

“Yeah.”

As Suimei smiled at her, she smiled back. Just with that, she felt like everything that was important to her had returned. Wondering how

Felmenia and the others were faring, they turned to look at them. And for some reason, they were all making a fuss in loud voices and had lost their composure. Just what had happened? As they ran over with a sense of unease, she could see Suimei suddenly gaze off in the direction Clarissa and the others went down with a severe expression. And before Hatsumi could call out to him...

“Ars Magna Raimundi... No, that magic was—”

Suimei's mutter resounded throughout the dark night sky.



... Due to the hero Hatsumi having been targeted, the Alliance was busy cleaning up the aftermath, but because they were predicting that she would be targeted from the very beginning, the chaos created by the attempt was limited to the riot made by the anti goddess religious organization cult members.

Speaking of those cult members, after the riot, not a single one of them was caught. After Clarissa and the others disappeared in a haze of smoke, the cult members also seemed to have vanished into the alleyways and the shadows of buildings.

To the Alliance, the incident was a disturbance that was completely unprecedented, but to Suimei and the others it was devastating. Naturally, the reason for this was because the ones who were opposing them in that place were Clarissa and Jillbert.

Just a few days ago, they had a friendly exchange and parted from the two women. They had only known them for a short time, but Suimei was indebted to both of them in no small amount, and to Lefille, Jillbert was someone she was very close to. They all had strong emotions as to why that had happened, and it could just be said to be the strange misfortune of fate.

It wasn't like Suimei and the others didn't have any resistance to the irrationality of the world, but because they were people they thought they could get on better terms with, it did make them feel a little down.

–And so, several days after their battle with Clarissa's group, Suimei, Felmenia and Liliana were visiting Hatsumi's room in Miazen's palace to bid her farewell.

Selphy was also present in Hatsumi's room, but having come to an understanding about their relationship, she took the guards that were inside and outside the room and left somewhere. She was likely being tactful in case they were going to talk about things that they didn't want others to hear.

And after everyone settled into chairs, what awaited Suimei was an incessant trickle of dissatisfied complaints from Hatsumi. Asking about why he kept silent about being a magician, she frankly showed her discontent as she grumbled about how he never informed her of what he was doing on the other side. As this conversation came to an end after a while, Suimei was left completely disheartened.

Since her memories returned, the time she spent having amnesia from the summoning largely just changed into stress. And taking a short rest, she frankly cut right back into complaining, as Felmenia stepped in to stop her with a forced smile.

“... U-umm, Hatsumi-dono? How about leaving running Suimei-dono into a corner at that?”

“Eh? I still only got about halfway through what i want to say though.”

“All this, is half... is it...”

Hearing her talk like she hadn't let out half of her true strength yet, Liliana shuddered. On the other hand, Suimei was already filled to the brim with her complaints and couldn't take anymore as he made an expression like Munch's 'Scream' as he apologized non-stop.

“Everything is my fault, so please let me off around here...”

“I guess. It's also true that it couldn't be helped, I'll let you get off with just this much today.”

It seemed that she somehow got as much as she needed to off her chest for now. As the atmosphere in the room calmed down, Suimei called out

to Hatsumi.

“... So, how are you Hatsumi? Did you calm down a little after regaining your memories?”

“Un. Well, I've also got the memories from when I had amnesia so it feels a little weird, but I've got a better grip of the situation that I'm in now.”

The reason she was able to say that was naturally because there was a possibility for her to return. Because she had a sense of security that she could return, a portion of her anxieties had likely vanished.

“Hatsumi. Since your memories have returned, I'll ask you one more time. Do you want to come along with us?”

“... Uun. As I thought, I can't do that. I said it last time, but I jumped into this fight on my own. That's why I'm unable to cast it aside after all this time.”

“Even if nothing could have been done about that?”

“Suimei, you said it yourself a little while back didn't you? If the instructor saw me as I was, I would be punished. If I treasured my own safety and ran away, that in itself would cause dad to get angry at me.”

Hatsumi smiled as she talked, she had no misgivings about this. It was precisely because she regained her memories that she was able to follow through on her beliefs with such conviction. As long as she decided to live while following that path, any hesitation she had towards it would also naturally vanish.

“I see. Well, I thought you'd say that.”

“You're not going to bring me along by force?”

“I'll respect your will. Besides, I think I'll be able to bring you back good news soon.”

“Did you figure it out!?”

“There's just a little more to go. For now I need to go back to my base in the Empire, organize the information I gained here, and start on trials for

the spell.... If that damn Eanru didn't blow away the ruins, I would have been able to solve it all while I was in the Alliance though.”

“I see...”

Seeing that it would still take time, a slight amount of disappointment showed on Hatsumi's face. This also applied to Reiji and Mizuki, but all of them must have held strong feelings that they wanted to return.

“I know you probably don't have any intent on returning until the demons in the northern Alliance territories are defeated, but... Well, if the spell is completed it should be fine to visit home for a bit right?”

“Yeah. I'm sure everyone is worried, also...”

“Also?”

As she made an expression like there was some matter to be concerned about, Suimei questioned what she was thinking about. And then, as if it was something that should have been completely obvious...

“Attendance records you know, attendance records. We haven't been going to school right?”

“If it's that, I'll take care of it somehow when we get back.”

“How?”

“Well, I'm a magician right~”

As he implied that he would make it work out skillfully, Hatsumi frankly made an unpleasant expression.

“Uwa, you're the worst... You're totally planning on using magic to make it all hazy. Uwaaaa.”

“Ah? What? So you want to repeat the year? I don't really care either way you know~”

“Eh? U-n... That would also be bad, huh...?”

“Then it's fine, isn't it?”

As Hatsumi looked at him like he should be ashamed, Suimei closed up the conversation with a quip. And then, Felmenia had her own questions

for her.

“It seems that it has been decided with regards to your return, but Hatsumi-dono, will you be alright with regards to those aiming for you?”

“You mean that Sister's group?”

“Yes. As long as they declared that they will take the hero with them, I'm sure there is a possibility that they will attack again. In that case...”

Just what will she do? But in the end, as long as she couldn't run away to the other world, there was nothing that could be done about it. Based on that, in the case that they did attack again, Suimei followed up on Felmenia's question.

“Hatsumi. Honestly speaking, what do you think?”

“I'll be difficult. This time we somehow got through because Suimei and the others were there, but with that kind of ability, a swordsman would need to be about as strong as dad to compete against them.”

“Sounds about right huh....”

Suimei recalled the fight from the other day. At that time, from what he witnessed of Clarissa and Jillbert's abilities, Lefille, Felmenia and Hatsumi were all being overpowered by them during the battle. The hero's power was an unknown quantity, but on top of the two women, there was Eanru who didn't show up that time. And then there was the mirage man who Suimei thought was responsible for sending him to the spirit world.

If they all came at once, it was probable that even with all their power, it wasn't difficult to imagine that defeat would be inevitable. However, Hatsumi's predictions seemed to be a little different...

“I can't win, but I think I'll be able to run away. My memories are back after all.”

Her expression showed off a level of confidence that she didn't show before. Certainly, now that her memories had returned, Hatsumi was stronger than when she had lost them. Clarissa and Jillbert were both

skilled, but if she devoted herself to running away she should be able to manage without any problems. However, while that may have been true, that magician was a different matter. Suimei was unable to unconditionally acknowledge that it was possible to escape his hand.

“I'll also complete the spell to return back home as fast as I can. If I do, we could use it for refuge if it gets bad.”

“... I kind of hate just running away though.”

“It can't be helped right? That man, is quite strong.”

“Un... I don't know much about magicians, but if Suimei says so I guess he is.”

There was also the fight with Eanru, so Hatsumi did recognize Suimei as someone strong.

Before long, their conversation came to an end, and with a brief 'See ya,' and 'Oh,' they finished their farewells, and Suimei left Hatsumi's room behind. And then, as they were returning to the lodging house, Felmenia suddenly called out to him.

“Now that I think about it, Hatsumi-dono isn't seeing you off?”

“Yeah. I was always away from home to head off somewhere after all. So it ended up that she just stopped seeing me off every single time I left.”

“When you say it like that it sounds like you were living together.”

As Felmenia looked at Suimei with a critical gaze, she seemed in ill humour like she had become sullen.

“What are you pouting for? We're cousins and are houses are right next to each other so we're just like family. Besides, don't I live together with Menia right now?”

“Eh? Ah, that's true, but...”

In a complete change from her pouting, Felmenia was now broadly grinning in a happy manner.

“Besides, Lefille and Liliana also live with us too.”

“Yup.”

As Suimei declared that they all lived under the same roof, he didn't really seem to pay it any mind as Liliana nodded alongside him. To him, he likely only recognized them as companions who shared rooms. He was probably conscious that he was getting on better terms with all of them, but because each of them had their own reasons like 'Felmenia was sent on Astel's King Almadios' orders,' or 'Lefille was there for the sake of completely dispelling the curse placed on her,' the late blooming Suimei who had no experience with love was unable to properly grasp their affection.

“... Felmenia Stingray, this is the beginning. It all starts here. You only started learning magic, and you promised to go along to the other world. There are still plenty of chances to get closer. Plenty!”

Felmenia turned her back on them and began mumbling to herself in encouragement. And then, Liliana tugged on Suimei's sleeve.

“What's up?”

“About that, mage with the large build, from before. Is it true, that if Suimei properly fought him, you wouldn't win?”

“I probably can't. With a magician of that level, it would be quite difficult.”

“Of that level...”

“Yeah. It's probable that the magic system used by that magician is quite ancient, and troublesome... Rather he's someone who possesses outrageous techniques.”

Hearing Suimei's phrasing, Felmenia and Liliana both tilted their heads to the side.

“Suimei-dono just said it was ancient, but what does that mean?”

“Exactly as it sounds. It would be an old magic system from our world. He's probably someone who is somehow related to my world.”

There was enough evidence to suggest that, no, there really was no

other explanation that he could think of. The savage names that Romeon used, the totemism that Clarissa used, and that magic the magician used at the end. There was no mistaking their sect had some kind of entanglement with his own world.

“... There's also Hatsumi-dono's case, so I'm not really surprised after all this.”

“More and more, this is quite, troublesome.”

After his small preface, Suimei went on to answer their suspicions.

“To break through that magic, I need to go back to my world at least once no matter what. I need to be taught by a magician who knows that spell to find out just what its origins are. Until then, there's probably nothing that I can do.”

Hearing Suimei's reply, Felmenia and Liliana were making stern expressions. Suimei then raised his conjecture to them.

“It's only maybe... And this is completely subjective, but what he used at that time was a composite concept. Using two or three concepts which are in no way similar, I think he created something that mixed them all together.”

“Mixing together concepts, and c-creating a new one!?”

“Yeah.”

Felmenia raised her voice in surprise. The two of them were making puzzled expressions like it was something hard for them to understand.

“That kind of thing, is it something that can, be gathered and given form?”

“Because they're mixed, I think it can be given form. It's the same as anything else. For example, let's see...”

“For example?”

“A hoe carries the concept of 'plowing the earth.' As a concept, it is something that one understands, and its image is that of an iron board fastened to a pole, anybody would be able to understand that 'symbol.'

And then, fastening a tool to it with a completely different concept, a new symbol is made which carries a new concept or something...”

It was something like a crest so to speak. As Suimei spoke, he looked to his left and right, and the two girls looked like they still had difficulty understanding. But that was only natural. Accepting what he was talking about was like 'denying pragmatism,' in the world of magic, it would be a breakthrough in the immutable laws of magic. Even if one did not know this, it was still something that could not be easily understood.

“Aaah, sorry. Even though I don't really get it myself I was a bit hasty in trying to explain it. Just forget what I said.”

As Suimei tossed that subject aside, Felmenia suddenly asked him something else.

“Are there many magicians in Suimei-dono's world who use that magic system?”

“No, that's also the first time I saw it, I think there should only be a couple people who use it.”

“Even though there are that few, you still know them?”

“I've got about three guesses. The magicians who used that magic would have been active during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.”

“Meaning?”

“They've all lived about five hundred years.”

“Five!?!... Are they elves?”

“Nope, humans. Or it would be better to say they were humans. They stopped being humans long ago after all.”

“Stopped being, humans... That's, also.”

“They're all monsters you hear? Monsters.”

“Monsters, beyond Suimei?”

“Just so you know, compared to them I'm at the level of a little chick. Well, at that level, pretty much every living being in the world would be a

at the level of a little chick or baby though...”

The true abilities of those magicians was not something that could be completely grasped by ranking them. The reason he estimated himself lowly compared to them was because of that. If one was not at their actual level, even if one was a high ranking magician, they would probably be dealt with as simply as a child.

“ ... ”

As Suimei fell silent, he remembered something from quite a while ago. It was an unusual occasion where the leader Nestahaim settled a dispute between fellow magicians. Along with the magic they were firing, he let out a single word and changed them all into infants in an instant. To be able to make his targets abide by his will without even using a spell, it was a technique that Suimei could not understand at all.

“Suimei, that phenomenon, was it also that magician?”

Phenomenon. In other words those things that attacked them at the end.

“Nope. That was caused by something else. They aren't things that are brought about by a person's will.”

“The name, if I remember right...”

“Twilight Syndrome.”

He never actually formally taught this to Liliana. However, Felmenia had seen it once before.

“Suimei-dono. Why did the Twilight Syndrome occur at that time? When I last asked you, you said that it was something that didn't occur in this world.”

“That's what I thought too. In reality, the natural power in the world is strong, so it shouldn't be at the stage where Twilight Syndrome occurs.”

“But if it occurred at that time despite that, it means...”

“Just what does it mean I wonder~”

Suimei began scratching the back of his head awkwardly. While he was acting like that, he did seem to be actually thinking about it though.

“Well, if I had to guess. The action those guys are taking, taking that event into account, they're moving to hasten the end of the world... Wouldn't that be about right?”

Hearing that, Liliana cocked her head to the side.

“End, the world... At that time, all the Sister and the others did, was swoop in and attack, right?”

“That's true, but... There's a saying that goes 'important matters happen more often than trivial ones,' and 'nature does not make great strides.' Everything in nature proceeds gradually, nothing will 'suddenly progress' or 'leap forwards.' Thinking of it that way, the reason they attacked was... In short, their goal was to abduct the hero, but it's also possible one important matter that comes out of this is that they are hastening the possibility of the end of the world by doing so.”

Clarissa and the others had a goal in abducting heroes, this was clear. It was unknown whether this had any relation to the demise of the world, but precisely because it was related, black holes opened where they were, and the Twilight Syndrome occurred.

“I can't completely throw out the possibility that it was a complete coincidence... But that kind of thing is out of my area of expertise. I'm not one of the denizens of twilight so I don't really know.”

With that, Suimei brought the conversation to an end, and brought one of his other anxieties out.

“All that's left, is Lefi huh.”

“Lefille, is it?”

Hearing Liliana's question, Suimei made a bitter expression as he recalled Lefille's current condition.

“She's the same as always though?”

“It's likely that she's thinking about her defeat. It doesn't show

normally, but I bet she is frustrated.”

It affected her quite deeply that she had tasted defeat in the fight against Clarissa. After that, Suimei caught glimpses of her acting somewhat impatient at her odds and ends.

“Well, it's not only that.”

“It's that, right?”

“So it's that.”

Thinking about what happened to Lefille's body alongside her defeat, the three of them each hung their heads down heavily.



While Suimei and the others were in anguish, Lefille was taking action elsewhere, and was in the office of the Twilight Pavilion's guild master... But...

“HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!  
AaaaaaaaHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!”

“Rumeya-dono, please don't laugh! This isn't something to laugh about!”

“But, but, you know!? If you, if you show me something like that! I'll, I'll! Haa, HAHAHAHAHA, HAAAAA!”

Rumeya was rolling around on the floor of the office with her tails wing around laughing with all her might. Gasping for air, it was to the extent where it was entirely possible she would choke and die as she wheezed for air while taking long breaths in and out. In front of her, sitting on the sofa, was the one who was laying bare her innocent anger, Lefille, who had once more become tiny.

“It can't be helped right!? It's not like I became like this because I wanted to...”

“Aaah, aaaah, my stomach hurts. This is the best laugh I've had all year.”

Seeing that she was still unable to stop laughing, Lefille was on the verge of tears as she scowled bitterly at Rumeya. However, her expression was just far too cute, and didn't carry a hint of dignity. After finally calming down from her fit of laughter, Rumeya reseated herself on the sofa.

“No, but really. To think that your body becomes smaller when you use too much of the spirits' powers. This never happened to Adyfize. Well, it just shows how large a portion of Lefi's body the spirits occupy is all... Fu, kukuku.”

Pinning down her mouth, Rumeya tried to stop herself from breaking out into laughter once more. However, she was at her limits, and her cheeks began to swell out as her mouth filled with air and a small laugh leaked out. On the other hand, Lefille could only let out an exasperated sigh.

“Please put a stop to that already. Suimei-kun and the others will be coming over to say their farewells soon.”

“Is that so? Fumu... Then before they get here, there's something I wanted to talk with you about.”

Saying that, she pulled in her pipe, and showed a serious expression. Seeing that her expression had tightened, Lefille naturally responded in a serious tone.

“Rumeya-dono, what is it that you wanted to talk about?”

After puffing at her pipe, Rumeya pointed a sharp gaze at Lefille which felt like it was piercing right through her.

“... Hey Lefi, you lost right?”

“That's...”

“Did you think I wouldn't know just cause you didn't mention it? I'd rather you not look down on me.”

As if she had seen it herself, Rumeya's words were filled with conviction. Having been seen through completely, Lefille honestly

nodded back to her.

“Lefi, do you know the reason you lost?”

“... Because my power couldn't earnestly reach them.”

“That's also true, but... Are you self aware of the other reason?”

Hearing her words, Lefille's heart jumped in place. However...

“No, it's just that my skills are still too raw. There is no other reason for defeat.”

Lefille took on a negative attitude as she denied there being any other reason. She didn't want to accept it. If she acknowledged it, she felt like a part of what had been supporting her would crumble to pieces. As Rumeya looked at her obstinate expression, she simply replied with a 'I see,' as she let out a sigh. This seemed to irritate Lefille, as she took on an unexpectedly critical tone with her.

“... Does Rumeya-dono think that there is something else?”

“It would simple for me to say it here, but... there's a parental side of me that thinks it would be better for you to find out yourself and accept it. There would be no benefit to you if I were too meddlesome after all. Fumu, what's to be done about this...”

As Rumeya muttered in a troubled manner, she puffed out the smoke from her pipe towards the ceiling and tapped the ashes out of her pipe into an ashtray. And then, perhaps having found her answer...

“That's it. Well, you've got that boy and your reliable companions after all, there's no need to rush it. Along the way, it will do you good to just look at the fights you've had up until now. If you end up losing despite that... Come back and see me again. I'll strictly reforge you when you do.”

“... Understood.”

“Un. In short, don't get too much into a fighting mood, but just by saying it, it isn't something that's easy to get, especially when you're young...”

As she trailed off quietly, she must have been thinking of her own

experiences. With a faraway look, Rumeya gazed out the window. After silently finishing her pipe, she suddenly smiled and called out to Lefille.

“Lefi, come here for a bit.”

“What's the matter.”

“Let me pet you.”

“N-o w-a-y!”

Rumeya was waving her hand up and down trying to appeal to Lefille for a good petting as Lefille obstinately refused her. Her hat that was far too big for her body fell over her eyes and she curled up into a ball on the sofa.

“Eeeeh! Even though you've become the perfect size to be petted, isn't it fine~!?”

“It isn't! Where can you find someone who would be glad to be petted in this kind of circumstance!?”

Saying that, Lefille abruptly turned the other way as Rumeya broadly grinned.

“Even if you say you hate it, I'm just going to pet you forcefully.”

The moment those words reached Lefille's ears, Rumeya's figure on the sofa became nothing but an after image, and vanished. And then immediately after that, Lefille's hat was stolen from her with tremendous vigour.

“Wawawawawa! Rumeya-dono!?”

“I got you~”

“Gu, guuuu...”

As she was pinned down with a delightful feeling from above, Lefille learned of absolute humiliation. As she was, with her abilities in that state, Lefille had no chance of escaping. After Rumeya teased her for a while, her fox ears suddenly began twitching.

“Oops, looks like they're here. Well, though it'll be a meagre, shall we

throw a farewell party?”

“... Yes.”

# Epilogue I

Elliot Austin had just arrived in the western territory of the Astel Kingdom in Kurant City. While also soothing the area at the request of the Salvation Church, he was en-route to the country of Thoria to the north of the Astel Kingdom. And right before his eyes, was a towering mansion. The current time was the evening. Under the light of the mana lamps placed outside, he once more looked at the letter that was passed to him during the afternoon.

“—My goodness, just as I arrived, I get an invitation huh.”

The reason he let out a sigh was because of how hectic it was to be a hero. Promptly after he arrived, as if he was being expected, he was given a letter, and the one who sent that letter was the lord of the mansion in front of his eyes.

The name of the mansion's lord was Lucas de Hadorious. He was the feudal lord of Kurant City and a big noble who held great influence in Astel. The greeting to the feudal lord set up by the Salvation Church was the next day. But before that could even happen, the other party had set up their own meeting. Elliot had no reason to refuse, so leaving Christa behind at the church's lodging house, he arrived at the mansion.

Explaining the situation to the gate guards and showing them the letter, he was immediately allowed through. As he passed through the door to the private room where Hadorious was, he noticed that the room was dimly lit, the only thing serving as a light source was the moonlight from the window. The one who summoned him was sitting at his desk, and was letting off a needless amount of pressure from his eyes that was overwhelming even compared to Graziella.

Elliot was quite taken aback by that, but trying to make sure that it didn't show on the surface, he stepped up and stood before him. He was definitely pressuring Elliot with his aura, but Hadorious simply pretended like he didn't realize that, and called out to Elliot.

“El Meide's hero, Elliot-dono. I thank you for accepting my sudden summons. By the way, how are you doing?”

“Up until now everything was just normal, but after coming here I've felt like I've hit rock bottom.”

“I bet.”

Hearing Elliot's sarcasm, Hadorious responded with a snort. This man seemed to keep his wariness concealed.

*(As I thought, this man is aware...)*

Unlike the Nelferian Emperor who always held an intimidating air, Hadorious' pressure held a sense of directionality to 'who it was being pointed at.' Even if it was some sort of test, at any rate, the one being tested would be left with a sour feeling. While Elliot was holding on to such doubts, he kept up his facade as always and questioned Hadorious.

“Are you not going to turn on the lights?”

“I simply thought it was more refined to sit under the moonlight. If it doesn't bother you, then I would like to leave it as such.”

As Elliot internally cocked his head at Hadorious' mysterious subtleties, he outwardly showed a nod.

“And so, what business do you have with me today?”

“As the feudal lord, I thought it was necessary to greet you.”

“If it was the greeting, it should have been planned for tomorrow. Besides, calling this a greeting is quite the fine thing to say at this point, huh.”

“Regarding that, I recall the hero Reiji also telling me something similar.”

Saying that, a faint smile showed on Hadorious' face. Seeing this, Elliot let just a little of his displeasure show as he continued.

“If that is all you have to say, then I will take my leave.”

“Well don't be so hasty. I have one more matter to discuss with you. The

reason I called you here today, bastard, was because I wanted to have a talk with you one on one.”

“Bast—... Just what is it?”

As Elliot bit down his complaint at the sudden discourtesy, he urged the conversation forward. Hadorious then joined his hands together atop his desk.

“I thought that I would hear your damn opinion here today.”

“My opinion? What do you plan on doing by hearing what I think? Could it be that you think I'm going to cause some kind of harm to this country?”

“No, I don't believe such a thing. It's just, I'm a little curious as to why you carry such thoughts like wanting to save this world.”

To Elliot, it seemed like a foolish jest peculiar to nobles. He was speaking like he was toying with Elliot, but even so, Elliot replied honestly.

“It's not like I really want to save this world. I'm simply saving the people who wish to be saved, and as a side effect the world is also being saved. It's not something I put too much thought in.”

“ ... ”

“Does that not please you?”

To Hadorious, it must have felt like an unconvincing answer. As Elliot was thinking about that, for some reason, Hadorious shook his head.

“I asked the wrong question. Bastard, why do you want to defeat the demons?”

“...? Just as I said, to save the people who want to be saved.”

“I see. That's quite the noble thought.”

“As I thought, is there something you don't like about that?”

“Yeah, it's strange.”

At the continuous stream of indirect replies mixed with sarcasm, Elliot's

tone was starting to show his irritation.

“I believe that standing up to fight for the sake of others is only natural though?”

“However, it doesn't have anything to do with you right? The crisis of this world, and the people of this other world, both are unrelated to you.”

“That's certainly true, but...”

He had a point, but Elliot had his pride. In his world, he was a well known brave warrior. He had built up a sense of values and pride there. He would never act only to benefit his own well being. He certainly was unrelated to the people here, but now that he was connected to them, he couldn't just bluntly refuse them. It seemed that Hadorious also saw through his trail of thought...

“Then why does that turn into defeating the demons? Even if you do not fight the demons, can't you save the people of this world?”

“I'm fighting the demons because it was requested of me. I also have the power to do so. That's why I complied.”

“I see. You're the same as the others in that regard.”

“...?”

Elliot was unable to grasp Hadorious' true motives behind his mysterious phrasing and was trying to rack his brains for a reply.

“... You have a better understanding than that man at the least, with regards to how the thing known as a world works I mean.”

“...?”

“Based on your reply to my earlier question, I'll ask you one more, you've made your determination to defeat the demons, but why do you think you think that kind of resolve came out? To come to this world, to save the people living here, the fact that you held no doubts towards this, did you not find it strange?”

“Whether it's strange or not, the thought that I had to fight was none other than my own will.”

Fighting the demons was something he decided on his own. Certainly, the fact that his motivation seemed bottomless was something he held doubts towards before, but—

“That's not it, bastard. You are, no, all of you are being manipulated.”

“Manipulated? By who?”

“The Goddess. The fact that you have all decided to fight in this world and hold such a will, is all influenced by the Goddess' plans.”

“ ... ”

Hearing Hadorious' declaration, Elliot kept his mouth shut and thought about it. Just where was the intent behind this dialogue between them? Starting at the reason for his battle, and now they moved on to the Goddess. He couldn't see the end goal of the conversation at all. It all felt like a play on words with no actual reasoning behind them, but for some reason, he was unable to just laugh it off.

“And why does that matter? We heroes received divine protection from the Goddess, it's obvious that there is some kind of intervention involved. Besides, I don't think it's a particularly bad thing if it's for the sake of saving people though?”

“It is just as you say, bastard. However, what if it wasn't for the sake of the people? If the heroes' existence was only to satisfy the selfish desires of the Goddess, then what would you think?”

“I'll be changing the topic a bit. But precisely because the existence of divinity is so large, they don't hold trivial wills the way that humanity does. Divinity does not possess the excess known greed.”

So he declared. But just as he voiced those words, a slight amount of sweat formed on his forehead. He realized the truth that he didn't want to, as if it was closing in on him immediately. However, that truth that he didn't want to hear, came pouring down at him relentlessly.

“If you understand the beings known as gods that well, then you should understand. Certainly, gods have no sense of greed. However, what are gods in the end? Just what do they do?”

As Elliot swallowed his saliva, he thought of the beings known as gods. About just what they did. He recalled the dialogue he previously had with Suimei Yakagi. This talk he was having now, was very similar to the one he had at that time with that man. Just what did he think of god? In the end, Suimei Yakagi spoke ambiguously, and because Elliot mistook him for a person of this world, he didn't investigate it any further. But if he did, he would likely have arrived at the conclusion he just found out right here—

“Elliot-dono.”

“... For the sake of amassing their own power, they are existences who exert their authority.”

“And do you think that such existences would allow those that they handed out their authority to to act freely? You understand deep in your heart that you are dancing to the Goddess' tune, correct?”

He was right. It may not have just been Elliot's own will. It was reasonable to think that the reason he thought that he had to do so no matter what was because something was working behind the scenes to plant that suggestion in his head. However...

“... But is that wrong?”

“Nu?”

“Certainly it may not be my own will. Our fight may be the result of the Goddess' despotism. However, as a result, people will be saved. In that case, I don't think it's particularly bad. You could say that it can't be helped.”

“That thing that cannot be helped, is stealing away the possibilities of man. Under the control of the Goddess, the means of saving fragile lives are crushed, and thrown away all the time. Despite this, bastard, can you simply say that it cannot be helped?”

“What do you mean?”

So he asked, but Hadorious answered his question with another question.

“Allow me to ask you first. What kind of place was your world? Was it a world where people pushed forwards for the sake of living a better life every day, and in the end, those efforts were rewarded and the world you knew was built with that as its foundation?”

“What are you saying? Isn't that obvi—”

Yes, it was obvious to always strive for better. As long as people lived, development and growth was an extremely natural outcome. However, from the way Hadorious was speaking, it was like he had doubts towards that way of living—

And then, he realized. Beyond that question, was the mechanism which drove this world.

“... It couldn't be, this world...”

The moment he asked for confirmation, the door to the office opened, and several soldiers appeared. As they fluently formed a line, Elliot glanced at them and questioned Hadorious.

“What is the meaning of this?”

“Our conversation is done for now. I will be testing you out from here.”

“If it's something violent, then I'll lodge a complaint to the Salvation Church though?”

“That's only if you manage to leave here right?”

“Do you really think they will be able to stop me?”

His words were arrogant and daring, but his opponents were mere soldiers. Even if they grouped up, they would be no match for Elliot who had received the Goddess' divine protection. Just as he was thinking this, Hadorious separated himself from his desk.

“Your opponent is me, bastard.”

“For the esteemed Duke himself to step forward, won't it be troublesome if you get injured?”

“First let's see you try.”

Ignoring Elliot's sarcasm, Hadorious provoked him. It was difficult to have a quarrel within the mansion of a feudal lord, but judging that nothing would proceed by just talking, Elliot drew his sword and attacked. However, without even noticing that Hadorious sword was even drawn, Elliot's sword was stopped by it.

“Wha!?”

“Hou... As I thought, you jump to action differently from the others.”

“You stopped my sword... With one hand?”

He had no intention of actually hitting Hadorious. He fully planned on stopping just before making contact. However, the speed of his sword was such that a normal human would be unable to see its movement. Thus, it was a tremendous shock to see it stopped like that.

“Hero. You certainly do not intend to say that is all you have? Back when you fought the third Imperial princess of the Empire, did you not also hold back?”

“... How do you know that?”

“It just means, I have a way of finding out.”

Elliot put his strength into his sword, and from the resistance he felt, he leaped back on his own. And then, he returned his sword to its sheathe.

... He couldn't understand the nature of this man. Naturally, this also included what he was thinking about. At this rate, it wouldn't be strange no matter what happened. Even if he was captured, even if he was killed, nothing seemed impossible at this point.

Having made that judgment, Elliot made his resolve. What he need to do at that moment, was to use all his strength to cut his way through. While still unarmed, he rolled up the sleeve on his right arm. And then, a silver gauntlet appeared on Elliot's arm. He then gave his final warning.

“... If I get serious, the mansion won't get off lightly you know?”

“That's only if you are able to use your power at its best.”

“Very well. I will show you my power.”

Electricity coiled around Elliot's arm. The furnishings in the room that were stuck by the lightning and shattered to pieces. Even with that, he was still holding it back, and it seemed Hadorious even saw through that as well.

“A great power. I see, so this is why you can't use it in the centre of a city.”

“Naturally. Because of the divine protection from the hero summoning ceremony, my power has increased. If I used this in the middle of a city, it would be a bother to many unrelated people.”

After speaking, just as he was about to drive himself at Hadorious...

“If you have that much power, then it is more than enough.”

“More than enough...?”

“I'm talking about the divine protection. If its that well adapted to your body, then the necessary portion has likely been filled.”

“I don't know what you're talking about, but I'm not about to stop at this point.”

“I don't mind. After all, it isn't my role to stop you.”

And immediately after Hadorious' suggestive words, a shock ran through Elliot's nape.

“Wh... at...?”

Elliot's voice was puzzled. The sudden blow left his consciousness hazy, and he used all his strength to focus on his senses. The soldiers behind him should have showed no signs of moving. But...

“—As one would expect, Lonely Figure-dono. To think even that hero was unable to sense you. The nickname you wear isn't just for show I see.”

A nickname he had heard before reached Elliot's ears. When he was in the Empire, once in a while, the people from the army would say the name Lonely Figure in fear. That person, was a man with swept back black hair mixed with some grey hairs. He had reddish brown eyes and a rigid face. His presence could assimilate into a shadowy figure, the

Empire's greatest swordsman and assassin.

“R-Rogue Zandyke... Just where...”

“From the very beginning. It's fine to pay attention to the soldiers who came in, but to neglect the possibility that someone was lurking around from the start, it is a fault just like one a Hero would make.”

“Ku...”

Unable to support his body anymore, Elliot fell to a knee while trembling. While vaguely listening to Rogue's warning, Elliot's consciousness eventually sank into a mud like darkness. After Rogue checked that he had in fact lost consciousness, he carried Elliot and laid him down on a sofa. And then, he called out to Hadorious.

“... Was it fine not to do it yourself?”

“It was more certain for Lonely Figure-dono to so than myself. The hero's power isn't something that can be underestimated.”

“And who was the one how took that power head on with his own body?”

Rogue replied in a taciturn manner. His attitude was insolent, but both of them accepted this of each other and didn't seem to dislike it. The soldiers in the room also said nothing. And then, Hadorious suddenly asked Rogue a question.

“However, was that alright? Becoming a Universal Apostle like us?”

“A foolish question. I gave my sword to Gottfried-dono. Isn't that the same for you?”

“No.”

“... What do you mean?”

“My sword is already dedicated to another. I cannot lie about that. Of course, I have not forgotten my great admiration towards that man though.”

While he spoke, Hadorious was clearly thinking of someone. To Rogue,

he felt like he could see a hallucination in the direction of Hadorious' gaze.

“... Hadorious-dono. There is one thing that I must pass on to you.”

“Let's hear it.”

“The demons have moved. They've already plunged into Thoria and are on their way to the Empire.”

“I see. As expected, they moved precisely as he predicted.”

As Hadorious sighed, Rogue threw out a doubt he always had.

“Is that fine? Is not not a little different from the original plan? The invasion of the demons in Astel and the departure of Reiji-dono to the self governed state. The failure to capture the Alliance's hero. Unlike the original plan, there are deviations that cannot be ignored.”

“Regarding that, adjustment are being made on each occasion, thus there are no problems. Besides. The original plan was to gather all of the heroes beforehand, but it seems that has changed a little.”

“What do you mean? In that case, the Empire will have to stand and fight against the demons without a hero and end up losing right?”

“No, that's won't happen.”

“... Mu. Then the Alliance's hero will go to the Empire? Or will we have this Hero-dono take care of the demon subjugation ahead of schedule?”

As Rogue gave Elliot a glance, Hadorious shook his head.

“No, that duty will fall on to the hero Reiji.”

“But are Reiji-dono's abilities not insufficient? A fight against an army of demons would likely be a heavy responsibility for him. Because of the scheme in the Empire, the prominent nobles have decreased in number. If it is not Elliot-dono, then I don't think it will balance back out properly.”

“Regarding his abilities, it isn't something to care about. We'll simply play our hand so that he can win. Besides, the hero Reiji is currently quite

famous. Because he was made out as the one who defeated ten thousand demons in Astel, his fame is higher than the hero Elliot.”

“But the Alliance's hero has also defeated a demon general correct?”

“The Alliance's hero Hatsumi had just ended a battle with the demons in a draw. The uproar in Miazen was also something they were unable to restrain. Just from that, her fame would take a hit. On the other hand, the hero Reiji has inherited an ancient hero's weapon from the self governed state and drove away the demon general who attacked him. If he drives back the demons from the Empire on top of that...”

“Certainly, Reiji-dono would be well known as the strongest hero.”

Currently, Reiji's achievements as a hero had surpassed Elliot's. When it came to their actual abilities, he was somewhat behind, but to the populace who blindly believed in the heroes, none of that mattered. Seeing that Rogue was convinced, Hadorious glanced over at Elliot.

“All that matters is the piety of the populace. Certainly, it is important to have power to drive away the demons, but that is a secondary concern. Currently, the Alliance's hero is the strongest among them, but the divine protection from the Goddess in her is not that good. However, since the hero Reiji has been steadily distinguishing himself, the Goddess must also have her eye on him. Naturally, we must put the other heroes to use too.”

Pausing for a break there, Hadorious looked up at the moon through the window.

“—Let us make sure that the hero Reiji gains the utmost fame that he can. So that he receives the Goddess' greatest favour, and becomes a matchless hero.”

To be set up in a high position, hardships were completely unavoidable. If he did not carry true ability, it would come back and bite him after he was elevated. Rogue muttered lightly as he slightly pitied Reiji.

# Epilogue II

After Suimei's party returned to the Nelferian Empire from the Saadias Alliance, they now arrived at the back street which led to their base. The condition of the place they lived was the same as always. The alabaster that Suimei heavily plastered on the walls of the surrounding buildings was still a nice pure white. The characteristic dampness of a backstreet couldn't be felt at all and the area was overflowing with cleanliness. Coupled together with the sunlight pouring down from the sky, it resembled a park.

Looking at it carefully, several of the cats that Suimei had made his temporary familiars were settled on top of the tables and chairs that were left in the area outside as they purred and relaxed. They were leaning with their backs on the chairs scratching their bellies, or just spread across the furniture spread eagle, or basking in the sun on the balcony.

“Kitty!”

The moment she saw this, Liliana cast aside her parasol and charged towards the cats as her violet twin tails bounced in the air. Since she had gone far away, she must have needed a replenishment of cats and dogs. Now that he thought about it, Suimei remembered that Liliana had been somewhat reluctant to part with them when they left the Empire.

“Hug.”

“Nyaa~n”

After capturing several cats, she pressed them against her cheeks all at once. Because Liliana poked around them back when the cats were made temporary familiars all the time, they didn't show any signs of disliking it. And the one to let out a sigh as if saying 'good grief,' was the tiny Lefille. Standing up the parasol that Liliana threw to the side, Lefille picked up one of the cats in her arms and talked to it.

“At any rate, you guys, are you not going to return to where you came

from?”

“Nyaa.”

Even as she poked the cat's cheek going 'Hey! Hey!' Naturally, the only reply she received was its meow. She knew this, but she likely just wanted to try asking it on a sentimental level. And then, Liliana, who was next to her gently brushing the cats, replied for them.

“It's pretty here, and it's easy to take an afternoon nap, so they come around once in a while.”

“Cats love clean places after all. I see, so while wandering around they take the opportunity to relax and feel at home here.”

“Nyaa~n”

As the cats meowed like they were replying, Liliana listened to them intently. It looked like she was having a conversation with the cats, but this was just a method Suimei had taught her to come to a mutual understanding with animals.

—After the previous disturbance in the Empire ended, the cats' role had ended, so according to their contract of 'in exchange for feeding them and securing a place to sleep for a fixed period of time, they would cooperate,' the partial elevation of their intelligence that he granted them with magic was dispelled.

They all returned to where they came from after that, but to the cats, this was an easy place to take an afternoon nap, so they ended up appearing here quite frequently.

“At this rate it'll become a gathering spot for them at night huh.”

“That seems about right. It's often said that cats like to gather.”

Felmenia replied cheerfully after Suimei spoke. Because she was also rather fond of cats, the tranquil sight of cats gathering together was like food for the soul.

“B-by the way, Suimei-dono, um...”

Saying that, Felmenia glanced back and forth between the cats and

Suimei's face. For some reason she seemed embarrassed as she fidgeted around.

“Hm? Aah, the cats right?”

“Yes!”

Letting her silver hair fly behind her, she practically leaped towards Liliana and the others and began petting the cats. After passing time peacefully like that for a while, they heard familiar voices come from the entrance to the alley.

“Ah, they're here!”

It was a young man's voice that Suimei was very well acquainted it. As Suimei turned around to that somewhat reassuring voice, Reiji's party who should have been in the Saadias Alliance was standing there. Titania then called out to him with a somewhat calm expression.

“So you've returned.”

“Yeah, we just got back.”

As Suimei shrugged his shoulder, Felmenia came running from behind him while carrying a cat. And then, she fell to one knee and took on the etiquette of a retainer before Titania.

“Your Highness, it is wonderful to see you in good health.”

“White Flame-dono, it is also good to see you so well spirited. Do you like cats?”

“Eh? Um, well... Yes...”

Because Felmenia had knelt down courteously while still carrying a cat, Titania began laughing. After Felmenia replied in an embarrassed tone, she moved the conversation onward.

“Your Highness, If I remember correctly, was your plan not to soothe the citizens in the self governed state?”

“Yes. We went and returned to the Empire this morning.”

And then, Reiji brought up one of the reasons they ended up returning.

“Actually, we got called back by that noble again.”

“That noble again huh...”

“Un...”

As Reiji replied with a grim expression, Suimei noticed that the person who usually called out to them first had not yet shown up.

“Come to think of it, what's up with Mizuki? I haven't heard her at all yet.”

“U-umm. Mizuki is...”

“What's up?”

Suimei cocked his head to the side as he asked, but Reiji just awkwardly averted his gaze. And just as he did...

“FUHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!”

Suddenly, what he could hear from behind Reiji and the others, was an excessively high tension laugh. Hearing that laughter, Suimei head suddenly felt extremely heavy.

“... Oi, Reiji, what's with that laugh that leaves me with nothing with a bad premonition?”

“Un, it would really help, if you could just guess...”

As Reiji replied in a tired tone, Mizuki showed up with a single shining golden eye.

“It has been a while. He who manoeuvres secretly behind the light and carries that deep crimson that lives within the darkness deeper than the same darkness of the universe that I inhabit, oh my eternal rival!”

“Ah... Aaaaah.”

Hearing the words coming out of Mizuki's mouth, Suimei let out a voice like he figured it out. Looking at Reiji and Titania, he could see that the two of them were at their wits' end. As Mizuki walked forward with an air of composure, Suimei looked at her with a complicated expression.

“... Mizuki, you know, didn't you stop doing that?”

“What are you talking about? Besides, I am not Mizuki. I am the unique existence in all heaven and earth, the Holy King of the Heavens, Io Kuzami.”

“Yeah yeah yeah yeah. That kind of thing doesn't exist...”

As Suimei gave an apathetic response, Felmenia looked at him with a doubtful gaze.

“... Suimei-dono. Just what is even going on here? I'm having a hard time understanding.”

“Even if you ask me... Oi, Reiji, what's up with this?”

Reiji then talked about what had happened in the self governed state. About how they attained the weapon left behind by a hero. About how a demon general had appeared. And about how Mizuki ended up as she was.

“... I see. After going and getting that weapon, Mizuki ended up like this.” “Un. That's why, it's my fault. If I properly protected her, then...”

Reiji's expression was stiff. From the very beginning, he had made the declaration that he would protect her before they even left Astel, so it must have weighed heavily on his mind.

“Well, don't worry about it.”

“But.”

“Mizuki's also responsible for saying she would go along. Besides, nothing will come out of brooding over it now. You can't do anything about something that's already happened. Also, since she suddenly became weird, isn't it possible that she just suddenly goes back to normal too?”

Perhaps because of those optimistic words, Reiji's face regained its cheerfulness.

“You're right.”

“Though it's definitely outside my range of expectations that it ended up like this...”

“... You're right.”

Reiji looked at Mizuki for a moment with a complicated expression. He likely wanted to say that of all things to happen, it would have been better if it wasn't like that. And everyone in his group was of the same opinion. In any case...

“—Well whatever. Lets head inside for now. We also just got back though so we can't really show you any hospitality.”

“It is fine even if you do not pay us any mind. We also came here to exchange information after all.”

Following up on Titania's reply, Io Kuzami, previously known as Mizuki, spoke with a haughty attitude.

“Fumu. Then let us go to your damn castle.”

“Mizuki. You wait out here for a bit.”

“I am Io Kuzami.”

“Yeah yeah, I got it, Io Kuzami-san. Menia, get Lefi and Liliana and go inside with Reiji and the others.”

After confirming that everyone had entered the house, Suimei faced Io Kuzami.

“Now then... So? You're seriously not pretending here right?”

“Do you still not believe me bastard?”

“Just checking. Come here for a bit.”

“I refuse.”

“But she refuses. Actually, it's faster for me to just get closer huh, lend me your head.”

While putting on an attitude like he was picking a fight, Suimei drew closer. And as he did, Io Kuzami put on a smile like she was toying with him.

“Did I not say that I refuse?”

“Can't hear you.”

Promptly setting aside Io Kazumi's words, Suimei placed his hand on her head. Back with Hatsumi, due to her amnesia he couldn't play out any hands, but in the case of a split personality, it was possible to return the original personality without giving her any shock. Therefore, despite feeling guilty about it, he prepared to cast his magic—And just as he did.

“Bastard, do you intend to tamper with this little girl's head like that once more?”

“—!?”

Io Kuzami smiled like she knew exactly what he was thinking as Suimei leaped back. While he was gripped in surprise, Io Kuzami showed him an expression with a shadow behind it.

“What's wrong? It is not something to be so surprised about is it?”

“... What are you? Why the hell do you know that?”

Suimei questioned her with a severe expression. It was supposed to be a secret that only he knew. Then just how would a split personality that just suddenly appeared know that? Doubt and suspicions began whirling around in his head. On the other hand, speaking of Io Kuzami, she simply smiled with composure.

“You're making quite the grim face. However, is that not right? It is something that happened before you bastards came to this world. Yes, this little girl had fallen in love with you. However, you trampled on her love. And with your damn power, you substituted the target of her love to another.”

“... Yeah, that's right.”

Yes. It was just as the one who named herself Io Kuzami said in a bitter tone. At first, Mizuki was seriously interested in Reiji, but while Suimei was helping her approach Reiji, it seemed that she had ended up falling in love with Suimei, and confessed to him. And just as Io Kuzami said, he used magic to switch her feelings over to someone else. As he looked at her as if asking why she knew such a thing, Io Kuzami replied.

“It is nothing. When I possessed this little girl, I simply had a little peek at her memories. Of course, it just means I also had a look at those damn memories that you sealed away.”

And with those words, Suimei somehow came to an understanding as to what exactly Io Kuzami was.

“Answer me. What are you? What kind of spirit?”

“There's no need to be so angry. I have no intention of making any mischief. The reason that I am borrowing this little girl's body is simply because our interests coincided.— Besides, you are unable to remove me, correct?”

“Don't underestimate a modern magician. We've been exorcising things like you in all times and places with all kinds of magic.”

“Stop that. It is certain that you may be able to do so, but the burden on this little girl will be considerable. It is also possible that she may just break you know?”

“ ... ”

Suimei was unable to deny that. If the thing that possessed Mizuki was a large existence, it was true that if he forcefully drove it out, it would be a considerable burden on her. He couldn't just cast out her words as a lie and he continued to scowl at Io Kuzami.

“Don't make such a frightening face. What, there is nothing to worry about. I have no intention of bringing any harm to this little girl, though she may go through some painful experiences.”

“Is that the truth?”

“I don't lie.”

That could also be said to be a certainty. Fundamentally, spirits did not lie. There are occasions where they avoided telling the truth and tricked their opponents, but if it wasn't the type which caused mischief, if she guaranteed Mizuki's safety, there was likely no deceit in her words. As Suimei gave up on driving her out by force, Io Kuzami looked at him with

a curious face.

“If you think of this little girl so precious, then why do you keep her at a distance?”

“Shut up. I'm a magician, Mizuki is a normal human. There's no way I can let Mizuki cross over to this side.”

“I see.”

After replying briefly, Io Kuzami once more smiled like she was ridiculing him.

“Also, don't mention any of this to the others, you hear me bastard? This is a secret between you and me.”

And with that, that 'thing' that had possessed Mizuki began using her body to laugh.