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樋辻臥命

Gamei Hitsuji

Illustration: 猫鍋蒼

OVERLAP

Isekai Mahou wa Okureteru! [LN]

The Different World Magic Is Too Far Behind!

vol.7

by Gamei Hitsuji

[Novel Updates](#)

Translation: [Hikoki Translations](#)

Epub: [Trollo WN/LN EPUB](#)

異世界魔法は遅れてる!

7

樋辻臥命

Illustration = 猫鍋蒼





「……ささや」

八鍵水明

インルー

「決まりだな。いまだけ背中を頼む」

「みずきを
出しなさい」

「ふが、
きひやま
はにおふる！」

イオ・クザミ (安濃瑞樹)

リリアナ・ザンダイク



Prologue: The Possessed Woman

Currently, in the Nelferian Empire's Imperial Capital of Filas Philia, in the alleyway where the Yakagi residence was located, a slight tension filled the air. It wasn't the feeling of tension before a fight nor was it the indescribable premonition invited by ominous events. If one were to make an example, it would be like the time where one were to confront a devil that came up during a summoning spell, it was an intersection of gazes filled with hostility.

However, the source of that strange atmosphere came from the confrontation between Yakagi Suimei and the girl before him. On top of her school uniform was an unseasonable red muffler. On her hands, she wore fingerless gloves. It was an outfit which gave off a somehow complicated sensation. With glossy long black hair, a charming small face and large and round eyes, normally she would be his good friend, Anou Mizuki—But at that moment, there was a sense of discomfort which implied otherwise.

The eyes she directed towards him were black and gold. Normally, both of her eyes should have been black, but for some reason one of them had changed colours. That ever gentle smile that she always had on, had now become like the sneer of a devil, and gave off a sense of provocation.

It was a transformation one could not possibly imagine from her normal self. Yes, right now, the one in from of Suimei, was Io Kuzami. She was, something, that named herself so. Just how long had it been since they began talking? Suimei and Io Kuzami's gazes simply collided in silence. And then, she made an exasperated expression like she grew tired of waiting.

“—So, isn't it about time that you let me through?”

“... Frankly, I don't want to let an ominous guy like you into my house.”

“Mu—?”

At Suimei's words, Io Kuzami's face became stern. It wasn't all that surprising,

she was something whose true nature was completely unknown, so Suimei's complaint could certainly be said to be respectable. Seeing that, Io Kuzami was about to say something with a predictably exasperated expression when...

“But—It's also true that I can't just say that.”

As if implying that he would allow her to come and go, Suimei turned his back to her. It certainly didn't sit right with Suimei to let something of such a suspicious nature inside. But in that case, no matter how long he just stood there and waited, nothing would progress forwards, and if he drove her away here, he would lose the chance to gain information.

Compared to letting a suspicious entity into his house, Suimei was more reluctant about those other points. He wanted to know just what she was and to ascertain whether or not she would cause any harm. It was necessary for him to analyze her from all her words and actions. In that case, it was unavoidable to let her inside his house. And then, Io Kuzami broke out in laughter as if to make a mockery of all that.

“You're quite the troublesome human, aren't you bastard? Despite wanting to live a simplistic life, you can't help but entwine yourself in theories. Won't you just accumulate resentment like that?”



“Shut it. What’s a magician going to do if they don’t entwine themselves in theory? Theorizing about each and every bothersome thing and assembling a

theory by one's own effort, that's when magic first take shape ain't it? If you deny my occupational disease it would be the same as taking away my food."

As he spoke bluntly due to the irritation of things not going his way, Io Kuzami threw away her own frivolous way of talking, and narrowed her eyes.

"So? Will you let me inside? How about it?"

"... Is it true that you won't cause any harm?"

"I hate meaningless questions."

"That's rich coming from someone who spouts meaningless crap as much as they want."

"Fuu. If I was intent on causing you all harm, I would be sure to make you all unprepared for it from the start. Don't you also understand this without me having to explain every little detail?"

"I'm just making sure is all. If you don't want to say anything, I at least want to hear from your own mouth that you at least won't do anything."

"Do you really think I would lie?"

"That's why I'm saying I want to hear it from your mouth."

The reason Suimei was clinging on so persistently was naturally to keep Io Kuzami in check. In this kind of bottomless exchange, even without lying, he was at a disadvantage if she remained silent. Therefore, in a way, it was a last resort to at least have her declare that she would do nothing. If she was a spirit of high purity, there was no way she could ever lie after all—"

Eventually, Io Kuzami shrank back like she was giving up.

"I have no intention of bringing harm to you bastards. If that wasn't the case, I wouldn't have saved them."

"Then just what kind of benefit do you get from this?"

"To not just honestly accept my kindness, you're quite uncooperative aren't you?"

"That is my role. Reiji and Mizuki are good people, so I have to be the one who is distrustful."

“Even the parts of you that are not softhearted are naive.”

Saying that, Io Kuzami laughed like she found it somehow delightful as Suimei clenched his teeth bitterly and turned away. And then, he raised his finger next to his face and waved to it beckon her along. Seeing Suimei’s attitude, as expected, Io Kuzami let out ‘what an insolent guy,’ while laughing it off. He still had no idea just what she was thinking.

“...”

Suimei casually peeked out the corner of his eye at the cats. If it was the cats who were sensitive to the presence of bad spirits, they would react to any threat that Io Kuzami posed. However, the cats in the alleyway were completely normal as they playfully meowed where they were.

In other words, it at least meant a devil did not possess Mizuki. With that, one of Suimei’s worries had vanished. That being the case, there were still other possibilities, so he couldn’t be negligent. As Suimei guided Io Kuzami into the house and towards the living room, everyone except for Liliana was sitting in chairs around the table.

“Menia, where’s Liliana?”

“Liliana is in the middle of replenishing her need for cats. It seems she took several of them to her room to play with.”

“I see.”

Because she had been away from cats for some time, Liliana likely wanted to play with them with all her energy.

“Well, even if everyone is not gathered, I do not particularly mind.”

“Why are you suddenly acting so damn self-important...”

After being let in, Io Kuzami was acting excessively haughty leaving Suimei unable to hold in his astonishment. As he exchanged looks with her asking her what the hell she was saying, Io Kuzami returned an expression like she was getting carried away asking him to just follow along.

“You hear me my worthy rival? I am great. Greater than anyone to the extremities of this universe. Thus, you shall also show me respect as one would

show their master. No, I will allow you the privilege of doing so once every ten days. I won't ask you to lick my buttocks, but I will at least allow you lick the dirt off the soles of my shoes."

"Who's going to lick what? Rather, if you want someone to show you respect that much, go found a new religion or something. That way is far more reliable."

"Ooh! That is also a grand idea. Right then, on the dawn of a new religion, the organization's name will be the Mother of Darkness... No, Life Form Airspace Third Law of..."

"Oi stop that! There's all sorts of things wrong there!"

"What are you saying? Were you not the one to tell me to do so?"

"I didn't mean to actually go and do it dammit."

Even as Suimei yelled, Io Kuzami recklessly spat out her words fluently. Suimei kept exchanging looks with her to tell her to stop, but all she did was put on a smile like she was toying with him as she lead him around by the nose.

"Are you listening? When I read your damn name, I read it as a worthy opponent—in other words, a rival. Do you honestly believe that I would meekly listen to such an opponent's words?"

"AAAAAAAH why do I have to go through this crap where I feel like I can't get through at all in this kind of place damiiiiiiiiit!"

As one would expect, even Suimei was yelling completely at his wit's end trying to mesh his conversation together with Io Kuzami. Because she wasn't being air headed and was doing it on purpose, it just made it worst for him. Seeing this exchange between them, Felmenia and Lefille both had their eyes and mouths wide open and gave their impression.

"It's amazing isn't it."

"How amazing..."

To the two of them, they never thought that Suimei could be toyed around with to that extent. In the Alliance there was Gaius, and then Rumeiya, and this was now the third person. And then, Felmenia suddenly threw a puzzled question at Suimei.

“Umm... Suimei-dono. In the end, just what caused Mizuki-dono to end up like this?”

“That’s... I also don’t really know. Well, I guess she’ll just be like this until she goes back to normal huh?”

“E-eh...”

Suimei’s answer of just giving up was quite unlike his usual self, and hearing that, Felmenia didn’t really know how to reply and let out a doubtful voice. As Suimei and Felmenia had that exchange, Reiji scratched his head while muttering, ‘What did she call it? That’s my dark history... dark history... Haha...’ His anguish was something that his fellow victim Suimei was more than able to sympathize with. On the other hand, including Titania, all the girls had absolutely no idea what was what.

“... Setting that aside. Shall we talk in detail about what went on after we split?”

“... Un, you’re right. I also think that’s what we should be prioritizing here.”

“Umu, then let us begin.”

“That’s enough from you already, just take a damn seat!”

After Suimei said that, Io Kuzami took her seat, and he began to speak of what happened to them.

Chapter 1: At the Yakagi Residence

“I see, that kind of thing happened in the Alliance...”

After Suimei told them clearly about what happened in the Alliance, Reiji muttered in a serious tone. In response to that, as usual, Suimei shrugged his shoulders.

“Yeah. How do I put it, it was all quite harsh.”

“But to think even Suimei’s childhood friend would get summoned.”

“That’s quite the complete coincidence huh. When I found out she also had amnesia as a bonus I really panicked, seriously...”

While saying that, Suimei reminisced about what happened right as he arrived in the Alliance. After finding Hatsumi by coincidence at the parade, when he went to go see her, she told him she didn’t know him, and then ended up trying to cut him down. It was all quite the terrible experience. Reiji then put on a relieved smile.

“But thank goodness. It would have only just piled on our worries if she still didn’t have her memories...”

“Yeah, seriously.”

The fact that her amnesia didn’t develop into something serious was something for Reiji to be delighted at as Suimei’s good friend, and Suimei returned him a relieved smile. And then, something seemed wrong with Reiji. As he was giving everyone a relieved and refreshing smile, in a complete changed he suddenly made a somewhat uneasy, somewhat troubled and heavy headed expression.

“It’s really great that you returned. Really...”

“...”

The reason Reiji’s tone had gotten rather gloomy, was naturally because of the girl sitting next to him. He didn’t have a talent for sensing the emotions

behind that hazy expression, but Suimei did not overlook that a melancholic shadow had fallen over him.

In other words, he was envious that they managed to return safely. But even so, since Reiji's disposition was one where he never felt feelings of envy towards others, he seemed somewhat haggard. It wasn't hard to imagine what kind of anxieties he carried while returning to the Empire himself with Io Kuzami in tow.

Having sensed this, Suimei exhaled heavily. As a friend who shared bygone days, it wasn't somebody else's problem. In any case, as Suimei and Reiji sympathized with each other, Titania spoke up.

"So, did you leave that hero Hatsumi behind in the Alliance?"

Suimei nodded back towards her. And in his stead, Felmenia spoke.

"Hatsumi-dono has her own fight to take care of. Suimei-dono respected this, and decided to part with her for the moment."

"Suimei, are you alright with leaving it like that?"

"There's nothing to be alright with. If she intends on carrying things out properly, it would just be unwanted meddling for me to forcefully drag her along."

"However, she may suffer something dangerous in the Alliance right?"

Something dangerous. Reiji reacted to those words.

"Those Universal Apostles or whatever that came up in your story right?"

—The Universal Apostles. It was the mysterious group formed by Eanru, Clarissa, Jillbert and the mirage man who stood atop that roof. They were the ones manipulating the anti Goddess religious group from behind the shadows, and they schemed to kidnap Hatsumi who was a hero. They were fresh in Suimei's mind.

Every one of them was a formidable enemy that could drive the members of Suimei's party into a corner, they couldn't be dealt with by ordinary means. In the present condition, they were a group who could be said to be more of a menace than the demons.

In spite of those people being around, Suimei left Hatsumi behind. If one were to ask him whether he had no concerns regarding that, he couldn't just say he didn't. But, at any rate—

“Regarding that, it couldn't be helped even if she came over here with me right? No matter where they are, we don't know when they're going to attack. It's evident that no matter what we do, we won't have the initiative. That's why the only thing we can do is have Hatsumi cut through her proper path as quickly as possible while I find a way to return. That's about the best thing we can do. Anyways, more importantly...”

As Suimei implied that the main focus of what he wanted to say was something else, Reiji seemed to know what he implying. He folded his arms and began groaning in a grave manner.

“From what Suimei is saying, it means we also might get targeted right?”

“If it's just as those guys say, then yeah.”

“A scheme to take along the heroes, a mysterious group huh...”

He wasn't sure just what kind of goal they were trying to achieve by kidnapping the heroes. As long as there wasn't enough information, it wasn't something he could clearly give an answer to. Suddenly, at that point, Suimei turned to Lefille.

Among the Universal Apostles was Jillbert, who Lefille had gotten along with well here in the Empire. It must have left her with rather complex feelings to have a friend become an enemy. As the room filled with a heavy silence, Reiji changed the subject.

“So, next is our side of things right?”

“Yes, that's right.”

“Umu.”

As Reiji spoke, both Titania and Io Kuzami nodded. Suimei heard about why they went to the self governed state before they went into Suimei's house, but he only heard a basic outline and didn't ask about the finer details. He knew about the enemy who attacked them, and that they went to get a relic from the

self governed state. As expected, this was something that Suimei's group held great interest in.

“—Well, to put it plainly, after we split up from you guys, we went to get the hero's relic in the self governed state to compensate for our lack of power.”

As Reiji opened with a concise explanation, Suimei's group each nodded back to him and urged him to continue.

“After arriving in the self governed state, we received an explanation about the hero's relic from the person in charge of it and were brought deep inside the temple. And at that time, a man who named himself a demon general attacked us, and we repulsed—No, we were let off, and returned to the Empire today.”

This was the same outline they heard when they reunited outside. Hearing that story once more, Felmenia muttered in a puzzled tone.

“Attacked by a demon general...?”

Suimei also found it unexpected that a demon general would directly confront Reiji. It was only natural. The fact that Reiji and the others were in the Empire, and the fact that they were headed to the self governed state were both things that nobody should have known.

“In other words, does it mean the demons have predicted Reiji-kun's actions?”

In response to Lefille's guess, Titania shook her head.

“No, that did not seem to be the case.”

“Meaning?”

“The demon general did not know that a hero would be in the place where the hero's relic was enshrined. The demon general was only aware that Reiji-sama was a hero when Reiji-sama named himself.”

“That demon general named himself Ilzarl, but it seems that man's true purpose there was the hero's relic.”

“I see. So their plan was to quickly remove something that could have proved a threat.”

It was likely exactly as Lefille said. There was sufficient reason for a hero summoned now to try and get hold of a weapon a previous hero had used. Since the number of demon generals had decreased, they likely wanted to cut off that possibility early and chip away at the heroes' battle potential. Suddenly, Suimei remembered something from what was just said, and questioned Reiji.

"There's just something I'm a little curious about, but right now you called that demon general 'that man,' right?"

"That's what I said, what about it?"

"No, it's just that a word that definitively defined him as a man so naturally came out, I was just a little curious. Did his appearance look like that?"

"Ah... I didn't really pay attention to that. Certainly."

After hearing Suimei talk, it seemed Reiji also came to an understanding and made an expression like he noticed something. Up until now, the demons and demon generals that Suimei had come across were all beings that had figures that were quite different from that of humans. It was different enough that the distinction between male and female was a complete afterthought. Naturally there was probably a difference between the sexes, but because they deviated in outward appearance so much from humans, it wasn't something one really thought about upon seeing them. But here Reiji clearly called him a man. In other words, that demon's figure had outward characteristics that looked like a human male.

"Certainly, after meeting that demon general, we also did not think he was a demon. His figure was quite close to that of a human after all... Un, that's right. Now that I think of it, I believe that demon general falls into a somewhat special category."

"Also, when Reiji-dono said you were 'let off,' does that also have some kind of connection to his peculiarity?"

"Un. That demon general was amazingly strong. Even when we all fought together, we were completely unable to put a dent in him. That's about it."

"That's..."

"So it was hard even with Reiji's divine protection huh..."

Seeing Reiji's expression, Suimei put his hand to his chin as he groaned. It was true that Reiji was a complete amateur before coming to this world, but nevertheless, Suimei also did not think his power was low. Up until now, he had fought demons, defeated Rajas, and competed against Elliot. For him to be 'completely unable to put a dent in him,' was sufficient enough a fact to have anxieties about. And then, Io Kuzami snorted as if to express her resentment.

"Fuu. At that level, if I make a serious effort."

"Certainly, at the very end Mizu... Io Kuzami-san's magic did look like it was working."

"Is that so?"

As Suimei asked, Io Kuzami abruptly acted out like she was pinning down her left hand.

"That is so. Well, that demi-ogre also caused my left arm to throb, so I should give him my praise, but—"

Watching Io Kuzami's chuuni-like actions, for some reason, Reiji made a strange expression.

"... Ummmm, Io Kuzami-san? At that time, wasn't it your left eye that was throbbing?"

"Hm? Is that how it was? Then in that case, to cause my left eye to throb—"

"If you forgot about it don't go mixing in your damn evil eye every single time!"

After pinning down her left arm, she was now acting out as she pinned down her left eye instead. No longer able to endure it, Suimei retorted at her immediately. Despite being nothing of importance, he couldn't understand why she had to overly exaggerate every little thing before she was satisfied. In contrast to Io Kuzami who was saying it was something trivial, Reiji stated his opinion.

"But, it's true that the demon general was strong."

"What are you saying? Are you not implying that I am weaker than that guy?"

"No, that's not what I really mean..."

As Reiji and Io Kuzami's pointless argument continued, Lefille couldn't take it any more and cut into their conversation.

"We're getting nowhere like this, Reiji-kun. Just how much power did that demon general hold?"

"Ummm, let's see..."

"Haven't I been saying it all this time? He is but a small fry. An opponent somewhere on the level of a dragonnewt, he could not even be considered an enemy of mine."

"..."

As Io Kuzami was taking each and every opportunity to get in the way of their conversation, even Lefille was starting to get annoyed. Sensing that they weren't going to be able to control this, Suimei pointed his gaze over to Titania. Seeing this, she partially closed her eyes as if remembering what had happened, and then began speaking.

"That demon general's power is a considerable threat. He easily brushed aside our magic and manipulated a powerful red lightning that wasn't magic itself. His physical ability was also astounding... Let's see, it is about the level where he can barely be opposed at my speed."

"Fumu..."

Because Suimei had fought with Titania once before, her strength was etched deep in his heart. And here, she was going that far to express the demon general's strength. It was without a doubt that this was an opponent that he could not underestimate.

"So is there anything else about him on your mind?"

As Reiji and Titania pondered over Suimei's question, Io Kuzami smiled.

"There is no need to ponder about it. There is one more important matter is there not? That guy had called all of us offerings correct?"

"Ah!"

"Now that you mention it, that is true..."

Hearing Io Kuzami's words, the two other seemed to remember something. Looking at them clap with vigour as they realized, Suimei made a grim expression.

"Offerings you said?"

"That's right. That demi-ogre did not hesitate to treat humans as mere foodstuff. In reality, several of the people within the temple fell quite literally prey to that man."

"Oioi, you're saying it wasn't just a bluff, he's seriously a guy who eats humans...?"

As Suimei seemed to be at a loss for words, Reiji and Titania both nodded back to him. To those who held absolute confidence in their own abilities, there were those who exaggerated their strength before those who held incomparably weak abilities. When Suimei heard them say offerings, he had thought that would likely be the case here. But to think that it really was a man eating monster, it was the most unexpected of unexpected things to come up.

As he looked up at Reiji and Titania's faces, it was easily visible that they were both grim. It meant that the two of them witnessed 'the scattered scene of the feast,' it was clear just from their expressions. And then, having suddenly realized something, Felmenia questioned them with a grave expression.

"It couldn't be, the reason Gregory-dono and the others aren't here is because..."

Hearing her words, this thought also came to Suimei. It was unusual that the knights who were always following Titania around weren't here. As Suimei and the others began to tense up, Titania shook her head back at them.

"White Flame-dono, there is no need to worry. Gregory and the others were injured and remained in the self governed state, but they are all well and alive."

"Is that so..."

"Well that's a relief at least."

Felmenia let out her relief as Suimei nodded beside her. For Felmenia, she was relieved at the safety of her countrymen. As for Suimei, Gregory and the

others were people he only knew by sight, but they were also the people who took care of Reiji and Mizuki. If something happened to them, Suimei would also not feel good about it. Right after their worries were dispelled, for some reason, Lefille groaned in a baffled way.

“I understand that the one who attacked all of you was a monster who ate people, but in the first place, demons shouldn’t be monsters who eat people though?”

“Yes. I also find that part mysterious. I have never even heard of such a thing before after all.”

Felmenia also agreed with what Lefille was saying. Certainly, even though the demons were monsters whose appearance differed from that of humans, Suimei had also never heard of demons eating people before. Titania also seemed to be of the same opinion.

“—I also do not understand. However, in reality, the one we fought was a man eating monster.”

In the end, even Titania was unable to bring out an answer on this point. There just wasn’t enough information regarding this as well. It couldn’t be helped that they were unable to bring out a clear answer. A menacing demon general had appeared. Just like that, as the conversation on that topic was about to come to an end, the one who brought up the man eating in the first place, Io Kuzami, spoke up.

“My eternal rival. Do you not have any ideas?”

“Why are you asking me? Don’t just throw it at me.”

“Isn’t it fine? I just thought I’d like to hear any of your delusions that seemed similar.”

Suimei couldn’t tell what Io Kuzami was thinking about as she looked at him with an extremely interested gaze. While he was having problems clearly understanding her intent, as if agreeing with her, Reiji bent himself forward towards Suimei.

“Suimei, I also want to hear it. What do you think?”

“Oioi, even you...?”

Seeing that Reiji was jumping on to the bandwagon, Suimei muttered bitterly. Just why did they have such absolute faith in Suimei’s opinion during these kinds of situations? In truth, there were a lot of things he could say from a mystical point of view, and there were quite a few pertinent statements he could make, but—if he said them here and got too close to the core of the matter, his own identity would end up getting exposed, which made it difficult for him to say anything.

But noticing that every gaze in the room was pointed towards him, Suimei judged that there was nowhere to run away to. As Suimei drew in a deep breath and resigned himself, he started by glaring at Io Kuzami. He was not reproaching her, it was the sharp gaze of a magician, to which Io Kuzami reacted.

“What is it?”

“... Earlier you called that demon general a demi-ogre, right? What did you mean by that?”

“Exactly as it sounds. If I were to say it in a way you lot would say it, that was a demi-ogre.”

Not quite sensing what the extent of ‘you lot’ implied, Suimei questioned Felmenia without shifting his gaze.

“Menia, what’s a demi-ogre?”

“... No, regarding that, I also do not really know.”

She didn’t seem to know. Moving along to Lefille, she also only closed her eyes and shook her head. When he looked both Titania and Reiji were also making curious expressions. So that could only mean one thing. In this world, the word demi-ogre was not one that was generally used. If those words were in fact the truth, then it wasn’t like Suimei didn’t have any clues about it.

“... Everything I say from here is nothing but my own nonsense. I think that demon general is probably at the top of the food chain of this world.”

“Top of the food chain?”

As Reiji returned his question, Suimei simply nodded back. Naturally, the three girls from this world also did not understand the meaning of the words top of the food chain and tilted their heads to the side.

“Suimei, what do you mean?”

“I meant exactly what I said. Speaking broadly, in the current situation in our world, mankind would be the top of the food chain. But in this world, I think another more powerful being stands atop that peak.”

In Suimei’s world—As far as normal people like Reiji knew though, it was well known that mankind was at the summit of the food chain. Naturally, the important here was the privilege of being able to decide on sparing or taking the lives of other beings. Speaking of the controversy of being the peak predator, the strongest biological being was actually bacteria and would be brought up and start to get complicated—But that had nothing to do with Suimei’s point so he left it aside.

At the current point in time, the beings that humanity did not know about and did not cross swords with were simply considered non-existent. Of course, by prefacing it with only to the extent that they knew, it just meant that humanity just didn’t know that there were monsters out there that could easily knock down the humans a peg, but—

Though even after saying this, Reiji still didn’t catch on.

“Even if you tell me that humans eat other beings...”

“That’s not what I mean. In this case, it’s better to think about it as the beings who are not threatened at all by the existence of other animals. Well, in this world there are therianthropes, dwarves, elves, dragonnewts, demons and all kinds of other beings, so it isn’t that strange for there to be a being which eats humans... In short, it’s something like whether that guy is something other than a demon who is hostile to humans or not.”

What it all came down to, is that there was an existence other than the demons who was the natural enemy of humans. In Suimei’s world, it would be something akin to ogres and vampires. And then, Titania looked like she was deeply pondering about it.

“... Certainly, that may be the case. That demon general did say something like he was lending the Demon Lord Nakshatra his power. In other words, he was not a demon.”

“So that’s to say, he’s not a subordinate or servant. In that case, he’s probably something like a separate influence that endorses the Evil God’s plans... Though even when I say it, it still seems strange.”

This was the part that gave Suimei a sense of unease. He had already deduced that the conflict between the demons and the other beings in this world was a war by proxy between the Goddess and the Evil God.

To put it in terms of the human body, the demons would be something like a virus from outside the body, and to counteract them there was the antibodies within the human body to resist them and other invaders. However in this case, where the demons were the virus, that virus was now acting in concert with a portion of the antibodies and revolting against the rest. If that hypothesis was correct, even if they were the natural enemy of man, the way they were going about things was all wrong. As Suimei groaned with a grim expression, Io Kuzami spoke up in a very interested voice.

“Fumu. That is quite the amusing idea.”

“Well thanks.”

After glossing over her words noncommittally with thanks, Suimei peeked to the side at Reiji who was nodding his head repeatedly in admiration.

“Aaah, Reiji?”

“Ah, un. I just thought that it’s just as you said. Despite being your imagination, I feel like you pretty much arrived at the answer huh... But Suimei, why do you know that kind of thing?”

And so it came. Suimei predicted that he would hold on to such suspicions, and answered Reiji without a hint of putting himself on guard.

“From something I read back in Astel’s royal castle, I just somehow imagined that.”

“It’s not just that right?”

Hearing those words, Suimei could feel his heart jumping. And then, suddenly, Reiji made a suspicious looking face.

“... As I thought, Suimei, you’re a person on that side of things.”

While reeling back a little, Reiji looked between both Io Kuzami and Suimei several times...

From the way he was acting, it could only mean that. Suimei was able to deceive him, but it was intolerable that he be viewed that way. Standing up from his chair, he raised his voice in protest.

“Oi stop that! Don’t lump me together with her!”

“But, you know...”

Even as Suimei yelled, Reiji made a somewhat displeased face as he talked. It was a face like he was tired of it, but there was no mistaking Suimei was being teased. And then, whether it was lucky or not, Io Kuzami began speaking.

“Kukukukuku... Oh my eternal rival. It just means that you cannot rebel against the damned blood flowing through thine body. It is about time you resign your bastard self and accept thine place as a person on this side.”

“I won’t accept it! I’m not gonna call myself the Dark Crimson Hider you hear!? You hear!?”

“My goodness, to think that you still have some shyness remaining. Fuu, you still have a long way to go.”

“What do you mean a long way to go!? Oi, Reiji! Do something about this! This is cause you said that kind of crap!”

“Can’t hear you~ can’t hear you~”

As Suimei continued yelling, Reiji turned around and blatantly pretended not to hear him. While yelling ‘Aaaaah,’ he had both hands over his ears. As they had this little harmonious (?) exchange between them, Lefille suddenly looked up at Suimei to talk to him in secret.

(Suimei-kun. That demon general, do you think he’s strong?)

(In all likelihood, he’s strong. Man eating being are so to speak, the natural

enemies of humans. Moreover.)

(Moreover?)

(Back when I talked about Eanru, the half elf who was around Hatsumi and Rumeiya-san mentioned a man eating evil right?)

(Now that you mention it, that's right. Certainly it was supposed to be terrifyingly strong or something... Hm?)

Probably in the middle of remembering what they talked about at the fortress, Lefille started to steadily tilt her head to the side in a charming way.

(What's wrong?)

(No, at that time I remember something like the dragonnewt being the one who defeated that man eating evil. It's just a possibility, but...)

Hearing those words, Suimei made a tired expression and went pale. It was only natural that he would feel down in the dumps since it was something that involved the dragonnewt Eanru. If the opponent Eanru defeated was the demon general Reiji and the others were talking about, or one of his kin, then just how powerful was that dragonnewt's true strength?

(Uwa, my head hurts... What the hell, that dragon asshole was that strong...? I don't want to ever fight him again though.)

(What are you saying after all this time? Didn't you promise him a rematch?)

(I heard nothing I know nothing. It was something the other side said on his own so let's just pretend I didn't hear it—)

Suimei started to run away from reality. His heart had already turned into one of a spoiled child. Noticing that they were talking among themselves, Titania called out to Suimei.

"Suimei. Is it about time that we move on to the next topic?"

"Y-yeah. Please go ahead. So, what's next?"

"Um, next is..."

As Suimei replied while hiding his disgraceful behaviour, Titania averted her gaze and hesitated to continue like it was hard to say. From her behaviour,

Suimei understood just what the next topic was. It was to be expected after all. As if prearranged, everyone turned towards Io Kuzami at the same time, and then without being prompted, they all let out a tired sigh together. And despite seeing this reaction, Io Kuzami began smiling with composure.

“Fuu, to have other sighs over myself like this, this beauty of mine, it is terrifying if I do say so myself.”

“...”

Hearing Io Kuzami’s completely off the mark declaration, everyone dropped their heads heavily together. Just how was she able to reach such a favourable interpretation from their actions? In any case, Suimei cut forward on the current topic of conversation.

“So, what’s with this?”

After asking, as expected, the one to reply was Reiji.

“Back when we were fighting the demon general Ilzarl we were talking about earlier, it suddenly became like this.”

“Like this, huh... By the way, was there any warning or trigger?”

“... It was in the middle of the fight, so I couldn’t really tell that much.”

“Hmmmm.”

While groaning, Suimei fell deep into thought with a severe expression. But it wasn’t like anything was suddenly popping up in his head. As Suimei turned to look at Io Kuzami as if asking ‘How about it?’ while looking for an explanation and prodding her, all she did was make a suggestive smile. She likely knew, but was only pretending not to. Since she told him not to tell the others, she seemed to have no intention of talking about it here. Reiji then folded his arms together as he groaned.

“As I thought, isn’t this that thing where a split personality is born?”

“I wonder about that.”

“It really is outside of our field of expertise huh...”

The breath Reiji let out once more felt excessively heavy. The way to

cure—return her back to normal was completely out of sight, so his feelings of anxiety were likely just growing stronger. Because Suimei couldn't carelessly talk about it with the others, his only option was to play dumb.

“Suimei-dono. It seems that Suimei-dono and Reiji-dono know about Mizuki-dono's Io Kuzami-dono, but just what is she?”

It was a question filled to the brim with proper honorifics. Felmenia seemed to be in disarray as she asked, and following up after her, Lefille bent forwards in curiosity on her tip toes.

“I am also curious. It seems the two of you know something after all.”

“That's... Something I don't really want to say. If I do, I'd be digging up Mizuki's wounds and adding more salt to them.”

Hearing Suimei's example, Felmenia's face warped like she found it troublesome.

“That is quite an extreme way of putting it isn't it...?”

“No, in reality its just that extreme. The figure of Mizuki burying her face in her pillow and kicking around violently comes to mind.”

Hearing those words, Reiji also seemed to be able to perfectly visualize that image in his head as he was nodding repeatedly with his eyes closed. If Suimei didn't talk about what exactly Io Kuzami was, the other likely wouldn't understand, but as expected he couldn't just cast aside the explanation altogether.

—Io Kuzami. The thing possessing Mizuki who named herself so, took that behaviour from Mizuki's setting that she created back during her middle school days. Back in those days, she had an outbreak of the troublesome illness that was called chuunibyuu that was characteristic of people that age. At each and every opportunity, she would 'say meaningful things in meaningless ways,' or 'use antiquated speech,' or 'dress up strangely,' among other things. In general she just acted strangely.

And one of those, was the separate personality that was sealed (setting) inside her, Io Kuzami. As her friends, it was also something that left Suimei and Reiji racking over their brains. It was likely that the thing that had possessed

Mizuki, in order to avoid Reiji and the others discerning the possession, faithfully reproduced the Io Kuzami in her memories.

Right now, Suimei was still unable to predict what purpose it possessed Mizuki for, but setting that aside...

While Suimei was looking back at the past while groaning on his own, when he noticed, the conversation had moved on to when Io Kuzami took part in the fight.

“You have all been saying whatever pleased you for a while now. Do you not have any words of gratitude for my great efforts in that place which saved all of you?”

“That’s, certainly true, but...”

Reiji grimaced as he had an hard time honestly thanking her with a complicated expression. Suimei then called out to him.

“Is that so?”

“Un. Io Kuzami-san mentioned earlier how that demon general wasn’t anything special right? The moment after Mizuki turned into Io Kuzami-san, she used magic which mixed multiple attributes and fired it at the demon general.”

After Reiji’s explanation, Titania followed up with her astonishment at the time.

“That was quite the surprise. To think that such a technique would even exist...”

“Umu. That magic of mine was quite powerful was it not?”

“Un. That’s true.”

As Reiji frankly gave his impression, Io Kuzami looked completely satisfied. Her expression looked pleasant from being admired and praised, but inside she shouldn’t have been that simple.

While Suimei was examining Io Kuzami’s inner thoughts, Reiji suddenly seemed to notice something, and looked at Felmenia curiously.

“Reiji-dono, is something the matter?”

“No, I just thought that Sensei didn’t seem very surprised.”

“Eh?”

“I mean come on, she used magic which mixed together multiple attributes you know?”

As Reiji looked at her with a curious expression, Felmenia looked right back with her own curious expression. Basically, Reiji held doubts that Felmenia did not react at all when she heard about the magic Io Kuzami used. In this world, the mixing of attributes—In short, magic which was made of composite components was a large leap in technology. On the other hand, to Felmenia, who had been receiving lessons from Suimei, it was a level she already surpassed. Having finally understood what was going on, Felmenia cleared out her throat and began replying.

“... Um, the magic that Reiji-dono and her Highness the Princess witnessed was certainly a rare technique, but if you think about it carefully, then it is not all that large of a leap.”

“Meaning?”

“Just now Reiji-dono said that it was a mixture of multiple attributes, but would it not be more appropriate to say that it was magic which held properties from both attributes?”

“...?”

Receiving Felmenia’s explanation, Reiji cocked his head to the side. He was likely thinking ‘Aren’t those the same things?’ It was certainly similar, but in reality there was a major difference.

“The mixing of attributes... In short, you could say that it is the creation of a new concept. For example, if you mix the fire and earth attributes, what is the attribute that would be brought about in the end? That is of course, knowledge that we have no way of acquiring. Based on that, if what Reiji-dono says it correct, it would mean that Io Kuzami-dono gave birth to a completely new attribute... By the way, would it be fine for you to tell me the chant that Io Kuzami-dono used?”

“Umm, if I remember right, Oh flames and earth... Ah.”

“I see. As I thought, they are separated right?”

Just as Reiji noticed, Felmenia nodded as she was convinced.

“—Right from the outset of that magic’s chant, it declares the use of two attributes. With accordance to that, the magic will become ‘magic which uses the power of two elements,’ so it is not a separate magic system which mixes the elements together. If one looks at the mixture of attributes from the elements’ point of view, there is no way to demonstrate the existence of an element other than the eight attributes, so I cannot declare that it is impossible, but it is extremely improbable.”

Pausing there for a moment, Felmenia then continued her explanation.

“Magic can be summed up as affinity between the elements, in other words, it can be thought of as rival elements opposing each other. However, naturally, there exists attributes whose natures work well together, and due to their affinity they are able to cooperate. Fundamentally, this way of thinking applies to the magic from this world. One must remember the basis that when two different attributes are used, when two different magic are used, they will oppose each other. Rather than saying that the magics are attached together and the attributes are cooperating with each other, it would be more appropriate to say the magic used holds both components.”

When it came to mixing magic with magic, fundamentally, it could be said that there was no such thing as actually mixing two different completed magics together. It was possible to take flames which were born of magic, and wind that was born of magic—In other words, to take the phenomenon brought about by the spells and mix them together, but if that was not what was being done then it could almost be said that they would absolutely oppose each other.

When one was speaking of magic from this world, they largely made use of the power of the elements. Because they had the assistance of the elements, when it came to two magics of the same attribute, even if they were different magics, it likely wasn’t impossible to mix them together.

However on the other hand, because they were unable to use magic without the mediation of the elements’ powers, if the attribute didn’t exist as an

element then they would be unable to use magic. In other words, it was in fact impossible to mix attributes together to form a new one, as the new attribute would not be an element.

Thinking about it like that, rather than saying two attributes were being mixed, it was more proper to say that it held properties from both components. Hearing Felmenia's explanation, the two of them made an expression like they were now convinced.

"Certainly, now that you say it like that, it just may be the case huh... As one would expect of Sensei."

Perhaps because he realized and felt a sense of admiration within him, Reiji spoke with a humble face. However, Felmenia shook her head.

"All I talked about was simply displaying that the way you were thinking about it was wrong. However."

"Yes. Thinking of it that way, I feel like we would also be able to use it."

With those words, Reiji came to a proper understanding. That was exactly what Felmenia was trying to convey. Since they were caught on the word mixing, she simply unravelled in an easy to understand way the difficult portion they were stuck on.

She just changed the way they were thinking. Being able to change one's viewpoint was one of the most essential things to western occultism. From one's point of view, by changing the angle, it would be possible to see something else entirely that was not visible before, and it would be able to find an answer using a different approach. This applied to any field, but for western occultism which was chiefly comprised of the physical and metaphysical, to thoroughly investigating the true nature of things, to draw ever nearer to the truth, it was an indispensable process. Reiji then suddenly questioned Felmenia.

"Then Sensei, are you able to use it as well?"

"No, I am... Certainly if I wanted to try it, then it wouldn't be impossible but..."

Right now, Felmenia probably wouldn't be incapable of performing the magic they were talking about. Rather, as she was now, she could probably do so easily without any hindrances. But rather than using that, using magic from

Suimei's world was far more powerful and efficient. Since it wasn't restricted to attributes and elements, it could bring about unrestricted results.

While explaining her standpoint, she was truly able to use much stronger spells but didn't want to say anything, which left Felmenia a little troubled as she answered. As she was going 'Mumumu...' with a sullen face, Io Kuzami seemed to have seen through her, and cut into the conversation.

"That magic of mine is powerful you know? If you are so inclined would you like to try and see?"

"No, it is not like I am doubting the power of the spell..."

While being shown a provocative attitude, Felmenia showed no signs of jumping along as she was slightly perplexed. In her stead, Suimei replied.

"Quit it. For now."

"What, how boring."

Hearing Suimei's aggravated words, Io Kuzami replied in dissatisfaction. For now, she quietly resigned, but just as her self confidence indicated, her magic was likely quite powerful. If the thing that had possessed Mizuki was a spirit connected to this world like Suimei thought it was, its connection to the elements would be an entire level higher than any humans. Consequently, its magic itself would also be more powerful.

Even if Felmenia used the same magic, it would likely not reach Io Kuzami's level. While Io Kuzami was making a dissatisfied expression, Liliana came in to the living room. After peeping into the room from the door, she quickly came into the room towards Suimei and the others. Watching each and every one of her charming actions, the women in the room were all smiling broadly.

However, contrary to the expectation that she was going to take her seat, for some reason Liliana headed towards Io Kuzami, who was broadly grinning back at her.

"Have you finished frolicking with the cats? Hm?"

As Io Kuzami made an expression like she was dealing with a child's playfulness, Liliana did not respond to her. All she did was make a bitter face,

and looked at Suimei.

“Suimei, is Mizuki, still ridiculous?”

“... Well, just as you can see.”

“Calling me ridiculous is quite impertinent of you. I am perfectly normal you know?”

Io Kuzami frowned at being completely ignored while Liliana continued to make a grim face.

“No, I don’t think so. I feel like, something bad, has possessed you.”

To be more correct, it would be something uncooperative, but setting that part aside. Unlike Reiji and Titania, it was inevitable that Liliana would sense something about Io Kuzami’s condition. In this world, the power born of malice called the ‘power of darkness’ likely sensed something threatening. It was just as Suimei expected. Suddenly, Io Kuzami grimaced as Liliana looked at her more closely, and then...

“And, ei.”

—Gyuuu.

“Fuuu!?”

As if she was looking forward to it, Liliana pulled on both of Io Kuzami’s cheeks. Seeing that conduct, everyone except for Liliana had their eyes stunned open. Suimei couldn’t tell what she was suddenly doing. No, since she had Io Kuzami’s cheeks in her hands, there was only one thing she could be doing—Liliana had Io Kuzami’s cheeks tightly gripped and was pulling and twirling them like clay.

“Fuga, w~at in the h~lls are you d~ing!?”

“Bring out Mizuki. No, quickly, leave Mizuki, and get out.”

“Hey! Lily!”

Liliana continued to twist around Io Kuzami’s cheeks as she tried to physically drive her out. Unable to let her actions pass, Lefille tried to cut in between them in a fluster. Back when Liliana was feeling dejected, Mizuki had cheered her up

and cared about her a lot. Likely because of that, she was trying to expel Io Kuzami by squeezing down on her cheeks. In her own way, she must have felt like she owed a debt of gratitude which led her to such excessive actions.

Eventually, Lefille managed to pry Liliana away from Io Kuzami. However, she didn't seem intent on giving up yet, and thrust her finger at Io Kuzami with a snap. She was likely planning on using her Astral Shoot to give her a good shock. Seeing this, Suimei called out to her without putting on airs.

“Liliana, stop that.”

“Why? If something, has possessed Mizuki, won't this, drive it out?”

“No, it's probably useless. Give it up.”

“Mu... I, understand.”

Hearing his words, Liliana lowered her arm despondently. On the other hand, Reiji and Titania looked like they had no idea what was going on.

—Astral Shoot. It extended one's own astral body to give a direct shock to the opponent's astral body. When this manifested, it made use of the nature which binds the physical body with the astral body.

The astral body referred to the shell of consciousness which wrapped up the soul—To put it roughly, it was suitable to call it a concept which blended together the things known as the soul and the consciousness. Since it had the aspect of 'consciousness' attached to it, when one was sleeping or fainted, it would no longer be attached to the body and vanish, hence in that condition, the Astral Shoot would do nothing to an opponent.

Currently, Mizuki was not conscious, so she was in a state where the Astral Shoot would be considered ineffective. But in reality, the astral body of the thing possessing Mizuki was connected to her physical body, so the Astral Shoot would end up affecting her body as well.

Liliana's aim was likely to use the Astral Shoot to take decisive action against the thing that had possessed Mizuki and if circumstances permit, pull it out forcefully and urge Mizuki's mind to reawaken.

But before all that, the act of both awakening and pulling out—in other

words, causing the reappearance from an out of body experience, was impossible. However, because the proprietor of the outer layer of the consciousness was not the soul, the astral body and physical body were not very firmly connected, so there was at least a way to pull it out.

Such a high handed method would be befitting of exorcism. This point of view was likely Liliana's central focus and could be said to be a good decision, but at the present point in time, even if she did it, it wasn't like the thing possessing Mizuki would be erased, so even if it was driven out, it would just possess her again without much resistance. If Suimei at least knew its real name, he would be able to bind it and obstruct any attempts at repossession.

Despite having just been pinched mercilessly by Liliana, Io Kuzami for some reason had a pleasant expression on as she fixed her gaze back at her.

"Oh eye patched girl. You have quite the violent and dangerous side don't you? Umu, those garments are also to my liking. I shall make you my disciple."

"I'll refrain."

"Fumu, that's right. Now that you have become my disciple, you require your own darkness code name... Umu, first we shall give you a temporary one, the black emissary who hides the evil eye of the dragon king, so Dragon Eyes Black Lolita shall do."

"Is this a card game now...?"

"It really is a card game like name..."

"She's not, listening to me..."

As if she didn't hear Liliana's refusal at all, Io Kuzami was silently moving forward with the preparations (?) to make Liliana her disciple. Seeing her vainglorious behaviour, half of the eyes watching her were exasperated while the other half were troubled. Though that was basically their reaction to Io Kuzami from the very beginning as well. However, the chaos in the Yakagi residence was still not over. Right after one disturbance ended, another one just came fluttering up.

"—Mu?"

Suimei noticed the abrupt irregularity and let out his voice with a dubious frown.

“Suimei-dono. Is something the matter?”

“It’s a guest. On top of that... Oioioi, they’re just entering the house as they please!?”

The Yakagi residence in the Empire was the same as the Yakagi residence in Japan in that it had a barrier around it to detect intruders which used sensory and monitoring magic. Because of that, when there were intruders or visitors, that information was directly relayed into Suimei’s head, just as it did now, but—

“Suimei-dono, just who is it?”

“Wai—Isn’t she that dangerous woman!?”

“Wh-What—!?”

Hearing Suimei’s abstract words, Lefille was the one who yelled out loudly. Just from ‘dangerous woman,’ she seemed to have guessed who it was. In the world, there was only a single person that Suimei referred to in that way. As Lefille suddenly acted suspiciously, Liliana, who was next to her, knit her brows.

“What’s, wrong? Lefille.”

“The situation has gotten bad! I-is there somewhere I can hide!?”

“A hiding place, is it? If it’s that, then they’re all over the place, like there.”

Liliana pointed her gaze over to a desk set up in the corner of the living room with a quilt over it. Certainly, with her current stature, Lefille would be able to hide herself under it. But it seemed awfully cramped, so even if she could hide herself, she would still feel constrained. However, as if saying it was inevitable, she went as far as turning into a red wind to leap under it.

... After a short time, Lefille’s body settled in under the desk. But her red ponytail was jutting out and was swaying around. It was almost the very definition of the phrase, ‘don’t cover your head only to leave your ass exposed.’

It was quite the defective way of hiding herself, but because it was an atmosphere where it was difficult for anyone to say anything, nobody pointed

this out to her. And then, Titania turned to Suimei while making a face like she was bitterly grinding her teeth.

“Suimei, when you say that dangerous woman, do you mean her Imperial Highness Graziella?”

“Yeah. Come to think of it, Tia hates that woman as well huh. Should I turn her away?”

As Suimei asked, ‘Kick her out! Drive her away!’ came from the corner of the living room. However, since Suimei was asking Titania, he wasn’t just going to ignore her opinion, and looked at her while making a troubled expression.

“No, it is fine. As a matter of fact, I am rather reluctant, but please do as you see fit.”

In other words, it was fine to let her through. If she came here, it was likely because she had some sort of business. But, as expected, Titania was unable to hit it off with her, so she only let out a grand sigh as it ran against her real intentions.

After Suimei looked at Reiji, he also nodded back. Meaning that he should let her through. Before long, the door to the living room opened. And the one to appear was just as he thought, the Imperial princess, Graziella Filas Rieseld.

Without a single escort, she came on her own. Perhaps that was because of her unshakable conceit, but even if it was inside the Imperial city, the Yakagi Residence should have been hostile territory for her. But even so, she didn’t seem to be vigilant in the least. And the first thing that came out of her mouth, was at least something resembling an apology.

“Sorry. The reports had piled up, I’m late.”

She arrived late. She was speaking as if it was decided that she would come in the first place. Suimei’s group was looking at her with puzzled expressions, and it seemed Graziella noticed something as she looked to the corner of the living room. Naturally, she was looking at the desk that Lefille was hiding under, and of course, her ponytail was still sticking out and swaying. There was no reason to ask why Graziella’s gaze was becoming gradually more stern.

“... By the way, what is that?”

Hearing her question, Lefille's ponytail jumped up in fright. Lefille was unable to see anybody from her hiding spot, and it wasn't certain whether she knew that Graziella had figured it out... But she could probably tell from the atmosphere. Perhaps unable to bear the strange atmosphere, she came out from under the desk.

"Fu... So I've been found."

Lefille had more or less resigned. But it seemed she wasn't ready to give up, and was acting like nothing happened and trying to brush her previous failure under the rug. Though she was trying to act cool, it was just sad that her appearance didn't match her attitude at all. On the other hand, when Graziella saw Lefille (tiny), her expression twisted even further.

"... What is this? It seems like somebody awfully familiar though."

"Eh? No, umm, I am, umm..."

She hadn't been found out yet. While Lefille was thinking that, she was trying to deceive Graziella this late into the game, but Reiji and Titania spoke slightly faster than her.

"It is Lefille-san."

"It is Shrine Maiden-dono."

"AAAAAAAAAAAH!! You can't tell her!!"

The two of them probably didn't have any ill intent. They only relayed the truth. However, to Lefille, it was fatal. After letting out a shriek, the room sank into a strangely silent atmosphere as Lefille's 'Uu...' rang through the air.

"Shrine Maiden-dono you say? This is?"

As Graziella asked for confirmation, Lefille nodded once. It was quite hard to believe that a person could shrink, but perhaps because Graziella was familiar with Lefille's appearance, she wasn't able to just laugh it off as impossible. On the other hand, Lefille was suddenly gripped by a strange notion.

"Fu, fufu! Want to fight? If you do then I'll accept your challenge! This time I can still use the power of the spirits in this form after all! If you're going to come at me then come!"

Saying that, Lefille started shadow boxing and was letting out her fists towards Graziella. Her fists were quite fast, but it only increased the strangeness of the situation, and left Graziella completely befuddled. Eventually, after managing to take it all in, or perhaps because her emotions had swelled up passed her limits...

“—Fu! HAHAAHAHAHAHAHAHA! What the hell is this!? Isn't it just too pleasant!? T-tiny, you became tiny you know!? No matter how you put it that is just foul play Shrine Maiden-dono! HAHAAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!”

Graziella continued laughing. She was practically convulsing—though it wasn't quite that far, but her body was bent over and she held on to her side while laughing heartily. Speaking of Lefille who was being laughed at, she was mortified, and was already on the verge of tears.

“Fuuuuuuuuck! Don't laugh! I didn't end up like this because I wanted to! Don't laugh any more! If you intend on laughing then I won't show any mercy!”

With tears in her eyes, Lefille was stomping up and down while waving her arms, and in an unusual turn for her, she even started cursing. In response to that, Graziella spoke while enduring her laughter.

“N-no, I will cease for now. I have a debt to pay Shrine Maiden-dono, but at this rate it would only be bullying the weak. It's not good to bully the weak right? Shrine Maiden-dono?”

As she spoke while harbouring a grudge, Graziella pointed a meaningful gaze towards Lefille. It seemed that she was criticizing something that had come up the last time they met. Lefille seemed to be at a loss for words, and after trembling in frustration for a while—



“U-UWAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!”

Lefille let out her frustration full throttle, and flew out of the room. And then, as if attacking her routed enemy, Graziella's laughter filled the room.

“HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!! I can't. This is, f-far too pleasant...”

Her words did not have any sense of sarcasm to them, so she likely found Lefille's reaction to be honestly amusing. Plunking down into a chair, she continually let out her laughter. Having passed on interjecting in the flow of events, Suimei thought of Lefille pitifully with a complex expression and groaned.



... After a short time, after Lefille came back, Graziella questioned her.

“So, what happened? How is Shrine Maiden-dono's body?”

She was asking seriously, but because her laughter had not completely faded, a faint smile could still be seen on Graziella's face. Lefille stuck her tongue out and pouted with an extremely child like face as she replied.

“Nothing in particular happened. Hmph!”

Lefille turned her head to the side ostentatiously as Graziella replied.

“However, to think you would shrink.”

“Do you have some sort of complaint your Highness?”

“No no, that's not the case. Rather I find it amusing. How about you show up at the cathedral in the Imperial Capital at fixed intervals with that form? With such a sweet form, if you perform your skills as a shrine maiden of the spirits, the believers and the faithful will come in droves. Though most of them would probably be coming to crave your favour. Fu, fufufufufu...”

Graziella leaked out a stifled laughter. She was likely imagining the image of ‘a tiny Lefille trying to rake in money at the cathedral.’

“Absolutely not! I'm not an exhibition!”

After Lefille refused her proposal, Graziella's expression suddenly became serious.

“What are you saying after all this? No matter how you try to gloss it over, influential figures and celebrities are in no small way meant to be exhibited. It is rather useful after all, so there should be nothing more to it than that right?”

“Muu...”

It was certainly a sound argument. It was understandable that Lefille had nothing to say back. Even if the word exhibition left a poor impression, in reality, it had a positive effect, so it definitely wasn't something bad in itself. It didn't really apply to the feeling's of the person in question, but in any case it couldn't be help as it was simply the price of fame.

“Still, you're quite cute like this. I can't even imagine it compared to your original form.”

“Shut up! Even my original form is cute!”

Even as Graziella didn't put on airs, Lefille strongly objected to her words. On the other hand, everyone watching this from the side were likely holding back their words of ‘That's what you're objecting?’

“Suimei-kun! Don't you also have a debt to pay back to her Highness!? Defeat her right here! Reduce her to ashes without leaving a trace!”

The great shrine maiden pushed aside the problem and suddenly brought up an awfully violent suggestion. She was urging Suimei to settle his dispute with Graziella here. As one would expect, Suimei could not possibly jump on to her radical declaration.

“No... No matter how you put it, that's a little...”

“Are you not my ally!?”

“Lefi, sometimes you really say some absurd things huh... Oi, do something about this?”

Saying that, Suimei looked at Graziella. As for Graziella, she was showing a somewhat displeased expression towards Suimei's attitude which didn't lead one to think he was speaking to royalty at all.

“Just as always, you are quite the insolent bastard. I am still the princess of a nation you know? Do you not have the grace to watch the way you speak like a

commoner?”

“Do you really think I’ll try to flatter someone after they came and picked a fight?”

“That’s true. Even when I try imagining you speaking politely, it sends shivers down my back.”

As Graziella made a provocative smile, a vein popped out on Suimei’s forehead.

“What’d you say?”

“Suimei-kun! Do it! I’ll allow it!”

As Suimei got agitated, Lefille took advantage of the opportunity. There was no way the conversation could move forwards like that. Io Kuzami was laughing heartily, but the others were all troubled, and Reiji was no longer able to just stand and watch as he represented the others.

“Hey Suimei, reel it in here.”

“I’m not really...”

“Graziella-san too, okay?”

Reiji spoke up and smiled towards Graziella. He was likely trying to soothe her and have her back off in his own way. However, that Graziella wouldn’t simply pull back like that. Everyone in the room would think so, but—

“... Uu, well, you’re right.”

Graziella backed off. With extreme ease. Suimei thought their exchange would go on for a while longer, and opened his eyes wide at the unexpected development.

“... What is it? Every one of you is making a strange face.”

“No, I just thought you backed off quite easily...”

“Is that bad?”

“It’s not bad per say, but...”

It was just hard to swallow. Just now with Lefille, the reason Graziella backed

off on her own was because Lefille had become tiny, but fundamentally, Graziella was a sore loser. So for her to so simply back off against an opponent like Suimei with whom she had ties with, it left Suimei with a hard time being convinced of it. If there was one guess he could make, it would be the one who mediated, Reiji. And the fact that Graziella looked somehow restless—

“Eh? What’s this? Did that jerk Reiji capture another one?”

“That’s... How it seems.”

“Umu. Looks like it.”

“Oioi, just when did he capture that one...”

Hearing Titania and Io Kuzami agree with him, Suimei let out a bewildered breath. In a way, it was the same as always, but he still couldn’t stop his astonished sigh. This was unknown to Suimei’s group, but after the case in the self governed state had come to an end, Graziella’s opinion of Reiji had become quite favourable. As Titania knew of the circumstances, she was just grumbling to herself saying ‘It’s Reiji-sama’s fault for saving her...’ in a dissatisfied tone.

“... Rather, I know it’s rather late to ask, but why the hell are you here?”

“What? Were you not told?”

“...?”

Naturally, even if Graziella said that, Suimei didn’t know what was going on. All he knew was that Titania said to let her through, and the rest was all gibberish to him. On the other hand, Reiji seemed to know what was going on and was feigning innocent.

“Huh? Did I not tell you?”

“Oi, I didn’t hear any of this? If you’ve got a reason then tell me properly.”

“Suimei. Her Imperial Highness Graziella went with us to the self governed state.”

“Ha? The hell?”

“It’s the fault of that annoying Goddess’ oracle. After you lot left the Imperial Capital, an oracle came up telling me to accompany Reiji, and that’s why I am here today as well.”

Having said that, Graziella explained the situation further. About the details of how she went along with them, and about how she was being added to the conversation they were having. Listening to her, Suimei folded his arm on top of the desk as he groaned, and questioned her.

“I get why you’re here. But more importantly, is it fine for you to hang out with us like this?”

“It cannot be helped. As long as I hold my public character, I cannot persist on killing you. If it is necessary, then even if I am reluctant, I cannot persist.”

“Well, I don’t really care as long as you understand.”

Saying that, Suimei then turned his gaze towards his companions.

“Ah, I don’t have any thoughts in particular on the matter.”

Felmenia shook her head like she had no ill feelings at all. As long as her own nation’s princess was showing self control and ushering her in, as her retainer, she likely wasn’t able to voice her opinion on the matter either way. On the other hand, Lefille looked back at Suimei with a dissatisfied gaze. There was still the lasting effects of what had just happened, so she was probably reluctant. However, after Graziella spoke like that, she couldn’t be stubborn about it.

“Starting over again, I am Graziella Filas Rieseld. I’m sure you all won’t treat me favourably, but do keep in mind that I am travelling together with Reiji and the others.”

After making a short self introduction, Graziella turned towards Liliana.

“Liliana Zandyke, it has been a while.”

“It is good, to see you again.”

“If you ever intend to return to the Elite Twelve, then I will hear it any time you know?”

“No, I don’t have, any intention, of returning, anymore.”

“... I see. Well, in that case it cannot be helped.”

As Liliana shook her head greatly, she showed her strong feelings of refusal, and Graziella backed off without hounding her at all. From her attitude, it made

Suimei think that they were nothing but political words, but because he caught a glimpse of a somewhat disappointed atmosphere, she likely did want Liliana to return deep inside. From Liliana's capabilities, it was something Suimei understood, but including Rogue, the gap left behind by the two of them was likely so large that it could not be overlooked.

"And so, how much have you already talked about?"

"Let's see, we talked about the demon general Ilzarl, and just about finished talking about Mizuki."

"I see. Then that means I made it in time to talk about that."

"That?"

Hearing Graziella's abstract words, Suimei cocked his head to the side.

"Suimei, it's about the reason we went to the self governed state."

"Aah, you mean that weapon or whatever that the hero left behind huh."

"Un. It's this."

Reiji then took something out of his breast pocket, a silver accessory. It had a blue gem embedded in its centre and was shaped like a single winged badge. Its design was similar to a medal from a foreign country, and its construction was quite delicate. Seeing that, Lefille made a puzzled expression.

"Reiji-kun, what about that accessory?"

Her doubts were natural. From the logical connection of his words, he was about to show them a weapon. However, what he took out was a small ornament that didn't look like a weapon at all. Other than Lefille, everyone else also couldn't help but incline their heads to the side.

"Lefille-san. This is the weapon that was said to have been left behind by the hero."

"This is?"

"... Reiji-dono. It only looks like a regular ornament to me, but is it endowed with sort of mystical power?"

Felmenia was somewhat bewildered as she inquired about the ornament.

Hearing her question, Reiji made an expression like it was hard for him to say.

“It certainly seems to be endowed with mystical powers, but—”

While looking at the ornament and explaining it to Felmenia, Reiji seemed to suddenly notice something. And at the end of his gaze below his knit brows, was Suimei’s grim face.

“Suimei?”

“No, that’s a weapon right? So why does it look like an accessory that you can just find anywhere?”

“Ah, un. It transforms. Into a sword.”

“This thing does huh...”

As he exhaled vaguely, Suimei stroked his own jaw and scrutinized the object in Reiji’s hand and inspected it from different angles. Reiji then made a grim expression as he began explaining.

“When I first saw it, I also thought it was strange that it look like an ornament. But this thing definitely transforms into a weapon. Though I don’t know at all why it’s like that.”

After he finished talking, Reiji noticed that the gazes around him weren’t pointed at the ornament, but at himself. They were all gazes expecting him to turn it into a weapon. However...

“Sorry, I can’t turn it into a weapon.”

“What do you mean. If you could declare that it could turn into a weapon, that means you managed to do so right?”

“Yeah, that’s right, but it looks like there’s some sort of condition to transform it, the only time I was able to do so was that one time.”

“White Flame-dono. The only time Reiji-sama was able to transform it into a weapon, was in the middle of battle. At the time, we were driven into an unfavourable position, but as Reiji-sama yelled it suddenly transformed...”

“The moment this turned into a weapon, I practically forgot the difference in ability between myself and the demon general. Even though it was such a

desperate situation.

“You mean after it turned into a weapon, Reiji-kun suddenly got stronger?”

The strengthening of physical ability likely didn't really strike a chord with Lefille. The one to answer her doubts, was one among those who saw it, Graziella.

“Just from what we saw, that weapon likely strengthens its owner's power and grants them abilities. He was manipulating some other special power as well. It certainly was appropriate for something called a hero's weapon.”

While nodding in comprehension, Graziella spoke about the weapon. Seeing that she wasn't poking fun at it, Reiji's strength after transforming the ornament into a weapon must have left just that much of a deep impression on her.

Speaking of everyone other than Reiji's group, they were all only half convinced—Or rather, none of it seemed to have a sense of reality. But that was only natural. They didn't think that Reiji and the others were lying, but all they were actually shown was an ornament, and Reiji couldn't turn it into a weapon. There was the saying seeing is believing. And the visual information they were receiving didn't match the words they were hearing. Suddenly, Felmenia looked to her side and peered at Suimei's face.

“Suimei-dono?”

“Hooou, this is...”

After her question, Suimei replied with a fishy tone a beat late. While gazing at the weapon left behind by the hero, he was giving off a strange atmosphere like he was outside the group. However, Titania seemed to see his behaviour as skeptical.

“You may not believe us, but everything we said just now was the truth. After Reiji-sama turned that into a weapon, That demon general that I was pressed into a hard fight against was easily overwhelmed...”

While speaking of it, it seemed Titania was remembering Reiji's gallant figure, and had a somewhat entranced expression. What she had said earlier was in some way wrong, Suimei held no doubts that it was just her wild delusion. But

setting that aside. Reiji then seemed to have a sudden flash of revelation, and clapped his hands together.

“Now that I think of it, Titania also used a sword huh. I was shocked that you were so strong.”

“No, it wasn’t that...”

Titania followed the flow of the conversation and replied in a humble and ladylike manner, but...

“—Ah.”

In the end, what came out was a befuddled voice like she was going ‘oh crap.’ As for Suimei who had been forbidden to speak about it, seeing her idiotic behaviour, his astonishment was irrepressible. As for the girl who let it out, she was trembling in front of Reiji. Moving about excessively in confusion, she was unable to properly make out any words to say.

“Ah, no, that was, that was, that was...”

However, in complete contrast to her, Reiji happily raised his voice.

“Geez, if you’re that strong then you should have told me in the first place. I’m practically an amateur, I would have wanted to be taught how to fight or things like that.”

“...”

Of course Reiji wasn’t actually criticizing her, but the way Titania had become completely speechless seemed to have indicated that she took it that way. In her head, she already established that ‘strong with a sword = tomboy = hated,’ in some mysterious way, so having it revealed was a serious affair. Glancing at Titania who was trembling non stop, Graziella showed a curious expression.

“You, did you not know that her Royal Highness Titania was strong?”

“Eh? Graziella-san knew already?”

“Obviously. Her Royal Highness is...”

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAH! You can’t you can’t you can’t! You cannot say that your Imperial Highness!”

Just as Graziella was about to reveal Titania's identity, Titania drew closer to her with a tremendous voice and vigour. In response to that, Graziella looked at her with a cold gaze.

"I have no idea what reason you have to hide it, but after showing him that kind of fight, is it not far too late?"

"B-but..."

Having this pointed out to her, Titania faltered. She was still opposed to it, likely because she didn't want to be hated by Reiji. It was pitiful in its own way, but because she was greatly off the mark, her surroundings were filled with a completely baffled atmosphere. Watching Titania's ungracious figure likely left her retainer with complicated feelings. And so, Felmenia began explaining it.

"Reiji-dono. Her Highness the Princess is one of the Seven Swords. She's the fourth seat of the Seven Swords, and holds the second name of the Twilight Beheading Princess. Even in this northern region, she is a swordswoman at the absolute pinnacle."

"__"

Suddenly, it felt like the sound of someone going completely pale could be heard, such was Titania's ghastly face. Finally, she was found out. While she was making an expression like she was thrown into the greatest depths of despair, Reiji's reaction was extremely positive.

"Amazing! Tia is really that amazing!?"

"Eh?"

"...? What's wrong?"

She reacted as if it was completely unexpected... And in response, Reiji questioned her in a curious tone. Having finally become cognizant of the inconsistency between their expectations, both of them were blinking in surprise.

"R-Reiji-sama? U-um, does it not make you think that I'm a tomboy?"

"Why?"

"B-but, to vigorously assault an opponent with a sword, it's extremely

unladylike... Um, it seems boorish for a woman.”

“Uun, that’s not true. Isn’t Tia very ladylike and modest? Rather I respect it.”

“R-Really!?”

“Un.”

After Reiji made a short nod, Titania’s face suddenly brightened up. On the other hand, having watched their little exchange from the side, Graziella mouth twisted cynically.

“Your Royal Highness’ insight is still too naive. A man who volunteered his own body to protect others from evil would never look at a woman as a tool to fill his greed for dominance. Besides, if using a sword makes a woman a violent tomboy, then the Shrine Maiden-dono there would be the absolute incarnation of boorishness wouldn’t she?”

“Don’t just use me as reference each and every time!”

As Graziella glanced at her Lefille like she was ridiculing her, Lefille raised her hands and yelled. She was completely being dragged in. On the other hand, Suimei shrugged his shoulders greatly and spoke to Titania.

“That’s why I told you this before. That Reiji wouldn’t care about that kind of thing.”

And as he did, Reiji was the one to talk back to him.

“Huh? Suimei knew?”

“Hm? Ah, well, yeah. After she nearly beat me to death, she sealed my mouth.”

“... What? Did you fight with Tia?”

As Reiji asked, he looked at Suimei with a critical and somewhat suspicious gaze. However, the one to start panicking was Titania.

“I-it was nothing! That was, um, there was a conflict in opinions between Suimei and I, or rather there was an error in recognition or... There was various, um, various...”

The duel at that time was something Titania started. Moreover, despite

having a proper reason to do so, it was true that she pointed her sword at him, therefore, she didn't want Reiji to know. However, Reiji seemed to have made his own Reiji like misunderstanding...

“Aaaah, Suimei angered Tia right?”

“Ha? HAAAAAA!? Why am I the bad one here!?”

“I mean, after coming to this world you angered Sensei too. Didn't you do something again?”

As Reiji looked at him skeptically, Suimei attempted to object to his claim.

“Just when did I piss off Tia!? Rather, that kind of thing never happened right!?”

“But I can't think of anything else... As expected, Suimei must have done something without being aware of it. How about apologizing and setting it aside?”

“That case was already long resolved...! I really got dragged into a terrible experience there... Oi, Tia, it's your fault you know...? Tia?”

“Fufufufufu... Even a strong woman isn't a problem for Reiji-sama... Now that I know this, there is nothing to be frightened about. Whether it is a demon general or a love rival, all I have to do is cut them all down and finish it off...”

While Titania was making a dark smile, she muttered to herself with a sharp tone. It was like she suddenly received a revelation, but it was violent to the extreme. Suimei felt like he could see a dark atmosphere and dangerous aura around her. On the other hand, as Reiji was looking at her, he only made a stiff smile as Suimei spoke up.

“... I don't really get it, but it looks like she's super motivated... right? It's fine to say that the misunderstanding is over, right?”

“... Probably.”

As Suimei let out a big sigh, he urged the subject of conversation to change. Honestly speaking, he didn't really care about this topic at all, and was already noncommittal to it. And within that atmosphere, suddenly, a sound came from the entrance of the living room. As everyone shifted their attention to the little

pitter patter, they saw a single cat walking in.

“Nyaa.”

From the slightly opened door, it was trying to be noticed and appealed for its presence. Now just what did the cat want? It didn't look like it wanted to be cared for, but the expert in the field, Liliana, was the first to sense what it needed.

“It has a request, for the hero Reiji.”

“Eh? Me?”

“Yes. The cats seem to be hungry, and want to be, fed.”

“So that why it's calling? Umm, un. If it's just that then I don't really mind...”

Reiji displayed his understanding. At first he wondered why it had to be him and likely had such thoughts, but since he had no reason to refuse, he simply nodded. His softhearted nature was pushing his back, but even so it couldn't be denied that he was slightly bewildered.

“Reiji-dono, I will take care of the cats' meal. Lily, is that alright?”

“No, they want it to be Reiji, no matter what. The cats, seem to be interested, in Reiji.”

“In me?”

“It is likely, that it might be related to the divine protection from the hero summoning ritual. The cats, are likely sensing your sacred power.”

Hearing Liliana's story, Reiji turned to the cat and asked it 'Is it fine if it's me?' which the cat replied with an energetic 'Nyaa!' Such adorable behaviour caused Reiji to break out into a smile, and he quickly took the food from Liliana and headed outside...

As long as one didn't hate cats, there was no such thing as a human who wasn't delighted to be loved by cats. Reiji also seemed happy without putting up any appearances. A short while after Reiji left the living room, Liliana frowned as she muttered.

“... Was that, too forceful?”

Graziella seemed to have noticed that those words had a hidden meaning behind them, and spoke up.

“As I thought, it was your intention to separate Reiji from us?”

“Yes. If Reiji is here, then there are things, that will be hard to talk about. By all rights, I was planning to have Mizuki, go with him, but...”

Saying that, Liliana glanced at the side towards Io Kuzami. As expected, her squinted left eye had a glint of distrust behind it. However, Io Kuzami acted like it didn't concern her at all.

“There is no need to worry about me. That's right. You may just think of me as a divine sculpture whose beauty compels one to worship its holiness at all times.”

Despite saying not to mind her, her example was a little out there. If that was the truth, it would just be a nuisance on the eyes. Though she spoke about her own excessive beauty, it just meant she intended to stay and listen. As Liliana looked to Suimei to confirm if it was alright, he nodded back to her.

“... So Lily, was that cat also something you prepared?”

“Yes. I got the cats, to cooperate with me. I should have told you beforehand, right?”

Liliana nodded back to Felmenia's question. So this was what she was doing when the talks started when she was on her own with the cats. As one would expect, her actions were extremely cautious. And then, Liliana continued.

“Then, is it fine for me to start?”

It seemed that she had something she wanted to talk about. As everyone's attention gathered on her, Liliana began speaking in her usual disconnected manner.

“It is, about the weapon, we were just talking about.”

“Liliana. Regarding that, did we not conclude that it was something we didn't know more about?”

The talk about the weapon had already ended. As Titania pointed that out, Liliana let out a 'No...' as she turned towards Suimei.

“Suimei, back when we were talking about the weapon, your replies were all vague, right?”

“Hm? That so?”

“Yes. Suimei, do you know, about that weapon?”

“Why do you think that?”

“When we were talking about the weapon, Suimei’s attitude was frankly noncommittal. Also, when Suimei sees something he doesn’t understand, he makes a very serious, inquisitive face. There was, practically none of that, only a slovenly attitude.”

That was why she concluded that it was definitely something he knew about. Having her perceptive investigation thrust before him, Suimei put up both of his hands like he was giving up.

“As expected of Liliana. Very perceptive of you.”

“Though it would be ‘former,’ Liliana was still one of the Empire’s Elite Twelve. It is only natural.”

“It’s a little different from what I’ve seen, but isn’t that a Sacrament?”

As Suimei said this, Titania and Graziella’s expressions changed at once. Up until now, they never once mentioned the official name of the weapon, so they were likely surprised that it came up. Even from Suimei’s side of things, Felmenia was the first to question him.

“Suimei-dono, then as expected, you do know something about it?”

“Well, more or less... It really is more or less. Sacrament is the name of a weapon from our world, more specifically, it’s heavy ordnance.”

In an unusual turn for Suimei, he prefaced his explanation without having any confidence. Surprised at that fact, Graziella spoke up.

“In other words, as we thought, that is a weapon from your world.”

“...? As you thought?”

“I’m sure you already knew that it was a relic left behind by a hero, but the name of another item that was left behind with it used a language from your

world. We arrived at the conclusion that it was likely the case.”

“Is that so...”

As he nodded with a slightly curious expression, Graziella continued.

“So what is it?”

“Even if you ask me that... To put it simply, it uses mysteries that are different from magic, and is an amazing weapon. When one becomes its owner, even the powerless would be able to manipulate extraordinary power... So it seems. Well, from what I’ve heard already, I’m sure you all saw what kind of power it had.”

“Suimei-kun. I’m sorry to interrupt, but when you say extraordinary, is that ‘extraordinary’ by your standards?”

“Hm... Well, that’s right. That’s how it is. We talked about it before, but the demon general who Tia and the Imperial Princess couldn’t get close to was overwhelmed by the completely inexperienced Reiji after all.”

“I see. Reiji-kun already has the divine protection of the hero summoning ritual, if you think of it as making another great leap, then it would be just as Suimei-kun says.”

From watching Suimei’s ways of life, Lefille knew that Suimei had a bad habit of undervaluing himself, and was using that information to compare and adjust to what he said. As Suimei looked sullen, she abruptly snorted at him as if to tell him so.

“But Suimei. Just what kind of mechanism does that weapon have? No matter how you put it, I believe that power is extremely unusual.”

“That’s, a Sacrament’s—No, it is likely the outrageous part of the Lapis Judaicus set inside it.”

“Lapis Judaicus?”

“By set inside it, you mean that gem?”

Suimei nodded back to Graziella’s question, and then, just as he always did, he began his explanation.

“—There exists something called the Sage’s Stone, or the Philosopher’s Stone. It is an omnipotent catalyst which can turn lead or any other base metal into gold and is also called a Lapis. In our world, creating this is one of the goals of alchemy.”

“Making!?”

“Gold!?”

“Th-then Suimei-dono! That is to say, in short, the gem set inside the Sacrament is one such thing!?!— Then if you use that can you create as much gold as you like!?”

Upon hearing his conjecture, the colour in Titania and Graziella’s eyes changed. Naturally, Felmenia was likely genuinely interested in discovering the possibilities of an outrageous mystery as a mage, but the two members of royalty were probably thinking of the usefulness and risk of creating gold from nothing. However, Suimei shook his head as he continued.

“No, that is something other than the Lapis created by alchemy.”

“It’s different?”

“Well, hear me out. According to the scholars of mysteries, there are three varieties of things given the name Lapis. These things are tied to the Lapis in a broad sense, and each of them is able to act as a catalyst to take a small amount of work to give birth to something far greater, hence they are each considered a Lapis. The most valuable asset of alchemy, the Philosopher’s Stone, is called the Lapis Philosophorum. The Holy Grail filled with a blue liquid that is said to be able to resurrect the dead and grant immortality to the living is called the Lapis Lapsus ex Illis Stellis—In short, Lapis Exillis. And another one among them, is that one you saw.”

“Lapis Judaicus...”

“That’s right. This is a story from ancient times. An apostle grew arrogant and provoked the wrath of God, and was cast down to earth from the heavens. An emerald which cast away evil fell out of the crown the apostle was wearing at that time, and it faded and turned blue. It is said that this was the origin of the Lapis Judaicus.”

“In other words, that means it is an item of a god from Suimei’s world...”

“Not at all, this is just a simple legend. It’s not like it is really something created by some grand god. I don’t know who or where it was first created, but it is certainly something outrageous... No, there’s already nobody left who can create alchemy’s Lapis, so I can’t deny that the original might seriously be created by a god.”

After denying Titania’s words, he muttered to himself like it may not necessarily have been wrong. And then, Io Kuzami, who had been quiet up until now, suddenly began speaking.

“My eternal rival. In spite of it being you, you’ve been giving nothing but half-cooked answers have you not? For a while now you haven’t been saying anything conclusive you know?”

“I’m an outsider when it comes to this stuff. Whether it be its origins or what it was made for, there’s basically nothing that I know in full detail.”

Suimei didn’t have a means to investigate Sacraments or the Lapis Judaicus. Even in the archives of the Society’s headquarters, there were no documents which described it in detail. He didn’t know whether it was lost over the passage of time or if it was something that simply remained concealed. Therefore, his knowledge on the topic was very shallow. As he informed them of such, Felmenia made a grim expression.

“It is something even Suimei-dono does not know about...?”

“No, I mean, it’s not like I know everything.”

“But bastard, from what you’ve just said, you know of others that possess similar weapons?”

“Yeah, that’s certainly true. It is the case, but... When they told me about it I didn’t really get what they were saying.”

“You didn’t really get it?”

As Graziella’s expression grew more suspicious, Suimei made a complex expression as he nodded back to her. And then, Titania seemed to have noticed something from what he said.

“Now that you mention it, Faylia-dono also said something similar did she not? She received an explanation about it from Hero-sama, but she could not really understand.”

“Just as I thought...”

Suimei also was told about a Sacrament by its owner before. However, for some reason, most of what he was told didn't even seem like words or even sounds. To hear everything about the mysteries behind the Sacraments—in other words, to understand the concepts behind it, it seemed that there were certain special conditions that had to be met. Graziella then brought up what she heard from the elf as well.

“If I remember correctly, the elf at the temple said that his was something made to evade the end of the world.”

“You said the end of the world?”

“Yeah. We all heard this so there is no mistaking it. Though that is only if the elf did not remember it wrong.”

As Suimei looked over to Titania, she also nodded, so it didn't seem they misheard. However—to think it was made to evade the end of the world. There was only one thing that suddenly came to his mind when he heard this.

“In other words, that thing is connected to twilight syndrome...? No, it's true I heard about guys using one to beat down those beasts, but... That person never said anything about that either...”

When he asked his acquaintance who held a Sacrament, they didn't say anything about that. He didn't think that man didn't know every last thing about the Sacraments either, so just what was it...

“Suimei. Is there anything else that you know? For example, the method to turn the Sacrament into a weapon.”

“Yeah, I have heard something about that. I heard the words to change it into a weapon from nearby but couldn't actually hear it.”

“Then is there anything else other than the words?”

“What the Sacrament needs is a grounded understanding of the mysteries behind it and strong thoughts, or so it seems. The grounded understanding is

required, but when the owner of a sacrament holds strong thoughts, that is when it first manifests... No, when it is first able to become a weapon.”

“Strong thoughts... Is it?”

It didn't seem to strike a chord with Titania, as she was making a severe expression while groaning. On the other hand, Io Kuzami seemed to have noticed something.

“When it comes to strong thoughts, there should be one thing you remember that comes to mind. At that time, my fiancé fired out strong emotions. It is likely that because of that, he was able to forcefully cause the Sacrament to transform.”

Titania and Graziella both seemed to come to an understanding upon hearing Io Kuzami's words and nodded.

“If Reiji has the groundings to use the Sacrament, then isn't it something he'll just eventually figure out? As long as we can't pass along the words, there's no way for us to know after all.”

As Suimei let out his somewhat optimistic prediction, he moved on to a new question.

“What was Reiji's condition after the Sacrament turned back?”

“There was not any particular change. Just as we said before, he only became stronger temporarily.”

“So he was only stronger during the fight huh...”

“That's right. However, at that time, he was instantly exhausted.”

Sacraments were weapons which ate mana, while in use they always consumed mana and vitality. According the mysteries behind the Lapis Judaicus, the amount it consumed was designed to be small, but even if it was called something that gave birth to great power from a small quantity of input, that was all simply relative. In reality, the things Sacraments could do was on such an extraordinary scale that in the end, the amount of mana required was quite large.

Reiji did in fact have the divine protection from the hero summoning ritual.

Because of its effect, he had been strengthened, but even so, compared to a magician in possession of a mana furnace or the owner of the Sacrament over in his world, it was still insufficient. Seeing as he was still growing and already had that much capability with magic and that much stamina, he would likely be able to provide enough energy to it eventually. While thinking of that Suimei suddenly fell silent.

“ ... ”

“What’s the matter? Suimei-dono.”

Felmenia called out to Suimei after he suddenly became quiet. He didn’t respond right away, but after a while, he seemed to have come upon an answer, and let out a sigh as if he was resigning himself.

“... No, I was just thinking it was about time that I had to tell Reiji is all.”

“Hoou... That’s.”

“You mean, about being a magician?”

From Suimei’s abstract words, Lefille and Felmenia were able to guess what he meant. Titania was also the same in this regard, and looked at Suimei with a composed expression.

“After all this time.”

“Ah? Is that something you should be saying after being thrown into disorder from the same kind of thing just now?”

“Who knows, just what are you talking about?”

The tomboy swordswoman princess seemed to be intent on pretending it never happened. As Suimei looked at her playing dumb with a bitter face, Graziella, who didn’t know the circumstances, spoke up.

“Why have you not told them up until now?”

“I’ve been taught from the very beginning to hide that kind of information. The reason I didn’t say anything after coming here is something like a trace of that.”

“But if you stay in this world, they’ll end up finding out eventually wouldn’t

they? Especially since you are already looking for a spell to return to your own damn world? In the end, when you return, you'll have to tell them."

"No, it would have been fine to keep it hidden and just give a vague reason for the completed magic circle when the three of us return. After they return it is up to Reiji and Mizuki's own convenience to work it out. As long as they have no regrets and no reason to stop in the other world, it would be just fine."

"I see."

Suimei was thinking of broadening his choices. From the beginning, Suimei, Reiji and Mizuki were summoned at the leaders of this world's convenience. On top of their weak position, they basically had no choice in the matter.

However, as long as Reiji had decided to take part in the Demon Lord's subjugation, there was no way of bending his will. Having said that, there was no way he would simply cast aside the other world. Therefore, if it was possible to return to the other world and come back, he could calmly make his choice after looking back. Titania didn't seem to find it very amusing when Suimei mentioned returning to his world, and she looked at him with a somewhat sharp gaze.

"Suimei. Why did you have a change of heart now of all times?"

"It's that thing just now."

"That thing... You mean the Sacrament?"

"Yeah. Now that he took such a thing in his hands, he can't turn back anymore right? Even if he goes back to the other world, once he's left alone he'll stick his head into other people's business. It's absolutely certain he'll get rolled up in something. If the Society is going to look after him, my identity will be revealed anyways."

Even if they managed to return safely to the other world, it was likely that with Reiji's personality, he would get involved with the mysteries of the world. Once a person who can't silently watch the misfortune of others takes hold of mystical powers, it was natural that they would begin sticking their heads into all sorts of affairs. The others could likely also somehow understand this, and they came to an agreement without saying a word.

“Suimei-dono. Will you tell him right away?”

“Hmmm. No, I’ll do it step by step... Probably.”

As he smiled like he was trying to dodge it, Lefille looked at him suspiciously.

“... Suimei-kun, you’re a good for nothing.”

“Sh-shut up Lefille-san! It can’t be helped right!?”

“Suimei, is such a coward, in the weirdest places.”

Suimei was unable to retaliate to Liliana’s words. And then, Graziella was next.

“I don’t really give a damn about you either way, but do you have any worries about a break in your friendship from not telling Reiji and Mizuki?”

“Well, Mizuki will get angry to an extent, but if I tell them honestly, Reiji will... Well, he’ll likely sympathize with me. He’s not that narrow minded a guy. It’s true that there are some things that are hard to say after all this time, but...”

Suimei frowned as he put it into words. Naturally, it wasn’t that he felt obligated because he didn’t tell them, it was because of the harmful effect it could bring them from knowing. It was a principle that the existence of magic be kept secret from the general public to prevent normal people from being too deeply involved with mystical affairs. Humans were beings who were attracted to the mysterious, once they knew, it would become easier for them to notice the mysteries and also become easier for them to get involved in dangerous events.

Because of this, back in the other world, he never planned on telling them, and even here he never planned to either. However, he couldn’t deny that his problem was somewhat pigeonholed. It’s not like he would pay the price and anger him greatly, but because of the previously mentioned reasons, it was no mistake that Suimei carried great anxieties about telling him.

“My goodness, so it’s come to this in the end huh...”

After letting out a sigh, Reiji came back in with a fresh face after being healed to the brim by the cats.

Chapter 2: Emergencies Always Come with the Clouds

It was the day after Suimei and Reiji's group arrived in the Imperial Capital. On this day, Suimei was together with Felmenia in the alleyway in front of the Yakagi residence. The weather in the Imperial Capital was quite clear, so they decided to go outside. Looking up, the sky was cut off by the surrounding buildings creating a bright blue square. Coupled together with the sunlight pouring down on the white surroundings, it was dazzlingly bright.

And what the two of them were doing in such a pleasant environment, was of course a magic lecture. As expected, it was simply a magician's nature to spare time for the mysteries of the world whenever they could.

“—Now then, today we'll also be doing a lecture, but up until now we've done a lot huh.”

“Yes. There was modern magic, mystical entropy, liturgical techniques, the manifestation of magic circles, and finally the way to use all sorts of magic.”

“Yeah. With that, I do believe Menia has a firm understanding of just what a magician is.”

Just as he said, Suimei saw that Felmenia had grown, but she herself did not feel that way, and showed a self deprecating expression as she spoke.

“I would also like that to be the case, but... Regrettably, I don't have anything to compare to...”

“Regarding that, I think it's fine. Yesterday you urged Reiji and the others to notice their way of thinking regarding attributes right? It's fine as long as you have that kind of mindset. There isn't only one way of thinking. There is absolutely not a single law which establishes the phenomena of the world. If you properly understand that there are many approaches, then there's no problem.”

“What do you mean by many approaches?”

“In our world, the laws of science are generally known, and everyone thinks of them as a measuring stick. However, in truth, on top of the theories which explain the phenomena of the world, mystical theories also exist right? In short, it just means not to get caught on a fixed idea.”

“Ummm...”

“Let’s see. When you first heard of our magic, you never thought you could manifest mysteries without the mediation of the elements right?”

“Yes. That is certainly true.”

No matter what it was, only once the theory was understood would results begin to stabilize. Recognition and revelations, that was the so called ‘eureka.’

“In our world, everything is thought of from a physical perspective, it is a world dominated by the doctrine of the material. Everything with form emits power, takes action on other objects, and gives birth to results. For example, no matter what it is, heat is emitted from it.”

This was exactly why even if fire was created by magic, the mind of a modern person would immediately simulate the movements of atoms and molecules taking action on the objects in the atmosphere. It was just natural. Because of that simulation, their understanding had stagnated.

“... I see, the normal people of Suimei-dono’s world think that the heat emitted as a result of spells and mystical actions are equivalent to regular heat, so they deny it right from the start.”

To learn magic, it was important to clear away the thought that there must be heat to create anything.

“Yes. Just as Menia said, because those in the super sensible domain are unable to recognize this, they only believe what they see with their own eyes. Because they can’t understand, they are unable to follow the process, and unable to pursue the result. Magic is something that can first be used once that ‘understanding’ is made.”

Conversely, if one’s understanding was half baked, the result would also be unstable. This applied to any field of study.

“The preamble was a little long, but it’s about time we start. So today, what I’ll be explaining is—”

As Felmenia pitched forwards, perhaps because he was putting on airs, a strange amount of anticipation was building up. While a drum roll played out in his head as he watched Felmenia biting down anxiously, what he said next was...

“—About the production of a mana furnace.”

“The production of a mana furnace! You said the production of a mana furnace right!?”

Hearing about the contents of the day’s lecture, Felmenia became even more excited. She was unable to stop trembling in excitement, it couldn’t really be helped for her to be a little proud.

“And so, what is needed to make a mana furnace? Putting together what I heard a while back, I think it has some relation to the internal organs, but it is hard to think that you add a new one in...”

Felmenia had already been guessing about how the mana furnace worked. She had already witnessed its existence on countless occasions and seen its power with her own eyes, so she likely took all that to consider its mechanisms on her own. As Felmenia began to list out her own conjectures, Suimei first told her to calm down before continuing.

“A mana furnace is certainly related to the system of internal organs, there’s a small nuance to the wording of adding a new one in, it isn’t strictly corporeally added in or anything, so it is a little wrong.”

“... What do you mean?”

“In other words, instead of corporeally, it is added spiritually.”

“Spiritually?”

“That’s right. It makes use of the ether body.”

Hearing that word for the first time, Felmenia knit her brows.

“The ether body? You said before that ether was an intangible power which drifted in the air, but is this somehow different?”

“Yeah. It’s a bit convoluted, but it’s something different from that.”

As he said this, the crease in Felmenia’s brow grew deeper. It was certainly convoluted. It was only natural that she was making that kind of face. Even if one excluded ether as it was referred to in the mystical studies, there were a great number of things bearing the name ether. There was no other way than to be confused in the beginning.

“From the analogical reasoning of the nuance, is it something connected to the physical body and the astral body?”

From the components she was listing out, Felmenia seemed to be thinking of it correctly. As she slowly drew towards a conjecture in her mind, Suimei nodded back to her as he replied.

“That’s it, it’s just as Menia says. The ether body is related to those. The ether body, physical body and astral body are considered the three pillars which compose all living beings. In short, the human body consists of those three components connected together, and when each one is damaged, lost or altered, then the human in question would lose their equilibrium.”

“The physical body is made of material components, the astral body is connected to the consciousness and the soul... Then the ether body is...”

“The ether body can be considered the spiritual portion... If I phrase it like that, it could be confused with the astral body which holds the soul. Putting it roughly... Let’s see, you could say that the ether body is like a blueprint for the physical body.”

“A blueprint for the physical body?”

“That’s right. It is something different from what is scientifically called DNA, but that doesn’t really matter. Speaking of it from a mystical point of view, the ether body is something similar. Every organ and part of the human body is created based on this blueprint as an origin, and is considered to always be influenced by it. It is not possible to capture an image of it with magic and see it, but along with the physical body, there exists an ether heart, an ether brain, ether arms, legs, and head among others.”

“...? It exists? Since it is a blueprint, after it is made, won’t it be

unnecessary...?”

“Certainly with the nuance of the word blueprint that would be the case, but... In truth, it is the map of the construction of the human body as well as an operational manual. The ether body is always in a condition where it forms a double of the human body’s shape...”

“... H-haah?”

“Sorry. I didn’t cut to the conclusion. To sum it up, while the ether body is a blueprint, after that role is complete, it is also an instruction manual for the sake of operating the physical body normally.”

“I see. If it is like that, then I understand.”

As Felmenia’s doubts were cleared, Suimei moved to the core of the matter.

“After getting this far, it’s just a little further. If the ether body is a blueprint, then...”

“It would be fine to just rewrite that blueprint!”

“Yeah, that’s exactly it.”

The point of this lecture was exactly as Felmenia guessed. Each of the three pillars had special characteristics which pulled the circumstances between each other. When the physical body felt fatigue, naturally, consciousness and the soul would weaken. When the astral body was reduced, the physical body would also weaken. And just like those two, when the ether body became strange, the physical body’s functions would be altered, and would even have an effect on the astral body. This could be said to be a weakness of the human body and posed many disadvantages. However, the production of a mana furnace was a technique that turned this argument around. After confirming Felmenia’s realization, Suimei continued his explanation.

“To use the ether body to alter the physical body, there is a need to alter the subject’s consciousness using a staged approach. By consciously reforming oneself as a magician, the astral body would be urged to change from that self awareness. The next step is to alter one’s own ether body using magic, and the blueprint for the physical body and the brain is changed. Once that is finished, the physical body will gradually change, and in the end the physical body will

once more have an effect on the astral body, and one will arrive at the stage where their mind and body are all aligned perfectly.”

After putting the detailed explanation to an end there, Suimei began generalizing it.

“So to summarize. Using the blueprint for the physical body, we’re not increasing the number of material internal organs. Without changing its appearance, we are attaching new functionality to the physical body. This is commonly referred to as a ‘dream organ,’ and when it was first discovered it was also called increasing the number of spiritual internal organs.”

“Ooh... It’s a theory which gives a glimpse of the depths of the mysteries!”

In the end, Felmenia stood from her chair and clenched her fists. It was the bright and excited expression of the lingering emotion of a magician who had received a revelation of a new mystery. In contrast to her excitement, Suimei’s expression became severe. And then what came out of his mouth, was a warning filled with concern.

“—However, once you tamper with the ether body, you will no longer be a proper human. You’ll be tampering with the blueprint that makes you human in the first place after all. Not only the physical body, but the astral body will also change. That kind of thing can no longer be called human.”

“...”

She would lose her humanity. Hearing the weight of those words left Felmenia unable to speak. Losing one’s humanity was something that anyone who had common sensibilities would normally refuse. If one was not raised like Suimei was since early childhood, then there was nothing abnormal about hesitating here.

“This is one of the reasons I call the outrageous magicians in the other world monsters. Since the powerful magicians have tampered with their ether bodies to their hearts’ content, their lifespans have become inexhaustible and their mana preposterous. There are even those who have gained a stock of souls or have transcended death.

“Death!? T-t-t-transcended death!? Would that mean that they are

immortal!?”

“Strictly speaking it’s not like they are actually immortal. It would be more correct to say it is difficult for them to die. They’ll no longer be affected by common causes of death like conventional weapons, disasters, lifespan or disease. Those that are released from the confines of death—are called a Lich.”

“B-but even so, to be released from one’s lifespan and not die is quite considerable...”

“... That may be so, but, well, those weirdos are really limited to only a tiny fraction of the guys with the talent to do so. It’s not something anyone and everyone can become.”

Suimei added this on, but Felmenia’s surprise and fear had yet to clear up. Immortality was one of the dreams of humanity. Even if she could not reach it with her own hands, she had likely passed her limits for being surprised that there were those who had already grasped it.

“—There is a saying that ‘We are an existence who know not the limits of expansion.’ After a human tampers with their ether body, they become what is known as a magician.”

Magicians were different from regular humans. This also applied to their way of life, but their existence itself already differed from that of humans. With an increased amount of mysticism as a living being, they could elevate their spirit to the next level, fire off an intense psychic chill brought about by magic, they could manifest the golden flaming eyes, and they had a general disinterest in machines. Having distanced themselves so much from a human, they had already departed from the category of humans.

“... As I am now, even though I can use the magic from your world, it means I am still not a magician right?”

“That’s about right. It would be proper to say you’re just a magic user. However, that is only depending on the circumstances.”

“It means I will also become a magician right!?”

Making a fist with both hands, Felmenia raised her hands in celebration. To her, this was a single clear step towards her goal, so it likely elevated her

motivation.

“And so, at the same time as that, about Menia’s assignment from here on.”

“I have also given that consideration. I have a large task ahead of me.”

“So you’ve realized just what it is that Menia needs now.”

“... As expected, it’s firepower right?”

“Hmmm?”

Felmenia was making a serious expression just like the one Reiji showed when he was talking about the demon general. However, because it was such a large leap from what he was thinking about, he couldn’t help but be dumbfounded. However, as the girl before him seemed to be looking for confirmation, she continued like what she said was insufficient.

“I thought about it a little while ago. My magic overwhelmingly does not have enough firepower... What is the matter?”

Felmenia grew doubtful as Suimei didn’t seem to react at all. In response, Suimei replied with his eyes shaped liked dots as if he was completely befuddled.

“... Ah, un, by all means, please continue.”

“Back in the fight with Jillbert-dono, even with Lily’s support I had to fight a defensive battle. I’ve been thinking of it ever since, about how I could have improved that situation. And then I’ve been carefully comparing the way I’ve been fighting up until now and other ways of fighting...”

“And so, why firepower?”

“Yes. After looking back at the fight with Suimei-dono, I think that it was firepower that was missing.”

“Eh!? Me!?”

“Also, when it came to a mage from this world, Graziella-dono’s greatest attack also had a lot of firepower. Even after watching Lefille fight with a sword, I’ve seen her push into her opponents’ attacks with her own here and there. So as I thought, what has become necessary is an elevation in firepower.”

“...”

Felmenia grew more passionate as she talked about it. And Suimei had nothing to say in return. While he was wondering what she was going to say, he felt like she was passionately burning up in a different direction. Certainly, when it came to both Lefille and Suimei, they had a number of different attacks with powerful single strikes that could pressure their opponents on the surface. When it came to Suimei's opinion, he thought that Felmenia's technique was more delicate. Among Suimei's group, Felmenia had always taken charge of the housework and office work, roles which required an attention to detail. The way she worked was modest, and also showed in her magic. The reason she quickly came to such a troublesome understanding, was also proof of this.

(No, it is normal for her to be good at delicacy, so is it fine to concentrate on elevating firepower?)

Currently, while in this world, there was no problem with having high firepower. If she was conscious that the magic she used was always modest, then there may not have been a need to specialize in that direction.

“What's the matter? Suimei-dono.”

“... That's right. Just as Menia says, let's increase your firepower. Shall we go in the direction of learning to control magic with a large effect and giving it your own flavour?”

“Yes!”

“Well for starters, about the medical treatment regarding the ether body and the manufacturing of an altar...”

And just as Suimei started talking about the expansion needed for the mana furnace...

“Hm...”

Suddenly, he heard sounds coming from the entrance of the alleyway. Because the alleyway in front of the house only led to the entrance of Suimei's house, there was no other possibility than Lefille and the others had returned, or some other visitor coming to see them. Because the alleys of the Imperial Capital were complicated, it could technically also mean that someone was just

lost.

As Suimei and Felmenia both looked towards the entrance, what came out was a girl wearing the robes of the Salvation Church in an exhausted state. She had her hand propped against the wall and was out of breath, so they could infer that she was in quite the hurry. However, that girl's appearance was familiar to both of them. There was no mistake that it was the attendant magic priest of the hero Elliot who was summoned in El Meide, Christa.

“What are...”

Without waiting for Suimei to finish his question, Christa began talking while still breathing roughly.

“I-I apologize for being so abrupt. There is something urgent that I must convey to Astel's Hero-sama...”

“To Reiji?”

“Y-yes...”

“Just what in the world happened?”

“Elliot-sama... Just after Elliot-sama went to Duke Hadorious' mansion...”

—He didn't come back. Hearing those words, Suimei and Felmenia began to take action immediately.



After Christa came rushing into the alleyway, it was already the afternoon. The bright and clear skies had crumbled as if to suggest an emergency was happening, and thick clouds had rolled in which hinted it could begin pouring at any second. Because of that, Lefille and the others had returned, and in an unexpectedly small amount of time, everyone had gathered in the living room of the Yakagi residence. Seeing that preparations to begin their discussion had completed, Io Kuzami opened her mouth.

“So just what has happened that you suddenly gathered everyone? I do think that we discussed matters sufficiently the other day though?”

“...?’

As Io Kuzami showed a slightly dissatisfied attitude, Christa looked at her with

a quizzical gaze. She was sitting there with Mizuki's appearance, speaking in a haughty tone similar to Graziella with her legs crossed. During the incident in the Imperial Capital, she served as Mizuki's opponent, and from that experience she was able to perceive to an extent just what kind of woman she was, which was likely why she was in a confused state. Though that applied to everyone present.

"Don't worry about Mizuki. Some things happened and her personality changed is all."

"R-Reiji-sama, what exactly does that...?"

"I'd like to leave it at just that..."

Don't ask anymore. As Reiji shook his head to imply that, Christa didn't question them any further on the matter. On the other hand, perhaps because there was something she was curious about, Felmenia began to speak.

"Her Highness Graziella does not seem to be here though..."

"She had some business to take care of, and said that she would be late."

"Is that so?"

"It's fine if she doesn't come."

Liliana replied to Felmenia's doubts, while Lefille suddenly spat out her opinion. Because Graziella was an Imperial princess, she was likely quite busy now that she was back in her own country, but—setting that aside, Lefille still seemed to have some lingering feelings left from the other day. Anytime her name came up, Lefille would react strongly. Deciding it was about time to start the conversation, Reiji seemed to have an inkling of what had happened.

"Hey, if Christa-san is here and Elliot isn't, then..."

"Yeah, we already heard the situation. Seems we'll hear the explanation one more time from here."

As Suimei urged her on, Christa began talking with a gloomy expression from the seat of her chair.

"—It was about one week ago. Elliot-sama and I were going to go to Astel to do sympathy calls as we planned, but when we entered the west most town of

Kurant City, he received an invitation from Duke Hadorious through the Salvation Church.”

Hadorious. The first one to react to that name, was Titania.

“The Duke you say?”

“Yes. To show his hospitality, he wanted Elliot to visit his mansion by all means.”

Hearing that, the colour on Reiji and Titania’s faces changed. After they arrived at Kurant City, they were also called by Hadorious, so they probably thought that there was something behind it.

“On that day I was terribly worn out, so Elliot-sama paid attention to my needs, and went to visit the Duke’s mansion on his own. However, after that, Elliot-sama did not return...”

“So, you thought that something may have happened.”

“Yes. I went to the Salvation Church to ask them what had happened, but they persisted that Elliot-sama went to the Duke’s mansion, but because he was resting he was absolutely not actually let inside.”

The first one to start questioning Christa was Felmenia.

“Did you contact the Holy City about this?”

“I did at least contact them, but... Their reply was not favourable.”

“Not favourable? Even though it is about the hero?”

As Reiji brought up his doubts, Titania answered him.

“Duke Hadorious sends a fairly large donation to the Holy City every year. Because of that, there is a possibility that he talked them into it.”

“I see. It means his groundwork is already perfect. But why...”

As Reiji groaned with a severe expression, Christa also made a bitter one as if agreeing with him.

“Yes. I do not understand the reason his Grace the Duke would restrain Elliot-sama, I don’t have any more hands that I can play out...”

She was missing the vital hand of being able to approach Hadorious directly. That was probably the main issue. As long as there was no clear evidence that the hero was brought to any harm, she couldn't stubbornly persist. They didn't know what Hadorious' motives were. As everyone tilted their heads to the side at the emerging mystery, Lefille seemed to have a clue. From her position where she was quietly sitting in her chair, she raised her hand.

"Is it alright for me to make a remark?"

"Yes."

"Very recently, we also had a few things happening related to heroes. Isn't it probably that?"

"Related to heroes you say... Aah, the Universal Apostles huh..."

"Then Duke Hadorious is in league with the lot who attacked the hero in the Alliance?"

"The possibility exists, but that's about all we can say for now."

Lefille, Suimei and Reiji advanced the conversation on their own while Christa only looked at them blankly from the side. She couldn't tell what was going on from the fragmented information she had, so Liliana began explaining it to her.

"A little while ago, I believe Christa-san knows, that we went to the Alliance. But, at that time, the hero of the Alliance, was attacked by, a certain group. That group called themselves, the Universal Apostles, and we don't know the reason yet, but they tried to, kidnap the hero."

"... So that's why, there is a possibility that Duke Hadorious is part of that group."

"At the present point in time, there's no other group trying to pick a fight with the heroes other than the demons after all. The only other thing that I can think of is the entire nation of Astel attempting to do something, but that doesn't seem quite right."

Suimei continued his explanation while making a bitter face like he was remembering something. Hadorious had some personal motive in mind. There was that group who were trying to use to heroes for some scheme. The

possibilities were endless, but the probability that he was related to the Universal Apostles just simply made more sense given the timing. However, the one to raise an objection to this, was unexpectedly Titania.

“It is just my personal opinion, but I find it hard to believe that Duke Hadorious is in league with the Universal Apostles.”

Hearing her say that, Suimei knit his brows.

“How unexpected. I thought you didn’t like him Tia?”

“C-certainly he is someone I am unable to get along with, but that man is a noble of my country right...? Besides, Duke Hadorious is my father’s most loyal subject. That man serving two masters is more unlikely than heaven and earth flipping over.”

Hearing Titania’s declaration, surprised expressions could be seen all around her. They had all gotten a hint that she seemed to hate the man, so what she said was rather unexpected. While that was going on, Felmenia supplemented her words as a fellow countryman.

“I’ve heard Duke Hadorious has been together with his Majesty King Almadious since a young age as both of them ran through both battlefields and the political stage. His Majesty’s trust in him is deep, and the Duke’s loyalty is the same. That is also why all affairs related to Astel’s hero were entrusted to him... However, taking into account the current situation, is this not a circumstance where Duke Hadorious is still suspicious after all?”

“Yes. Even leaving out his involvement with the Universal Apostles, including this case, I cannot deny that he is plotting something with the heroes’ movements. Everything is likely done with Astel in mind. However...”

Saying that, Titania began to groan. She was likely racking her brains at the disparity between her personal assessment of Hadorious and his current actions. But in this situation, they couldn’t explain the reasoning behind him directly taking action to restrain Elliot, she could not just optimistically say that it would be alright. As the living room was filling up with a strange atmosphere, Reiji spoke up.

“... It seems, we’ll have to go to Kurant City next.”

“Yes, that does seem to be the case.”

“That is quite the hurried action, but it is something my fiancé has decided. I will also pleasantly follow along.”

And just as Reiji, Titania and Io Kuzami came to an agreement...

“—No, I’ll have you wait before you do that.”

Suddenly, the door to the living room opened vigorously. And standing in the doorway, was Graziella, donning her military uniform. Just as usual, she waved open her military coat and let her golden hair flutter majestically. After a brief moment where everyone was surprised at her sudden entrance, Suimei look at her critically while squinting his eyes.

“You, just entering as you please again...”

“This is my country. It does not matter no matter what I do right?”

“It matters! Barging into my fucking house as you please is an invasion of privacy!”

“That’s why I’ve been saying not to use such strange words. If you’re going to talk then use concepts from this world you fool.”

Seeing that Suimei had begun to growl at the disparaging remark, Reiji cut into the conversation.

“So, what do you mean by waiting?”

“Aah, an invasion of the demons from the north has been confirmed. At this rate the Empire will become a battlefield.”

As she frankly explained the situation, the sound of several chairs being cast aside rang in the air. The ones to suddenly stand, were Titania and Lefille. While still gripped by surprise, Titania cut straight to the point.

“Your Imperial Highness, what is the scale of their forces?”

“I don’t know the precise count, but I hear there is quite a lot of them. It is probable that we will have to gather all of the Empire’s military forces to put up a fight.”

“So suddenly...?”

As Reiji heard them talk, he knit his brows. The invasion was certainly abrupt. His bewilderment was right on the mark. However, Suimei had an idea of what was going on with the demons.

“I see. Since they lost a few generals, they’re trying to rally back up over here.”

Up until now, Suimei and the others defeated three demon generals, Rajas, Mauhario and Vuishta. Without defeating a single hero, they had suffered such casualties, so the demons must also have been panicking. And so, to rally their forces, they set their eyes on the Nelferian Empire. To the east of the Nelferian Empire was the Kingdom of Astel, to its west was the Saadias Alliance and the self governed state. It lied at the centre of the northern part of the continent.

It was a key point which was the fork in the road. Because it was an important traffic route for the circulation of money and goods, cutting it off here would kill off trade in the north. The effect of having the Empire fall here was unfathomable.

“I’ll say it here and now, but there won’t be any reinforcements from the other countries.”

“Your Imperial Highness, what do you mean?”

The one to raise their voice in doubt, was none other than Titania. Because it was such an important fork in the road, and because Nelferia and Astel were allied countries, it was obvious that they should be cooperating in such a situation. It was completely baffling that such an obvious action was not being taken. As the princess of Astel, she couldn’t help but be curious about her own country’s attitude.

“First the self governed state. Because they sent reinforcements to the northern Alliance, they can’t bring out any more soldiers. As for Astel, because of the cleanup after the previous demon invasion there and their countermeasures against future invasions, and because they are dealing with the refugees from other nations due to the demon invasions, there was a reply that they would not dispatch their troops.”

Hearing Graziella’s explanation, Lefille wrinkled her brow and groaned.

“I understand the situation, but... How do I say it, I can’t really admire such a

stance.”

“There is a reason for that. Have you not heard the rumours that have been going around Astel, the Alliance and the self governed state?”

“Aah, that rumour where the Empire was expanding their military and keeping their neighbouring countries in check right? I heard from Liliana that it was deceptive manoeuvring... So is that related?”

“That’s right. Even though the Empire has prepared to fight against the demons, they aren’t moving at all. Seriously, just what kind of nerves do they have? Their sense of danger is far too weak.”

Even though the demons were invading, they had no readiness to cooperate. All Graziella could do was voice her disappointment.

“Tia, is that kind of thing possible?”

“Yes. To abandon the crisis of an allied country is not a particularly strange occurrence. As long as they know the demons are invading the Empire, the war cannot be stopped after all. It is a certainty that they would suffer both military and financial losses. Even if they found faults with the problems that would come afterwards, because of the casualties, the Empire would end up finding it difficult to use force against other countries.”

“Anticipating the decline of the Empire’s military strength is likely something to make the neighbouring countries happy after all.”

Graziella let out a snort like she didn’t find it amusing at all. The reason she didn’t point her discontent towards Titania was likely because she understood it was not her own intent to hold back any reinforcements. Suimei then put all his weight into the back of his chair and stared at the ceiling.

“I think that If the Empire falls the damage to the others would also be ridiculous though.”

“That’s just the thing Suimei-kun. If the Empire did in fact fall to the demons, just what are the next actions that the adjacent countries are going to take? Using the just cause of saving their fellow humans from the demons, they could send their armies into the Empire. If the Imperial Capital ended up falling, then the all out war would have also exhausted the demons terribly. I don’t really

have to put it in words, but the things that they want to do would be accomplished easily.”

“It’s a little different, but it’s something like two tigers competing to eat one meal huh... Anyhow, don’t think of such harsh things.”

“I don’t know if it is the actual reason, but that kind of motive may be going around is all.”

Hearing Lefille say that, Titania thought that it couldn’t be possible after all.

“I still find it hard to believe for father to play out that kind of hand.”

“That’s it. His Majesty Almadious would rather do something to create an obligation of gratitude from the Empire in this case. It is hard to think that he would be overcome by congress.”

“It’s down to whether father is unable to move as he likes, or whether the information isn’t being relayed to him. Though the former is impossible.”

After Titania stated this, Graziella cut in.

“—However, while that may be true, it is troublesome for the Empire to fight on its own here. Thus, henceforth, I would like to formally appeal to your Royal Highness, Felmenia-dono, and the hero Reiji to take part in the battle to intercept the demons on behalf of the Empire.”

“I see, so that’s why ‘you’ll have them wait.’ If they’re dragged into something then you would end up losing some support to an extent.”

“That’s how it is.”

Sitting down in a chair with a thump, Graziella affirmed Suimei’s statement. However—

“But in that case Elliot-sama will!”

“It cannot be helped. I am more than aware that the hero Elliot’s case is important. However, it’ll be troublesome if we don’t all go to the battle encampment. Besides, those guys likely don’t intend to move the hero right away.”

“That’s, true, but...”

Unable to get any cooperation, Christa was left completely despondent. Taking her emotions carefully into consideration, Reiji spoke up.

“Is it not possible in some way or other to make some preparations in secret from the Empire’s side?”

“Even if we do it will all be in vain. If a priest from the Holy City is coming to us for help, that means the Holy City won’t be of any help. Right now, the Empire’s relation with the Holy City is of serious importance, even if we tried to intervene, nothing good will come out of it. Rather than clinging on to the Empire—”

Graziella then cast her gaze over to Titania.

“It is only proper that I do something or other from my end right? Understood. I shall send a letter to father to call attention to this... Though it may already be too late now that Duke Hadorious has already come out so firmly.”

It was a very reasonable concern. When it came to a schemer, when they took such open measures with their plan, it was very likely that they were already out of reach. Even if they had aid from someone superior, it would only prove to be futile.

“As I thought, Elliot-sama will...”

Have to be postponed. It was easy to guess what Christa was thinking about. And then, it seemed that Io Kuzami had an objection.

“Ultimately, whether or not we head off to the battlefield is all up to my fiancé’s decision is it not? Even if it is you lot, if my fiancé decides to go, then you cannot ignore his will.”

Saying that, she looked to Reiji with a gaze imply ‘So how about it?’ Certainly, if he went to go to save Elliot, this time he would be casting aside Graziella and would be unable to overturn it. And as the time to make a decision was closing in, Reiji closed his eyes for a moment, and the answer that he eventually arrived at was...

“... Christa-san, I’m sorry. I think that I must prioritize the demons.”

“... No, the subjugation of the demons is Hero-sama’s true purpose. There is no way that I can obstruct that.”

“Un. Even if Elliot was captured, I don’t think it means he’ll be harmed right away. After dealing with the demons somehow, let’s go save him.”

He had made his decision. And then, Reiji suddenly turned towards Suimei.

“Suimei, what will you guys do?”

“Us, huh...”

It was between taking part in the battle against the demons or going to save Elliot. In this kind of situation, making a judgment was quite difficult for Suimei. In this case, he didn’t really have anything he wanted to prioritize, so his judgment was dull. Personally, because Reiji and Mizuki (in body) were headed off somewhere dangerous, he wanted to support them. But because he also owed Elliot for Reiji’s case a while back, he wasn’t opposed to go saving him at all.

“Fumu. Suimei-kun, are you stuck?”

“Lefi, sorry, I need your recommendation.”

Sensing that Suimei was hesitating to make a choice, Lefille called out to him, to which he responded by raising his hands and asking for her opinion. At times like these, the existence of the girl who had the capabilities of a leader was something he was thankful for. She had a certain persuasive power, and could cleanly find a working solution.

The girl who was only about as tall as an elementary school student leaned against the back of her chair and folded her arms. Looking at it from the side, it looked like a small child trying to stand on their tip toes, but the words that came from her mouth were those of an adult.

“In this case, looking at it from the general situation, we should be prioritizing the fight against the demons. But because it is something that involves the heroes, it can also be said that it is something we cannot ignore. Looking at the bigger picture, the heroes are a great power after all. Losing that would be a big loss. However, in the end I still think it is a shoddy plan to divide our forces before the major threat that we can see before our eyes.”

“Lefille-san and Sensei are a big part of our war potential after all.”

As Reiji gave his thoughts, Lefille added on an apology in the end.

“My apologies to Christa-jou, but you will have to wait. Naturally, if the neighbouring countries immediately provided their support and slowed the advance of the demons, it would be a different story though.”

“Yes.”

“Then, that means we’re going to go fight the demons huh... Hm? I feel like just a little while ago the same thing happened...”

While saying that, Suimei cocked his head to the side. However, just how did those around him see this behaviour? Was he simply making a misunderstanding, or was he making a foolish display and pretending to forget? All those who had been travelling with Suimei looked at him like the latter.

“Um, how do I put it, things just do not seem to be going the way Suimeidono’s wants it to.”

Her moderate tone didn’t have any sarcasm in it, but as Felmenia was smiling she probably found it comical. By how he wanted it to go, she likely meant about how he didn’t want to fight the demons after all. This would be the third time that he would do so out of his control. And then, Reiji followed up on her remark.

“You’ve been saying that you didn’t want to fight ever since we were at the castle too. With Suimei’s personality it was bound to end up like this, so like I thought, you should’ve just come with us from the start.”

“Shut up! That would throw my plans out of order!”

“Then why didn’t you refuse now? Wasn’t it normal to refuse?”

“Uu...”

He couldn’t say anything back to those words. Looking at his surroundings, there were astonished faces, and laughing ones. Even Reiji who had cornered him was pleasantly laughing. And then, he suddenly stopped laughing, and made a serious expression.

“Setting that aside, Suimei, will you be alright?”

“Hm? What do you mean?”

“I mean fighting. You’ll have to fight against demons, and not only that there will be a ton of them right?”

“Won’t it just work out? There’s plenty of strong people around, I can just discretely hide behind Lefi or Menia.”

“Hiding discretely behind women is a little... You know...”

“I’ve only got one life.”

Naturally, he was only saying this because he didn’t want to show Reiji his actual abilities, and Reiji simply took it at face value. However, Suimei’s team was not satisfied at all with the way he was talking.

“Hou...”

“A-Ahaha.”

“Suimei, should be sued, at least once.”

“What’s with you guys.”

A gaze filled with criticism, a bitter smile, and a clearly toxic attitude. Seeing each of them like that, Suimei tried to restrain them with his words, but it had no effect.



“Then, I will...”

As Christa began to talk, Graziella cut her off before she could finish speaking.

“It should be fine for you to just standby at the Salvation Church. I understand that you are worried about the hero, but until we have finished our preparations, absolutely do not act on your own.”

“... Understood.”

“Don’t worry about it so much. It will be sufficient if Reiji and the others lend their hand to the first battle. Once the prospect of victory is clear, they can go to rescue El Meide’s hero.”

Graziella followed through to cheer up the downcast Christa. However, there were naturally conditions that had to be met.

“Though that is only if we are able to build up our forces completely to the next stage...”

“Astel should work out one way or the other, but the problem is the Alliance and the self governed state huh...”

The ones to let out their anguish were Reiji and Titania. As expected, that was the main issue. Since Titania was present, it was possible that Astel would make a move, but it couldn’t be helped that they had no connection to the self governed state and Alliance. However, there was only one person present who was smiling with their teeth out.

“Hey, I just thought of something interesting.”

Suimei suddenly made a turbulent smile filled with mischievous intent. Seeing that, Reiji pulled away a little as he spoke.

“Uwaa.... It’s the face when Suimei thought of something evil.”

“Evil is unnecessary dammit.”

“So? Just what kind of magic words did you think of this time?”

“Aah, I just have something that Reiji and Christa need to collaborate on...”

Saying that, Suimei began explaining the sinister trick that he thought of.



As Reiji and Titania declared their preparation for war, the Kingdom of Astel’s

response was quick. Having the hero declare his intent to fight against the demons, and then having their own princess follow after him, they lost their ability to remain an idle spectator, and immediately announced that they were sending reinforcements to the Empire. Since Titania made herself known, they lost any advantage they would gain from moving behind the scenes. After they contacted her, all they ascertained was that the information had not yet been handed down to the Royal Capital, which left Titania with feelings of relief.

“Thank goodness right?”

“It’s still too early to feel relief. Despite saying that reinforcements will definitely come, it’s not out of the question that they say it took time to prepare and couldn’t bring them out right away.”

Such was the exchange between Reiji and Graziella. It went well, but whether it was carried out the way they wanted it to, just as she said, it all depended on the upcoming battle. They had still yet to establish the source of why the information never made it there, so it was also possible that the army moved in opposition to the Royal Capital’s intent and didn’t march. In the case that this fight cornered the Empire into an inferior position, it was also possible that they end up withdrawing to avoid casualties. Maintaining a superior position from beginning to end was a condition that had to be met no matter what.

In any case, Suimei and the others were presently in the region where the troops were preparing to advance on the demons. Many tall mountains were stretched out in the northern mountain district of the Empire. The place Suimei and the others were was on the the gently sloping lower mountain areas, but if they proceeded any further, the undulations would become much more precipitous.

In that case, it would be foolish to try and gather the troops all over the area, and they wouldn’t be able to set up a base. Because of that, the troop headquarters was built on a hill to the side ready to attack the demons.

With a cliff to its back, the encampment was wide and had many tents lined up. Aside from that, there were impromptu protective walls, wooden stakes setup like they were meant to repel horses, mages and archers were confined in trenches and a large number of people were amassing all over the place.

Only a few days had passed since the army began to make a move. The region was also a wilderness with strong winds which exposed all of them to its fury. The fact that they were able to build up such an encampment with such speed in that kind of situation like their ability had not been affected at all was in no small part thanks to the power of magic.

To make the military encampment, work that required changes to the earth and stones in the terrain was done by users of the earth attribute. Work that required lumber was done by users of the wood attribute. It seemed many such mages who specialized in the field were gathered, and ended up building the enormous battle encampment.

This was one of the strong points of the Empire which had an abundance of mages. In a corner of the encampment that didn't seem cheaply made at all, Suimei looked up at the perfectly clear sky as he spoke.

“As expected of such a high place, it's getting chilly...”

It was something said that wasn't intended to be heard by anyone in particular, he simply said it because of the cold wind around him. It wasn't to the point where his breath was visible, but the difference in temperature compared to the surroundings of the Imperial Capital Filas Philia made it unpleasantly cold.

After gazing at the deep blue sky characteristic of mountain regions, Suimei lowered his gaze down to the gravel path. And on that path, still in her tiny form, Lefille was standing there with her red ponytail swaying in the wind.

“Lefi, how's your body? Think you'll make it in time?”

“There is some feedback. A little more... Within a few days I'll probably be able to return to my original form.”

“Then it seems it'll be fine.”

If Lefille herself was feeling feedback, then there wasn't any particular problems. He had created the magic circle to take care of her shrinking and had been performing the ritual to return her powers, so taking into account the time required, it was just about ready.

In that gap where she had become tiny, she didn't seem to have any

problems. It was unknown whether that was because of the power of spirits, but such a development was almost something to be envious about.

The frilly clothes she was wearing looked completely out of place on the battlefield. However, the figure of her looking into the distant sky nostalgically was quite appropriate. The reason she looked so comfortable in such a chilly environment, was likely because she was born in the lands further to the north. As the two of them continued to gaze at the blue sky from the corner of the encampment, a voice suddenly called out to them from behind.

“Suimei-dono, Lefille.”

As he turned around to the voice, Felmenia was standing there together with some soldiers.

“What’s up? Menia.”

“It seems they’ll be laying out the plans from here on out in the large tent further inside. Reiji-dono and her Highness the Princess are already headed there, if there was nothing in particular you were doing, they wanted you to come as well.”

Suimei nodded back to her, and headed towards the large tent together with Felmenia and Lefille. After passing a jumbled mess of goods piled up in a corner, watchtowers, tents stuffed with military offices and two mess halls, they finally arrived at the large tent.

As they went inside, the generals and staff officers they met before were all silently sitting in chairs. Following Felmenia’s guidance, they took their seats near Reiji’s group. The general in charge of the headquarters was Graziella’s older brother, the first Imperial Prince of the Empire, Reanat Filas Rieseld.

He had majestic ornaments in his long blonde hair and he wore luxurious clothing around his slim and beautiful body. Graziella was seated next to him as he grandly took the chief seat. It also applied back during the incident in the Empire, but he seemed to be the type who came to the actual scene fairly often. It was likely that he was also here to raise his achievements as the next in line for the throne, but setting that aside. Reanat then stood up as he faced Suimei and Reiji.

“First, I would like to greet the guests who have come here today. Your Royal Highness Titania, it is good that you have come. If you had not come to the encampment, then Astel would probably not have taken action. You have my thanks.”

“I also held doubts towards the attitude of my country. It is an honour to be of assistance.”

Titania elegantly bowed back towards Reanat’s gratitude. It was somewhat exaggerated for a simple greeting and she seemed to actually dislike it, but they had their official positions and customs to follow. After their somewhat questionable exchange ended, Reanat showed his gratitude to Reiji and Felmenia as well. And eventually, his gaze even came upon Liliana, who was sitting at the foot of the table.

“It is quite strange to greet someone who I have lost as a subordinate in this place, is it not? Liliana Zandyke.”

With a slight amount of sarcasm, Reanat made a very slight smile. The reason there was no criticism in his tone, was without a doubt because her departure from the Elite Twelve was a result of their negotiations with him.

“I’m here at the encampment, because Suimei is here.”

“Our guest from the other world is it?”

“Yes. It has been a while since we last met.”

Suimei faced Reanat and gave him a light greeting. He meant to be fairly formal, but both Graziella and Reanat looked a little confused.

“Fumu? The way you talk is quite different today is it not?”

“It’s because our positions are different from last time.”

“I see, I am quite obliged for your consideration.”

Last time during the incident, they were in a strange position where they were negotiating with each other, but this time Suimei came to cooperate. He wasn’t an enemy, treated him politely, and was older than him. In that case, Suimei had to be considerate. And because Suimei was a guest from another world, Reanat was also left in a strange position, and treated him suitably.

“Allow me to first express my gratitude to you as well. You have my thanks for instructing us on the plan to make the Alliance and the self governed state move.”

After Reanat showed his gratitude, Graziella pointed a delighted smile towards Suimei.

“To think that Reiji would make that kind of declaration.”

“Aah...”

As Suimei received unexpected gratitude for what happened, he thought back to the time he brought up his plan. It was a few days ago when they had yet to resolve the Alliance and self governed state remaining immobile.

—Try saying that if they aren’t going to send reinforcements or support, you won’t go save them.

Sitting in the living room while facing Reiji, Suimei proposed this to him with a faint smile. With a heart filled to the brim with mischief, it was still fresh in his mind that it sounded like a devil’s invitation. In any case, Reiji nodded back to him, and played out the move that would spur the Alliance and self governed state into action.

After passing along that declaration through the Salvation Church, as one would expect, the bubble built around the Alliance and the self governed state burst and they immediately declared their intent to send reinforcements and support. Whether just the fact that they wouldn’t get help from a hero when attacked by demons was the effective portion or whether they thought that they were abandoned by the Goddess was not quite clear, but it was clearly confirmed once more that a hero’s authority was quite strong.

“It truly was quite the clever scheme. It was something we could not have possibly thought of. At first we were satisfied that refugees from the north were being accepted, but we’ve unexpectedly gained quite a bit of composure. It was a very satisfactory hand to play.”

“No, I didn’t think it was all that much, but... I’m a little doubtful that nobody else could have thought of it.”

“That’s... To the people of this world, they are shirking their obligation to the

heroes. If they wronged the hero, then there is a history of that bill being definitively paid back after all. If a hero says that they will not save a country, it is something that would restrict that country's actions to the very extreme. Defying them would be the same as defying the Goddess' will. For example, even thinking of such an idea would be awe inspiring."

"I see, you mean that from the very beginning it was something unreasonable huh."

Hearing their story, Suimei was convinced. Just as Reanat said, the hero was a divine messenger to the other countries—in other words, they were in an absolute position. Both Astel and the Saadias Alliance never thought of firmly manipulating Reiji or Hatsumi. Hadorious' actions were likely the exception, but to coerce the hero into doing something, even if there was no ill will, it was likely something to feel awkward about. If by any chance it incurred the hero's displeasure, they never knew what kind of calamity would befall them, and above all else, because they would also be considered treasonous to the Goddess, there wasn't much in the terms of imprudent strategy that they could employ.

Suimei then suddenly noticed that though the gazes around him were all severe, there was a great sense of relief in them. They were all gazes which looked at him like he was a person of doubtful origin. But because they were aware he was a good friend of the hero who was summoned alongside him, there was no harshness in their gazes, and they changed to favourable gazes of admiration and astonishment. It seemed both soldiers and nobles treated matters related to the heroes as something sacred.

"—Then without delay, I would like to talk about our movements from here. There are those here who already know, but the vanguard has already moved and are slowing the demons' advance. Until the reinforcements and support arrive from each of your territories, I would like all sides to disperse to take action to stall the demons."

Reanat had both his hands on the desk and was giving a rough outline of what was going on. In short, they were buying time until their preparations were complete. In contrast to that, Lefille appeared to have doubts regarding that plan and raised her hand.

“Your Imperial Highness Reanat. Dividing soldiers on this scale for the sake of buying time seems far too sporadic. Though it is only my humble opinion, is it not a better idea to collect our forces and intercept them?”

Hearing Reanat’s instructions, she must have associated his idea of sequentially throwing their forces in as a poor move. Certainly, if their objective was to stall the demons, thinking about it from the point of exhaustion on the battlefield, it wasn’t strange to think that sending a large amount of soldiers only to stall for time was a waste of war potential. In that case, she was thinking that it would be a better strategy to use this encampment and the advantage of the terrain to meet the enemy in a serious battle.

“...?”

However, there was no reply to Lefille’s unreserved opinion. In its stead, Reanat seemed to only be staring at her in wonderment, and he tilted his head to the side as he looked at Lefille with a curious gaze.

“Your Imperial Highness, is something the matter?”

“Aah, no. My apologies, but are you truly the Shrine Maiden-dono from Noshias?”

“Y-yes, that’s true.”

“Is that so... Uumu.”

Reanat let out a groan as he confirmed it was Lefille. His grimace with a slight amount of anguish mixed in was just like he was bewildered at the disconnect between what was before his eyes and what he remembered. As his doubts weren’t cleared away, Graziella spoke up in a deliberately insulting tone.

“Elder brother, it seems that because of the spirits’ power, Shrine Maiden-dono ends up stumpy like that.”

“What do you mean stumpy!? Stumpy!?”

After scowling at Graziella for a while, Lefille cleared out her throat in a way that didn’t suit her appearance at all, and spoke to Reanat who still looked completely dumbfounded.

“Due to some small circumstances I am in this form currently, but in a few

days I will regain my original form. There is no need to worry.”

“I-I see. It is quite difficult to have a body entrusted with the power of the spirits I see...”

And with that, it seemed the conversation about Lefille’s body came to an end, Reanat had nothing more to ask her... It was said that when a person witnessed a phenomenon before their eyes that they could not comprehend, they would simply abandon any thoughts about it, this was likely just that.

There were people reacting in their surroundings, but there wasn’t a single one with a complaint or any distrust regarding this case. Suimei believed that this was also an example of the hero’s authority. In any case, as the conversation came to an end, Reanat quickly changed gears and tightened his expression.

“Well then, about your earlier question, the reason we are focusing on stalling is because we are anticipating that our reinforcements will probably arrive later than planned.”

“Meaning?”

“Just as Shrine Maiden-dono said, rather than dispersing our forces, it would be vital for us to gather our forces and clash with them all as one to put up a fight. By using our entire forces to hold them back, we could merge together with the reinforcements and push back the demons. It would be a steady battle. I also thought of this at first, but the situation has changed, I judged that we are not likely able to gather all our forces in this encampment. Therefore, we will disperse and slow down all of the advancing demons, and have the decisive battle further to the rear—I determined this to be more reliable.”

As Reanat explained this in a somewhat self deprecating tone, this time Titania raised her hand.

“Your Imperial Highness. In that case, it sounds to me like you plan on abandoning this encampment?”

“That is correct. Does your Royal Highness believe this to be a waste?”

“Though it may be imprudent of me.”

“No, I said something obstinate like my younger sister would didn’t I. As our army is abundant with mages, it wouldn’t be much of a blow to us to abandon this encampment. In other words, we’ll lure in the demons. Until our preparations are complete, we’ll only go as far as stalling them, then abandon the encampment and quickly fall back. After that, we will carry out the decisive battle at a much larger encampment prepared further to the rear. That is what we mean to do.”

It was a befitting plan for the current situation. Without hurrying to gain any achievements, he was properly conscious of the number of forces he was dealing with.

Just as Reanat said, if they retreated, left the encampment as it was, and made the demons think they were scurrying away, their forces would surely get caught up in the moment and independently take chase like beasts. If they lied in wait at the encampment further back, it was not impossible to crush every single one of them. The demons which moved across the ground and those who moved across the skies moved at different speeds, so a gap would be created in their pursuit. On top of that, this was a rugged mountain district. It would be difficult for them to keep formation, so the probability of them falling into the trap was rather high.

However, just like when Hatsumi was lured into a trap the other time, if the demons moved in a way that surpassed the tactics and common sense thought of by humans, they had to keep in mind that things could make a complete turn at any time.

In any case, there was no point in making that statement this late into things. As Suimei kept this in the corner of his mind as he stroked his chin, Reanat then alluded to the movement of Suimei’s group.

“As for our guests and the hero, I would like to entrust our headquarters to you, and have you ready to take action more flexibly.”

“Yes. Understood.”

Reiji nodded back at Reanat’s instructions without a single shred of doubt. On the other hand, Titania and Lefille just muttered a light ‘Like I thought,’ and ‘Seems so’ as if they were somewhat resigning themselves. Reiji then brought

himself close to Suimei's shoulder.

(... Hey Suimei. The two of them are acting like they get what the prince is saying with a strange attitude, but what's up with that?)

(It's probably cause in the beginning it would be bad for foreigners to pile up any achievements. The Empire needs to build up their achievements first which would likely raise the morale of the troops afterwards. Since Tia and Lefille are experienced with battle, the two of them know that we're a difficult force to handle.)

(Aah...)

(If the Imperial army can push us towards victory in the first battle, depending on the circumstances, they'll either just throw us in the middle or perhaps have us wait until the decisive battle.)

In the battlefields throughout history, the first strike and victory in the first battle was of utmost importance. If a foreign commander like Titania was the one to do so, all recognition would go to her. In that case, it wouldn't be an amusing story for the people of the Empire. For the same reasons, they wanted to avoid using Reiji who was summoned in Astel. It made sense for them to wait back in the encampment and simply prepare to take action at any time.

(It's quite troublesome to have to keep that kind of thing in mind huh...)

(Seriously.)

(Then we kind of served our purpose already just from getting the other countries to move right?)

(For the most part. Well since you're also a hero, they're probably expecting great things from you in the decisive battle.)

Having said that, Reiji was correct in that most of their role had already been completed. Depending on how the battle went, fundamentally, there was no reason to actually make use of famous people. They could use them by just publicly advertising their presence or rubbing off the responsibility of defeat from themselves to an extent.

As the talks about Suimei and Reiji's groups came to an end, they moved on

to the detailed roles allotted to each of the Empire's officers. Up until now, they had been listening quietly, but for the sake of raising their achievements, they were now quarrelling over who took on the more dangerous duties. Their army was the most resolute, or they wouldn't look back at danger at all, it was for their country. They were shouting all these things in loud voices.

As that dispute went on from its preliminary stages right to its end, the entrance to the tent suddenly flipped open. And when they looked towards the entrance, a man with a large build wearing a robe was standing there.

After saluting, he took off his hood, and the face of an old man was revealed. With white hair, drooping cheeks, many wrinkles which gave a sense of his age, and a somewhat tired expression, he sent a piercing glare into the tent with a glint in his eye. He had a strong enough spirit that nobody inside would call him out of his place for his age. It was an old man with a somewhat inconsistent presence. As he knelt down and bowed his head, Reanat called out to him.

"Gorgan. Is something the matter?"

"First, allow me to apologize to both of your Highnesses for interrupting you in the middle of the war council. I beg for forgiveness from each of the gathered generals as well."

Saying that, the old man once more bowed down deeply. Though he replied to Reanat's question with an apology to both Reanat and the generals, his manner of speaking was arrogant in a way that he was implying he was in no way inferior to them in terms of position. From his speech and behaviour, Suimei could tell that this old man was crafty. He was likely one of the officers of the Empire—a mage of high social status. As Suimei examined the old man, Liliana whispered in his ear in a quiet voice.

"That man, is Gorgan Bartwood Goalt. One, of the Empire's Elite Twelve."

"Which means."

He was probably Liliana's former superior. Since it was a battle which pretty much carried the Empire's future on its shoulders, it was inevitable that they would show up. After Gorgan stopped talking when he finished apologizing, Reanat questioned him once more.

“So?”

“Ha. I have come here on this occasion to make a humble request of your Highness.”

“Hou? You will? That is quite the unusual event.”

So it was rare for this man to make requests. Reanat raised his eyelids like it was unexpected, and then Gorgan’s gaze suddenly turned towards Suimei’s group.

“What’s the matter? Does this concern Hero-dono and his companions?”

“I have heard that on this occasion, they will be a part of our battle formation and fighting.”

“That is so, but what of it?”

“If I were to put it simply, I am dissatisfied.”

“Dissatisfied? Are you saying that you are dissatisfied that a hero is with us?”

As Reanat pointed a critical gaze back at him, Gorgan continued with an expression like he was feigning ignorance.

“If it is something that has already been decided, then we have no intention of objecting. However, there are others that are lacking with them as well, thus there are voices among the Elite Twelve who cannot consent to it.”

“It is not like they all have the authority to give commands, and they will not be giving you any orders either. Despite all that, do you still not consent?”

“It is not a problem of whether or not they can give commands.”

Gorgan promptly cut off Reanat’s implication. Unable to clearly see the meaning behind his words, Reanat squinted his eyes, and in his stead, Graziella let out a snort as she figured it out first.

“Fuu. In short, it comes down to whether they are worthy enough to stand alongside you lot.”

As Graziella cut to the chase, Gorgan nodded in reply. And then, the first to react was none other than Titania.

“Old man, are you saying that you are dissatisfied with the Hero of Salvation

Reiji-sama or myself?”

Gorgan’s statement was something that surpassed the limits of what she would permit. In a complete change from her usual elegant tone, she fired the severe wording used by one of high standing. The atmosphere in the tent gradually sharpened and became agitated from her words. The next strange occurrence was her rage filled gaze which implied that she might just cut him down at any moment.

It was to the extent that sweat was even forming on the heads of the generals gathered in the tent. Titania was a swordswoman given the nickname of Twilight Beheading Princess. The atmosphere accompanying here held a superior sharpness befitting of her ability.

But even exposed to such an atmosphere, Gorgan still appeared composed, and continued spinning his words with the same attitude.

“No, I do not doubt the abilities of Hero-dono or your Royal Highness Titania who is extolled as the Twilight Beheading Princess. Thus I also do not have a hint of dissatisfaction. However, among the companions that you have brought along, just how many among them could be said to be adequate?”

He didn’t point out anybody specifically, but his words were likely directed towards Suimei, Io Kuzami and Liliana. By his preface of ‘slipped in’ along with excluding Reiji and Titania, there was no mistaking it. Since he was being indirect, it only made his disgust stronger. Graziella then spoke up.

“Gorgan. I’ll say it beforehand, but the people other than the Hero of Salvation and her Royal Highness Titania are all people I personally brought along. Are you saying that you are dissatisfied even so?”

“With all due respect.”

“You damn geezer.”

After Graziella glared at the stubborn Gorgan for a while, she spat out a complaint. This time it was Graziella’s attendant and several of the generals who were brimming with rage as they filled the tent with a tense atmosphere.

Even if it was something they were dissatisfied with, it was something meant to be kept to himself. However, the current problem was their influence. If

someone of Gorgan's status brought up a problem with the power of the hero's companions to those at the war council, a considerable amount of displeasure would be born, and it would affect morale. This wasn't something good for those overseeing the army. If he could pinpoint a clear point to be discontent with, it would definitely cast a shadow over them.

As Gorgan stuck to his own assertion, it could be said that he was taking the morale of the army hostage. Because he was an important force in their army, they couldn't punish him here either. If it was Graziella, she may have done something, but the current supreme commander was Reanat. In that atmosphere which could numb the senses, Gorgan once more began speaking.

"I have no concerns regarding the hero Reiji-dono, her Royal Highness Titania or the esteemed White Flame."

"Then you mean to doubt the quality of everyone else?"

"Ha. The ones that those among the Elite Twelve are concerned with are Liliana Zandyke and the guests from the other world."

Lefille was not mentioned among the people Gorgan pointed out. It could just be that like Reanat, he had not noticed her since she became smaller. Io Kuzami then squinted her eyes like she heard a joke that was not funny at all.

"Hou? Are you saying that you doubt my true strength? You've got quite some nerves. That is quite the prattle coming from a mere gathering of withered branches trying to pretend to be a thick tree."

As he heard Io Kuzami's arrogant manner of speaking, Gorgan's eyebrows lifted up at a dangerous angle.

"Watch the way you speak, little girl."

"That is my line. Are you not the one who should watch the way you speak bastard? Have you grown senile with old age and forgotten the importance of choosing your words?"

Gorgan only quietly glared back at Io Kuzami's harsh words. He likely judged that any further argument would be fruitless. Eventually, his fierce gaze came to an end, and he turned towards Liliana.

“I do believe that you already know of Liliana’s capabilities, do you not, bastard?”

“There are the matters of her previous achievements as part of the Elite Twelve and her role in resolving those incidents, but in the end she is lacking. Her nature is also in question by the Elite Twelve.”

“So you cannot put your trust into one who is lacking?”

“It is not just us of the Elite Twelve, each of the generals and soldiers must also think so. I do believe her reputation is quite good from that incident, but because of that there are also many voices which are displeased with it, it is all the same.”

So he said, but Liliana didn’t seem to have any intentions of making a careless remark. She simply kept quiet and listened. As talks about Liliana came to an end, his sunken eyes then shifted over to Suimei.

“And then, there’s me.”

Gorgan didn’t seem to have much in particular to say, and he only gave a grave nod without saying anything further.

“And so, Gorgan, what is it that you wish to do?”

“I would like you to let us test these three people.”

“By test, you mean?”

As Reanat asked him, Gorgan looked up at the ceiling with a shameless attitude.

“Let’s see. How about we have matches between them and three members of the Elite Twelve?”

“I see... I understand your demand. However, I do not understand what all of you have to gain from this. Even if you understand their abilities, just what kind of that influence does that have on you? Even if you do not end up acknowledging them, it is impossible that I will withdraw them from the fight you know? Our enemies are demons. It’s better if even a single additional human is present for the battle after all.”

“Of course, no matter the result, we will find it reasonable that they are

included in the battle. However, it is a required truth that we have tested them.”

“In other words, you wish to demonstrate the Elite Twelve’s dignity, is it?”

Reanat came to an understanding of Gorgan’s intentions and let out a convinced voice. It wasn’t something as refined as demonstrating the abilities of the outsiders to those around them and dispelling the ill feelings towards them. One of the reasons was likely to contain the objections coming from among the Elite Twelve, but from the flow of their conversation, he intended to use the fight against the outsiders as bait to once more demonstrate the authority of the Elite Twelve to those around them. It would be bad for them to test out the hero, but dealing with the hero’s companions was a good compromise and they would be easier to deal with than a hero. Of course, if they won, they could use the hero as a pretext to raise the fame of the Elite Twelve.

It was transparent that they were expecting to use the brightness of the star known as the hero to enhance the brightness of their own nearby star. At any rate, the conversation moved forward, and was now at the boundary of whether or not it was going to happen or not, and Suimei let out a disconcerted sigh.

“So bothersome.”

He spat out without hiding his annoyance towards the constitution of what was called an organization and towards what was about to happen. However, it wasn’t like this was something Suimei was unfamiliar with. There were similar types of groups even back in the other world. Not limited to magicians, there were occasions where those who held great abilities easily became arrogant. They would doubt the abilities of those intruding on their turf, and would forcefully pick a fight to establish a hierarchy. Because it was so uncivilized, the Thousand Evenings Association served as a mediator between groups, but in this world it wasn’t like such an intense authority could exist.

Gorgan seemed to take Suimei’s idle complaint as arrogance, and was glaring directly at him. However, after having competed with so many magicians before, Suimei was already accustomed to handling such a gloomy atmosphere without causing any further waves. Without any intentions of keeping his

thoughts to himself, Gorgan averted his gaze and snorted.

And as their eyes separated, Suimei partially closed his eyes and looked at Gorgan once more. From his appearance, he looked like an old man with a large build. He had a moss green robe wrapped around his body and looked to be an experienced master. Not limited to just magic which employed the elements, he must have stuck his hands in all sorts of mysteries with no consistency. Evidence of his body being unable to bear the effects of such experimenting could be seen all over his body.

His eyes were clouded, the tips of his fingers looked withered like dying plants and had turned yellow. As things stood, the inside of his body likely couldn't be any better either. In contrast to his sturdy appearance, his body was tattered from overuse. However, the reason Suimei could catch a glimpse of an uncommon ferociousness within all that was because he was someone who aspired towards the mysterious. The lecherous light he could see behind his eyes was the karma of one who was unable to stop craving for the mysterious.

It wasn't like Suimei couldn't sympathize with that, but seeing his body, just as Io Kuzami had appraised him, he did indeed give the impression of a bundle of withered branches trying to form a sturdy tree.

And sure enough, Io Kuzami's words granted Gorgan's wish for a match.

"I do not mind. I shall scatter those who make light of me. Is it not a pleasant thought? It's a situation that the Japanese love."

"I also, do not mind."

Liliana followed up after her. She was not timid in the least. The reason he could see an unshakable confidence in her was likely due to the new mysteries that she had touched upon. And so, the last to respond, was Suimei.

"Whatever. I'll do it to."

After the two of them agreed, he lost his choice of backing out in the end. While lamenting the fact that he recently kept getting caught in the flow of things, Suimei let out a sigh and gave up.



Right after Reanat acknowledged Gorgan's request, the war council in the large tent came to an end. As for the matches that they decided on, it seemed it was going to begin right after their preparations were complete. In any case, those preparations were limited to having their mages who specialized in the earth attribute create a simple stage in the encampment out of stones, so it meant it was going to start pretty soon. As Suimei walked around and gazed at the endless sky, Reiji, who was walking next to him, made a bitter smile.

"It's turned into something weird huh."

"Seriously. They want to test us? They're just arbitrarily discontent, normally that kind of thing makes them hard to handle and leads to a demotion. Don't they have the self awareness of a member of an organization?"

As if letting out all his irritation, Suimei was rattling on with excessive vigour. Because he himself was a member of an organization, he couldn't help but hold doubts towards Gorgan's behaviour. Perhaps because he was unable to get rid of those ill feelings, Suimei just groaned quietly. Looking at this as something irrational, Reiji let out a clear opinion on the matter.

"That person must have enough power so that they just can't do that... Or rather, those people, probably."

"My goodness, it's a perfect example of those with authority being irresponsible. Being so hung up on authority that they need to do this kind of crap is seriously something idiots would do."

"Ah, did Suimei also notice that they were trying to use us?"

"Well yeah. No matter how you put it, his selfishness was completely obvious."

"Thought so."

"There is safety in silence. In the end, the fact that they basically showed that they want us to be human sacrifices to their glory is a poor way of dealing with it."

As Suimei looked to his side after spitting that out, he caught a glimpse of Reiji's serious face that he had been seeing more of lately.

“Hey, Suimei, do you think it’ll be alright?”

“Hm? The match? I should be fine you know? I’ll show you I can cut through it easily.”

“I’m not particularly worried about Suimei. You’re not the type to say you could do something without actually being able to after all. I’m sure you’ll manage to cut through it.”

“Then what is it?”

“The one I’m worried about is Mizuki... Or not, Io Kuzami.”

“Aah, that one.”

Suimei unintentionally let out his voice as he heard that. And then, Reiji made a sour expression like he had just eaten something extremely bitter.

“That’s... Probably not alright, huh... At the end, she was totally motivated wasn’t she? Isn’t she definitely going to do something?”

“Sounds about right...”

Reiji’s gloomy sigh spread out into their surroundings. He was likely imagining Io Kuzami running wild during the match. If Io Kuzami was the revival of Mizuki’s setting like Reiji thought she was, he wouldn’t be able to stop the train wreck that she would cause. As long as she was faithful to the setting, there was definitely going to be some sort of disaster. After clearing out his throat, for some reason, Suimei started to do vocal exercises like he was preparing to do an imitation. And then, he thrust out his finger and covered his left eye with his left hand.

“—FUHAHAHAHAHA! Hear me, oh you tiny existences who have run rampant across this world, you homo sapiens known as humans! What will unfold before you is my brilliant banquet. You bastards who are my invitees shall all catch a glimpse of my Grand Territory known as the True Darkness...! Or something like that.”

“As one would expect, you’re good at that. I can really see it happening. Un.”

“I’m not happy to be praised about it.”

“In any case, we should also be careful.”

“Will something come out of us being careful about it?”

“At the very least, I think we can avoid being dragged in.”

Though he said that, Reiji didn't seem particularly confident about it. That was just how much he saw Io Kuzami as a walking disaster. As he lingered in those heavy feelings, Reiji suddenly shifted his gaze towards something else.

“... Anyways, what is that?”

“Hm?”

As Suimei followed Reiji's gaze, he spotted the Io Kuzami in question. Not only that, she wasn't alone, and seemed to be talking to someone. Worried that she had done something again, they drew nearer while concealing themselves, and noticed that it was Lefille that was with her.

Interested in the odd combination, they came even closer while quieting their footsteps. Looking closely, they could see something like pompoms in Lefille's hands. As they listened in on their conversation, they could hear Lefille's bewildered voice.

“... So, why am I holding this kind of thing?”

“Umu. Because only you are unable to have the opportunity to stand on the battle stage to have the opportunity to unleash your own pathos, it has been decided that you will take on cheering activities for myself and those who are standing by for their own duels. I have just decided upon it. If it is cheering, then it must have this appearance.”

Hearing Io Kuzami speak, Suimei and Reiji were both making faces like something harsh was happening right before their eyes. They both placed a hand on their brow, closed their eyes, and shook their heads. Right after they decided to be careful, the god of this world truly had no such mercy for them.

“So, you're saying I should cheer you on?”

“That's right.”

“Just me?”

“That's how it is. This is also befitting of my disciple, but this time she happens to be a participant.”

“If it’s about not participating, doesn’t that also apply to her Highness Titania?”

“No, that one cannot do it.”

“Why?”

Io Kuzami then gazed off into the distance like she was looking at her bitter enemy, and began lying.

“Titania Root Astel. She is the owner of a glacial heart colder than one looking for employment during the employment ice age of 1994, a carnivore wearing the bulky hide of tenderness that she shows to everyone. I have no ears to listen to her speak.”

“... I don’t really understand the expression, but you mean to say that her Highness is unsuitable.”

“Umu.”

As Suimei was wondering just what she meant by ‘Umu’ after making such a heartless declaration, Lefille stuck out the pompoms.

“So, what are these?”

“Those are the sacred treasures used for cheering, pompoms. The one who is cheering raises these to the sky, and must yell out ‘Hurray~, hurray~,’ along with a name. Give it a try.”

“U? Un? ‘H-hurray~, hurray~, Suimei-kun!’... Is that about right?”

Despite being completely bewildered, Lefille followed along with Io Kuzami’s instructions, and began moving the pompoms. However, Io Kuzami seemed unable to stomach the way she was swinging them around.

“Be more cheerful! And move your hands more vigorously! If you don’t than the mysteries behind the sacred treasures won’t work!”

“L-like this? Hurray~! Hurray~!”

“Wrong! More like this, with a passionate soul! Shout out with your ultra soul!”

Matching Io Kuzami’s voice, Lefille began to absurdly swing around the

pompoms.

“... What, is that?”

“Lefi-san~. You don't have to seriously keep her company you know~? It's fine if you even knock her senseless you know~?”

Suimei spoke in a quiet voice, and thus Lefille could not hear him. Titania also incidentally happened to be nearby, and came up beside Suimei and Reiji. And she also seemed to have been watching the event unfold.

“Rather, isn't it about time that we must do something about that child?”

““I know right...””

They two of them replied with a heavy sigh one atop the other. And before long, they were informed that the stage had been prepared.



—Currently, one of the Empire's Elite Twelve, Aerith Melfein was surrounded by soldiers who were forming a circle without a single gap between them. That being said, it was not just her. Inside that circle there was one other who could be called one of the Elite Twelve and could also be called one of the hero's companions.

Saying that they were surrounded may have made it sound bad, but there was a proper reason for that. The reason was that the wide stone foundation before their eyes was the stage for the matches with the hero's companions.

This was all prepared by the head of the Elite Twelve, Gorgan. This stage was prepared as a way of demonstrating the Empire's strength to the hero summoned in another country and the Twilight Beheading Princess, as well as the other outsiders. It was in no way to prove that they were unfit for the battlefield. And Aerith was one of those chosen to fight in the matches.

Though Aerith held a position among the Elite Twelve, she was no more than the daughter of a small farming village in the south of the Empire. The village was always in need of more workers, so as if it was natural, she had an older brother and sister, as well as a younger brother and sister, and all of them made a living working for the village. And as she assisted her mother and father

alongside her siblings until she was an adult, she always thought that just like all the other young girls in the village, she would marry a man from the village and support it until the end of her life. That was the obvious life of a daughter born as a farmer after all.

However, that obvious life took a complete change when mages from the Magic Institute appeared. At the time, the Emperor was pressed to strengthen the military, and due to that, people with any talent for magic were being gathered far and wide throughout the Empire. That's why even the small farming village Aerith lived in had mages from the Magic Institute dispatched to it.

The condition for being chosen by them was extremely simple. It came down to whether one had the groundings for being able to use magic. It was also at a higher level than the standard used for the Magic Institute itself. As all of the men and women of the village immediately gathered, they began their measurements, and it was determined that Aerith had a strong disposition for magic.

And the rest went without saying. In exchange for a hefty salary, Aerith was invited to the Imperial Capital, became one of its mages, and was eventually chosen as one of the Elite Twelve. Her journey went with great strides, but that in no way meant that she was being lax. To become a mage, she first attended the Magic Institute. But because she was a country hick and her skin was swarthy like wheat, she spent her days there being made fun of. The amount of harassment she went through was simply uncountable.

But even so, Aerith continued to study magic without giving up, and eventually distinguished herself among her peers. When it was judged that she was fit to take part in actual combat, she even stepped onto many battlefields.

As a result, she was singled out by royalty and selected as the youngest ever among the Elite Twelve at the time. To Aerith, there was no higher honour that she could think of, and it was her life's pride. All those who made fun of her at the Magic Institute—those who were full of pride for their birth and talent, were all exceeded by her steady effort. This served as the foundation for her self confidence, and allowed her to recognize herself, it was completely natural.

From her inherent quick wits and effort, she was the young girl who became the youngest of the Elite Twelve. That was the evaluation of society regarding Aerith. However, that was several years back, and ended up crumbling so easily.

That was because of Liliana Zandyke's existence. She was the adopted daughter of one of the Elite Twelve, Rogue Zandyke. She wielded the powerful and rare attribute among the elements which acted in contrast to light, the attribute of darkness. And without even waiting for the age of five, she broke Aerith's record.

If Aerith took great strides to become one of the Elite Twelve, then Liliana did so in a flash. After going through several examinations under the sponsorship of Rogue Zandyke, Liliana was chosen as one of the Elite Twelve without ever standing on a battlefield let alone enrolling in the Magic Institute.

There was no way Aerith wouldn't be discontent about it. In spite of the fact that Liliana was also from a village in the sticks, just because she was discovered by one of the Elite Twelve, she attained the same position that Aerith went through hardships to attain, and stole the title of youngest ever away from her. Though she didn't let it out, deep inside she was unable to clear away her resentment.

As Liliana accomplished her missions one after the other and piled up her achievements, Aerith's hostility towards her only grew stronger. Even when they would see each other once in a while during missions, just the sight of her would increase Aerith's irritation. That is why Aerith showed great discontent in the fact that Liliana would be part of the battles to come.

Accumulating her boiling rage within her chest, Aerith walked towards the stage. She was passing the audience towards the grand stage which would bring Liliana Zandyke's defeat.

—She wanted to bring an end to the ill feelings in her heart. And then she would prove once and for all who was superior right here in this place.

As she let her passion burn up once more, she looked to the side of the stage where two other people were standing. Both of them were people chosen to take part in these matches just like Aerith.

“—Oioi, if you strain yourself so much won't it affect the fight sempai? You

really okay there?”

As if pouring water on her meagre determination, the one to call out to her was one of the Elite Twelve, Slane Zolnuf. He was a young man who was chosen as one of the Elite Twelve fairly recently, and though he was older than Aerith, he was still her junior. He was very quick witted, but he was also very boastful, and always acted in a way which belittled and made light of others. Because of that, Aerith did not approve of Slane. The Elite Twelve were supposed to be both proud and noble after all.

“Aerith. Display the utmost of your power so that you do not bring any damn shame to the name of the the Elite Twelve. Well, a bastard plebeian like yourself likely cannot achieve a suitable victory anyways.”

Following after Slane, the voice of a man in his prime called out to her. With a pompous tone, every single word that came out of his mouth was like the disgusting words of a typical noble. He was Baaldan Dostolf Zegent. Taking advantage of an empty seat on the Elite Twelve at the time, he used his influence to slip in. Among the Elite Twelve he was the most unsuitable member. His power as a mage was certain, but that was not accompanied by good technique or abilities. However, because he displayed a matchless talent for trickery, he had managed to keep his seat on the Elite Twelve. In an entirely different way from Slane, he was also a nasty man.

In all times and places, it was ordinary for powerful mages to be eccentrics, but the current Elite Twelve was nothing but a cruel lot that couldn't even be called eccentric. Currently, to Aerith, the only upright members would be just about Graziella and Gorgan. However, even more so than Slane and Baaldan, Liliana was someone who was unsuitable for a seat among the Elite Twelve. She was only a lowly existence who capitalized on her parent Rogue Zandyke's fame to take her seat.

(The Elite Twelve are not so naive.)

Aerith could no longer let those who relied on their parents' influence or those who did not actually have the ability swagger around as if they were important. She would stake her pride as one who needed to put in extraordinary amount of effort.

Right before she ascended to the stage, the member of the current Elite Twelve that she respected the most aside from Graziella stood before her. It was the head of the Elite Twelve, Gorgan Bartwood Goalt.

“... Aerith, you do understand correct? Just because she is a former associate and younger than you doesn't mean that you can hold back. The honour of the Elite Twelve is at stake in this fight.”

“Ha. I understand fully. I will demonstrate to that foolish little girl just how serious it is to abandon the Elite Twelve of her own accord with my water magic.”

After bowing her head, she looked him straight in the eyes, and Gorgan nodded back to her in satisfaction. After bowing once more, she stepped forth towards the first battle and onto the stage, where Liliana was already waiting.

“To think that someone who ran away would shamelessly show themselves like this. Are you saying that you suddenly feel like returning to the Elite Twelve?”

“I didn't, particularly come here, because I wanted to be, in the Elite Twelve. And besides, the only reason, I became an Elite Twelve, was to support the Colonel. I have no attachment, to an Elite Twelve, without the Colonel.”

“How impudent. You're probably using this fight to raise your reputation and waiting for Reanat-sama and Graziella-sama to call for you. Despite being a child you're quite shrewd.”

“...”

Though Aerith was spitting out abusive words, Liliana's expression remained clear. This little girl was always like that. Despite being a child, she showed no child like behaviour. Despite having malice thrown at her, she wouldn't get mad, she wouldn't even get sad. It was like she was saying that such provocations didn't even give her an itch as she always made that composed expression. That's why she got on Aerith's nerves. Anything and everything about the little girl got on her nerves.

“I will show you the power appropriate of one of the Elite Twelve.”

“By all means.”

Having said what they had to say, they each took a stance. There was no referee who would call the beginning of the match. This was a fight to demonstrate the authority of the Elite Twelve and not just any regular match. The Elite Twelve had to bestow defeat upon the outsiders that anyone and everyone could understand.

Thus, Aerith was planning on settling things in an instant. If she settled it right at the very beginning, that would be the utmost and overwhelmingly complete victory she could attain. That was a fighting style that was appropriate for the Elite Twelve.

“—Oh water. Thou shall gather into a violent mass of water and shoot forth. Surpass the gale and pierce through the enemy.”

Aerith began chanting magic of the water attribute. Her talent for magic—that is, the great talent that the mages who came to her village discovered, was magic of the water attribute.

... Aerith could not use any attribute except for water. All other members of the Elite Twelve were able to use multiple attributes, but she was only able to use a single one. However, her gift for using that single attribute was far mightier than anybody else, and could be used far more precisely than anybody else. That was why she became one of the Elite Twelve.

“—Go, Aqua Bullet Rapid Starter!”

Holding out her hand and pointing it towards Liliana, she let out her keyword. And at the same time, a large amount of water formed at her fingertip and wrapped itself up like a whirlpool before firing out immediately.

The speed of the water she fired out in a flash could not be caught by the naked eye. On top of that, Liliana was unable to see out of one eye which produced a blind spot. It was the most suitable magic to use against her. However, the flashing water bullet that she unleashed was evaded as if its trajectory had been completely predicted.

“Wha—!?”

All Liliana did was hop once like a wild rabbit. Just from that meagre motion, the flashing water bullet she fired out collided against the barricade set around

the stage and dispersed.

It was supposed to be unavoidable. But Liliana evaded it with an expression saying that it was completely trivial to do so. It would have almost been acceptable if she knew about the magic, but Aerith had never shown it to her even once. Nevertheless, the result was just before her eyes.

It was surprising, but she immediately put her emotions back in order. If she evaded it meant that she at least had a certain amount of ability. It was different from what Aerith was expecting, but it just meant there was a small calculation error in her predictions and reality. If she covered for the calculation error, then Liliana had absolutely no chance of winning.

“—Oh water! Thou shalt gather into a violent mass of water and shoot forth! Surpass the gale and pierce through the enemy! Aqua Bullet Rapid Starter!”

What she settled on was the same flashing water bullet magic that she used earlier. However, this time there was more than one, there was a total of five flashing water bullets at the tip of her finger. She aimed them all towards Liliana at a distance, and fired them one after the other. Aerith held firm that while Liliana was evading, her posture would break, and her last bullet would pierce through successfully. However—

“Is it, over, already?”

All five of the flashing water bullets were evaded. Even though she shouldn't have been able to see their trajectories, with a childish behaviour, she simply evaded them as if they were stones being tossed by children in a completely frivolous manner.

“Tch—Don't look down on me!”

Seized by Liliana's provocative question, Aerith let out a shout. And then, just as she was preparing to use her next magic, Liliana's mana became highly excited. Her mana soaked into the surrounding atmosphere and began stimulating Aerith's skin like a volatile acid was prickling her. This was the manifestation of the mana which was characteristic to Liliana.

“Then, it is about time, that I start.—Oh hermit. Hidden on the threshold of the realm of the dead, oh servant of shadows. Right now, from that abyss, raise

your innocent voice which causes all creation to quiver and tremble.”

Liliana began chanting a strange spell. As she wove that chant which did not call out to the elements, a black magic circle suddenly appeared at her feet, and following after that, many dark black bubbles began appearing in the atmosphere surrounding her which looked like worms had been devouring the air.

Aerith guessed that this was Liliana’s specialty, magic with the darkness attribute. Darkness bubbled up to the surface, vanished, and bubbled up once more. Every time this action repeated, the number of bubbles appearing increased.

Magic with the darkness attribute did not directly attack its target. Fundamentally, it was magic which affected its target’s mind. It could render the target comatose, or torment them, and it was also possible to use it for defence. There were many techniques which used it which were simply eerie.

While the bubbles of darkness were increasing in number, Aerith found herself painfully reluctant to do anything as alarm bells rang out in her mind at the impending danger of dark magic, and she found it difficult to go on the offensive. As she stood by passively trying to decide whether to go on the offensive or defensive, before long, the air before her eyes began to fester as if being encroached on by the darkness. As if the sky was slowly being wrenched, it coiled into a vortex. She started to be able to see an asymmetrical transparent pattern as if she was looking through warped glass.

Eventually, a pallid light lit up at its centre. The transparent and warped space gradually took on a pale blue colour. Aerith couldn’t understand what was happening. She couldn’t tell what would happen next. She had no memories of such a magic. Even in the Magic Institute and on the battlefield, she had never seen such a thing.

As Aerith boldly began chanting her defensive magic, beyond the pallid light, bubbling darkness and twisted space, a single beast appeared.

A beast—from its figure it appeared to be a dog. It’s body was filled to the brim with the pallid light that seemed to be constantly seeping into its surroundings, it had pitch black eye sockets that looked like they could suck one

in, and it had a body large enough to match Liliana's height. After it finished manifesting in a magical way, Liliana walked up beside the dog, and affectionately patted its head.

“—From now on, your name, is Howler.”

The moment Liliana bestowed a name upon the beast born from the darkness and will-o'-the-wisp, a bright red light born of mana filled its eye sockets. And in the next instant, the dog given the name Howler raised a howl that shook heaven and earth. That sound wave which felt like an electric shock spread throughout the stage, no, the entire military encampment. It was an extremely loud voice, but mysteriously it didn't carry any sense of menace for some reason.

“... I don't know what kind of magic that is, but magic that creates a mere beast couldn't possibly...”

After speaking, Aerith quietly chanted a spell and prepared to fire a flashing water bullet at the dog. However, as if it was waiting for orders, the dog stayed perfectly still without budging. It was the perfect target like that. Without hesitating, Aerith fired the flashing water bullet. Water flew faster than it could be reflected in one's eyes, and accompanied by trailing dust and a surging spray, it pierced into Howler.

“Did you see that!?!..... Eh?”

—Or it should have. Raising her voice in triumph slightly early for a moment, Aerith's voice changed to one of bewilderment as her triumph vanished and was replaced with doubt. Howler didn't make a single noise as it stood in place. Betraying her imagination of what the flashing water bullet would do, the moment it was about to strike Howler, it completely vanished.

It was as if it was negated by some invisible force. Magic was not something that would vanish due to magic. When conflicting attributes acted against each other, it wouldn't end so quietly. This was especially the case when magic collided against each other. The flashing water bullet should have had some sort of effect on the dog. But even so, it simply vanished. Vanished into nothingness. It seemed this also surprised Liliana somewhat, as she squinted her eye and looked at Howler.

“So this, is rank disparity extinction.”

Aerith didn't understand just what kind of phenomenon it was, but she didn't have the leisure to worry about it.

“If the flashing water bullet won't work, then...”

“No, it is not, your turn. Go, Howler!”

As Liliana directed it, the dog sprang to life, jumped up above the stage, and began dashing towards Aerith. It's speed and movement was just like a beast's. No, that was precisely what it was. However, even if its movements were different from a human's, she wouldn't so simply lose her composure. Aerith was one of the Elite Twelve, she had fought on many battlefields up until this day. If she could be done in by such movements, it would be impossible for her to be standing where she was. While casting a pallid light into its surroundings, Howler came rushing in while moving erratically to the left and right.

“—Oh water. Because thou art in agreement with my thoughts, become lithe and tough. Extend from my fingertip, and become a blade which cuts apart all things. Blade Act Liquid!”

Aerith fired out her magic. Naturally, it was of the water attribute. With magic at her fingertip, a flowing blade of water broke out, and lashed out like a whip. While the blade of water constantly emitted the sound of flowing water, it wined through the air like a snake towards Howler. Unlike the flashing water bullet, Howler assertively took evasive action against the blade of water. While evading the blade of water which was mowing down the surroundings, it took some distance from Aerith. On the complete opposite side of Liliana, it was positioned to sandwich Aerith between them.

“Tch—squirming around... Then how about this!”

Making that declaration, Aerith poured all her might into the next chant.

“—Oh water. Thou shall coil around everything before me like a vortex, swallow everything inside a calamity. Bestow pain upon all within your body, and massacre my enemies within your embrace! Hydrant Abyss Sphere!”

The moment she let out her keyword, water broke out as if wrapping up everything on the stage and began flowing in a single direction. She could hear

the surprised voices of the soldiers, and the voices of the mages maintaining the barricade begin to panic as the flow of the water gradually accelerated. A tornado of water took shape. Aerith was also within the tornado, but this magic had no effect on its caster. As the massive vortex gradually contracted, it submerged her enemies within the tornado.

It was a merciless attack. However, since she was told to show no mercy, it didn't matter whether or not anybody died. No, to her, it would have been the most satisfactory result if it resulted in a death. As she began making a gloomy smile in her heart while continuing her magic, she suddenly heard something.

—Howler's voice grew louder.

What rose up towards the heavens was a sound like a roar. There was no single word to properly describe it. If it was a dog or wolf, it would be a howl that anybody would have heard before, but it was as if the beast before her eyes had lightning constantly ringing out from where it was standing, and it was spitting out the tremors of thunder from its mouth. If one was to tell her it was 'the monster which brought all earthquakes to the world' that she was told of when she was a child, she would believe it without any doubt. And the power of that howl was tremendous. The air shook, and the vortex closing in on the stage as well as even the barricades in their surroundings were blown away in an instant.

“That's ridiculous!?”

Aerith couldn't help but exclaim her surprise at the impossible phenomenon. The soldiers and mages in the audience, as well as the other members of the Elite Twelve all raised their voices in surprise in unison.

The beast created by the darkness attribute should have been magic which only unleashed an attack in the shape of a dog. In spite of that, it used some other power to blow away Aerith's magic. Magic was something which only took a single predetermined movement. There was no way it should have been able to take on some other action other than the rules which were established at the time of its creation. However, there was an existence right before Aerith's eyes that made that possible. Letting out a low growl, it was looking at her while standing still. It was as if there was a 'real beast' carrying the power of

darkness right there.

Having her attention caught by Howler, Aerith suddenly heard light footsteps behind her. When she noticed this, Liliana Zandyke was closing in.

—Crap. That word gradually rose up in Aerith’s mind. Liliana was the daughter of the swordsman extolled throughout the entire empire, the Sword Master of the Lonely Figure, Rogue Zandyke. Aerith had heard that she was capable of not only magic, but also had knowledge on how to use a sword. In that case, even if she was empty-handed, it was bad to let her draw any closer. Aerith clicked her tongue at that thought, but Liliana was closing in unexpectedly quickly. And while she was doing so, Liliana began to mutter.

“—My hand is the fetter which is entrusted with dark desire. Engrave the illness of my touch on the heart of he who loiters before me, and chill them with despair.”

—Negative Touch. The moment Liliana Zandyke finished that chant, a pallid blue light identical to the one Howler was letting out began pouring out of her gloved right hand. It looked just like the nocturnal luminescence one sometimes saw at graveyards, the ‘loitering spirits.’

Liliana’s hand swept towards Aerith, and having been slow to take evasive manoeuvres, her arm had been grazed. She then noticed the growling of a dog behind her. And the moment she heard that, she set aside her appearance and took evasive action. Ignoring her posture, she focused entirely on dodging. As she tumbled atop the stage, Howler’s jaws snapped shut right where she was just standing.

If she hadn’t moved reflexively, she would’ve been bitten down and spat out. As a cold sweat trickled down her spine while she stood up—just at that time.

“Uu, gu—? Wh-what is this?”

Suddenly, Aerith was no longer able to raise one of her arms. Noticing the abnormality, she looked at her arm, but there wasn’t any visible wounds on it. However, for some reason, her arm would no longer move the way she wanted it to. It was like the sluggish feeling one had when one just woke up, but it felt like a delusion where that sense was fully contained to just her arm.

the Elite Twelve were being made light of. It was a heavy act that far surpassed the limits of what could be pardoned.

However, just because she was roaring in anger, it wasn't like the current situation would change at all. If she left it to her emotions now to weave together magic, such halfhearted magic wouldn't have any effect on Howler let alone Liliana. And having said that, if she started to use magic with a long chant, Howler would definitely cut her off.

In front of her, was Liliana Zandyke. Behind her, was the pallid beast, Howler. It was unfair. Truly unjust. Those words gradually rose up unintentionally inside Aerith's throat. In spite of it being a one on one match, she had to fight not only her opponent but one other. It was cowardly. There was no other way of describing it but cowardly. Though she wanted to say that, the Elite Twelve's pride would not allow her to. Moreover, it seemed that Liliana Zandyke even anticipated those emotions as she spoke.

"I don't really mind, if Howler steps back you know? Though that's only, if you complain loudly, that it is cowardly, right here."

Without taking Aerith's feelings into consideration at all, she unleashed those words at her. It would be fine if she complained, but she had no excuse to do that kind of thing. If she did, it would drag the Elite Twelve's dignity down to the ground.

If this was just a two on one situation, she wouldn't be irritated about it. Her senses were sharp, she even knew that the audience in their surroundings had dropped the fruits they were snacking on in surprise. Then when it came to the most recent phenomenon, it didn't even need to be said. Even if she was surrounded by ten assassins, she wouldn't feel threatened. However, her brain wasn't reacting normally to the young girl and pallid dog before her eyes. Every single one of her defensive plans that she could think of to deal with being surrounded seemed like they wouldn't work at all.

Liliana once more began murmuring a chant. Aerith felt like those words pouring out endlessly that she couldn't hear were all disparaging words as Liliana looked down on her. And along with that, the atmosphere in the surroundings took a sudden change which made the whole thing all the more

provoking to Aerith. That was why, she had to seal that mouth even a moment earlier.

All she had to do was seal that mouth which was at the root of everything that threatened her, that constantly changing phenomenon, those provocative words that criticized her verbal slip. Therefore, with all her might, she would stake all her honour and pride. Letting the hatred and rage burn in her heart, she elevated her mana with her entire body.

—However, that accumulation of mana, was drowned out by an accumulation of mana which far exceeded hers.

“He who is in our surroundings, the one that our eyes cannot see—”



It was a little before Liliana fired out the decisive blow at Aerith. One of the other participants in the matches that day, Suimei, was together with Felmenia watching the flow of Liliana’s match. He was currently somewhat separated from Reiji and the others. For the purpose of evaluating Liliana’s fight, he separated himself from them in a way where they couldn’t hear his conversation.

On top of the stage, it was just about the time that Liliana let out a chant, and Howler came out. Felmenia was watching Liliana use magic, but she questioned Suimei with a somewhat puzzled expression.

“Is that... A familiar?”

“That’s right. There’s a lot of familiars which take the shape of animals, but that is just one among them. A familiar made out of a charm which was given shape.”

Felmenia held doubts towards the way Suimei called it ‘a charm,’ and wrinkled the crease in her brow even further.

“Out of a charm? She didn’t make it out of magic?”

“Yeah, a charm. Saying she made it out of magic... Isn’t particularly wrong, but that thing wasn’t formed by the spell itself, but by the peculiar power held in those words.”

“And that is, a charm.”

While watching Aerith brandish her blade of water, Suimei nodded back to Felmenia. He then looked at Felmenia with a challenging look.

“If it was Menia, how would you break through that?”

“How I would erase Liliana’s familiar? Umumu...”

An answer did not float up immediately in Felmenia’s head, and she began groaning with a grim face. While she was doing so, a voice called out from behind them.

“—Hou? White Flame-dono does not know how?”

As they turned around towards the charming and husky voice, they saw golden hair and a military uniform. With a faint smile, the one to cut into their conversation was Graziella Filas Rieseld. Having heard that question, she spoke like she knew the answer. Felmenia then spoke up in a somewhat surprised tone at her arrival.

“Does your Highness Graziella have an answer?”

“Well yeah.”

“If it is alright with you, then I would like to hear it though.”

“I do not particularly mind, but there is not much meaning if you do not respond to that guy checking on your answer yourself. Seems he’ll dislike it if I leak out the principle behind it too.”

Speaking of the man who was being labelled as stingy by Graziella...

“I won’t say something that stingy.”

“You’re not going to hide it? Contrary to expectations you are quite lavish huh. From what I’ve seen is that not something like a trump card?”

“It’s not that painful to have the way that works dispelled.”

“It is the normal practice for trump cards to be hidden as much as possible.”

“From my perspective, trump cards are something that one must have as many as possible of. Well, if it’s like that, then the word trump card may end up being a bit wrong, but—you get what I’m saying right?”

“It’s an extravagant thing to say, but for now I’ll simply reply with ‘that is certainly true.’”

Graziella answered in a somewhat meek manner. She likely didn’t really want to agree with a rival at a moment’s notice. Setting that aside, having sensed Felmenia gazing at her like she was being urged on, Graziella began talking of the method to overcome the familiar.

“If White Flame-dono is unable to come up with an answer, it means you are thinking about it too hard. That thing you call a familiar is something created from Liliana Zandyke’s words, and so, that thing is in a sense, a cluster of words. That is to say, in a manner of speaking, it fights by the words that Liliana uses with intention behind them. Words are a concept which is composed of the voice, so if one or the other is stolen from her, that thing will not longer be able to take shape. Stealing away a concept itself is probably quite difficult, so in this case it would be fine to steal away the foundation of those words, the sound, away from that familiar. How is that?”

Graziella turned a serious gaze towards Suimei, who gave her answer a passing grade without any hesitation.

“Yeah, exactly. Strictly speaking, the proper answer would be to make it so that sound cannot exist in the surroundings, but you could say that stealing that away is just another means of doing so.”

Having heard Graziella’s explanation and Suimei summing it up, something finally struck home with Felmenia, and she vigorously raised her hand.

“I also thought of something!”

“In other words, something other than the answer just now?”

“Yes! If Liliana’s familiar is made of words, then using words with meaning that run counter to it, or that perhaps counterbalances its existence would work!”

After giving her answer, Felmenia waited for Suimei’s reply with bated breath. In contrast, Graziella found the answer of counterbalancing its existence unexpected, and made a very interested expression.

“Hou? Words with difference meaning to counterbalance its existence huh...

In that case, to make use of the chant which forms it, and oppose it right?”

Felmenia nodded back towards Graziella’s interpretation. And then, Suimei also gave a satisfied nod.

“That is also one thing you can do. Using magic which has the opposite effect, in other words, using counter magic is just one more means of doing so.”

Having her answer assessed as correct, Felmenia showed a slightly triumphant pose. She was likely delighted that she hadn’t fallen behind Graziella.

“Suimei Yakagi. If it was you, how would you handle it?”

“Me? I would obstruct that magic before it could be fully knit together, disassemble it and use rebound air to make the caster eat it. Well, that’s only if it takes time to construct the spell like Liliana did here.”

“Fumu. What is that rebound air?”

“It’s the fatal failure of high ranking magic, or the failure of the final process in the actions which make up magic made up of multiple steps. In other words, before the ‘manifestation of magic,’ in the case that the primary factor of the magic’s mysticism is obstructed, it will recoil back towards the caster.”

“I have had my magic obstructed many times, but that has never happened. Does it really exist?”

“Yeah. It’s cause it won’t happen if you only interrupt the chant or actions midway. Unless there is an effect on the spell itself while it is being constructed, it won’t happen... How should I put it, before Liliana used phenomenon mixer... It’s a little different, but she practised a similar magic before right?”

“Is that so? Liliana Zandyke’s magic is largely special to her. The only one who knew all of her abilities was Rogue. Moreover, what kind of damage is done when the rebound air happens?”

“Rebound air would first have an effect on the ether body and the astral body. The damage would largely be done to the internal organs. Let’s see... Do you have a taste for alcohol?”

“Well, yeah.”

“It’s like the kickback from drinking down a bunch in one gulp... Seems there’s a shock to the head that’s pretty nasty or something right? I’ve never experienced it myself, so I can’t really make a firm comparison, but...”

Hearing Suimei’s reply, Graziella did seem to have experienced such a kickback before, and made a straightforward grimace.

“I’d rather not experience that. Especially during a fight, if that happened it would be a significant hindrance.”

Saying that, Graziella had a slight smile on her face.

“I’ve heard quite the amusing story from you. But—”

“... What?”

“You have a tendency of being pedantic huh.”

Hearing himself talk, Suimei naturally also knew this about himself, so instead of holding a complaint in his throat, he let out a faint smile.

“Ha, there’s no such a thing as a human who ain’t pedantic. It’s just a matter of the scale being more or less. Part of the thirst for knowledge is the desire for recognition in the lime light. You won’t find something like a virtuous saint who doesn’t hang his opinion down on you no matter where you look right?”

“Hm? Rather than that, hasn’t the flow of the match changed quite a bit?”

“It really has. The one from the Elite Twelve is being pressured quite a bit.”

“Oi, you brought it up and now this...”

In the end, Suimei was going to give the same complaint that he had just received. However, just like the other two, he immediately focused on the match. On top of the stage, Aerith was being provoked by Liliana, and was extremely agitated. The fact that Aerith was very conscious of Liliana was something Suimei spotted before the match even began. However, that had now become the plainly visible driving force behind her fighting spirit, and was completely at the fore.

“... Rather, that’s quite the tractable opponent huh. Just from some light provocation she ended up exploding like that... No, her top is completely blown off at this point huh.”

“That’s a bad type of passion. It’s the type that the elements dislike.”

“Aerith is young after all. Well, since I’m younger it’s a little strange coming from me, but—she went through more troubles than others because of her birthplace, so she happens to have a lot of self respect and pride... However, I can’t accept that she gets taken for a ride so easily by provocation. This needs rectifying... Well, judging from the present situation she’ll understand from the result of the fight.”

It was a problem related to one of her subordinates, but Graziella did not seem to pay it much mind. Just as she said, if Liliana won here, Aerith would end up looking back on it and correcting herself. Though that was only if she ‘realized,’ but Graziella was giving off an atmosphere that Aerith wasn’t someone who wouldn’t notice.

“Eh, ain’t she your subordinate? You’re not going to cheer for her?”

“It doesn’t match my nature to raise my voice in encouragement. Besides, she doesn’t need that sort of thing. In any case, it seems to be moving to the final stage right?”

On top of the stage, Liliana began the chant which would ascertain the final strike of the match.

“—He who is in our surroundings, the one that our eyes cannot see. He who hides himself from all public eyes, the voice that anybody and everybody cannot hear. Now, at this present time, reveal your ambiguous body to the world, and lay bare everything far and wide. Thou art born of me, thou art named by me, thou art enslaved by me, thou art none other than my blood. Thus—”

Along with Liliana’s chant, mana began to radically gather up. Aerith had also already been gathering her mana, but it was short lived as Liliana’s mana drowned it out. As if acting in concert with Liliana’s mana, Howler returned to her side, and began growling. It’s voice became a deep oscillation and spread out, piled up, and went on to effect the mysteries in the surroundings as darkness bubbled up and formed subtle black lightning around Howler. As the growling grew strong, the earth began shaking, and debris began rising to the sky. It was like the omen before an enormous abnormal event.

As Suimei watched this, he let out a 'Hou?' in a greatly interested tone. Eventually, as if pointing the way to Howler, Liliana thrust her finger out. And then—

“Hear me! Let out the howl which destroys all! Spell Xenoglacier, Astral Dive, Howling Out!” (Intrinsic Curse, Dash to the Realm of the Dead, Howl of Absolute Destruction!)



Along with her keyword, an enormous howl broke out. A tremendous voice radiated from Howler's mouth which felt like it would be unbearable without

plugging one's ears and curling up. The ground, the stage, anything and everything in their surroundings began breaking to pieces. In response to that, Aerith had formed a gigantic wall made of far more water than she had used up until now, but such a volume of water which could even fill a pool was simple a drop in the bucket before Howler. In accordance with Liliana's finger, while howling and suicide charging straight in, the moment the pallid flash of lightning touched the wall, as if an entire waterfall broke onto shore, it was smashed into a pure white sheet of spray in an instant.

Immediately following the straight line which tied Liliana and Aerith together, a portion of the stage caved in from the shockwave. Having brought things to an end with that, Aerith collapsed on the spot. Seeing that, Liliana made an unconcerned expression and spoke quietly.

"It's, my win."

The result of the first match naturally ended in Liliana Zandyke's victory.



Even after the first battle finished, the aftertaste of the battle still had a hold of the audience. The soldiers, mages and each and every member of the Elite Twelve were all dumbfounded having seen Liliana's magic and were all staring at her figure as she descended from the stage. Seeing mysteries that should have been impossible with this world's magic, it must have been quite the stimulus to all of them. From their surroundings, they could hear surprised voices saying 'So that Aerith lost,' and 'To think the most talented woman among the Elite Twelve would...' Not only that, but there were some saying 'I've never seen magic like that before,' and 'Is that also the power of dark magic?' Surprise concerning Liliana's magic flew out along with the noise in the air.

Descending from the stage, Liliana eventually arrived where Reiji and the others were, and Suimei also met up with them. And the first thing to meet her, was Io Kuzami putting on a haughty attitude with her arms folded as she raised her voice in satisfaction.

"As one would expect of my disciple. It is no exaggeration to say that everything you did was the pure personification of the dark side you know? Even that final attack bared a close resemblance to force lightning."

“Please don’t, say such incomprehensible things, or declare such a lie, that we are not, student and teacher. It is a matter, that I’ll, sue you for.”

“FUHAHAHAHA! There is none in this world who can judge me!”

As Liliana denied her with all her might, none of it seemed to reach lo Kuzami’s ears. With a joyful look on her face, she was letting out a loud laugh. On the other hand, Reiji, Titania and Lefille were congratulating and thanking Liliana for her victory. Seeing that they all finished each of their congratulations, Suimei beckoned Liliana over along with Felmenia, and began talking to them in secret.

“Liliana. The model of that familiar was...”

“Yes, just as Suimei is thinking, a dog. But, what I used as reference, was that thing before.”

“The apparitions huh.”

Hearing Suimei’s conjecture, Liliana quietly nodded. From the eerie shape of the familiar, Suimei though that would be the case, and it turned out to be right on the mark.

“Suimei said before, that not just limited to the opponent who is watching your magic, the swaying of one’s own emotions is important. If I thought of something I myself found eerie, and associated with something scary, then I thought, that this would be effective.”

“Yes! Yes! As I thought it is better when the magic you show others is flashy!”

Following up after Liliana, Felmenia was nodding repeatedly with a satisfied look. She was likely complementing the topic of firepower that came up in their magic lecture before. An overwhelming amount of power and an overwhelming appearance. The mental effect of such magic was tremendous on both the opponent and oneself. And then, Liliana hung her head slightly apologetically.

“The magic I used this time, has changed quite a bit, from what you taught me.”

Because it took the shape of something she imagined, it was something that she had to change. Liliana thought that it was bad that she had done so.

However Suimei did not think that all all.

“I think it’s fine though? The fact that you have originality is proof that you have strong sensitivity. By all means, if you rely too much on your own senses then you could get caught in a pitfall, but if you’re careful there’s nothing for me to say. There’s still some issues to resolve, but I think it was quite the good use of that magic, right?”

“Yes!”

After Suimei praised Liliana, she smiled delightfully. From this match, he understood well that Liliana was a different type of practitioner from Felmenia. If Felmenia was the type to put in great effort, then Liliana would be the prodigy type. Rather than tending towards Suimei, she was a practitioner more akin to Suimei’s assistant and disciple, Hydemary.

As for her aptitude as a magician, she had an affinity towards witchcraft. As long as she didn’t end up specializing in a single type of magic, she had the potential to become quite the magician. As their secret talk came to an end, Reiji called out to them.

“For Liliana-chan to be that strong. It surprised me.”

“Y-yes. At the very least, I am a former member, of the Elite Twelve.”

“Then was Liliana-chan one of the stronger ones among the Elite Twelve?”

“No, that’s not quite...”

She couldn’t really say it, that her current abilities were because Suimei had been teaching her magic. Without being able to say that, she became somewhat incoherent. And then, whether it was good or bad fortune, Io Kuzami cut into their conversation.

“However. To have a disciple of mine show such a stylish appearance, I also cannot just keep quiet.”

“I’ve been saying, I’m not your...”

“A disciple of mine has shown such a flashy battle to us after all. Kukuku... For the next match, shall I personally show them the virtuous aesthetic of quiet simplicity and subdued refinement of a plain fight?”

Without listening to Liliana at all, Io Kuzami continued psyching herself up. And then, Reiji made a complicated expression as he drew closer to Suimei, and put up his hand to his mouth as he whispered.

“Hey, Suimei. She’s saying that, but...”

“... There’s no way in hell it’s going to be plain. Rather, does she even have the aesthetic sense to know what quiet simplicity and subdued refinement is?”

“She’s probably thinking of a completely different set of aesthetics from what we’re thinking of right?”

“Just as always huh.”

“Un, just as always.”

As the two let out a sigh at the same time, Io Kuzami rose to the stage.



After the destruction brought to the stage from the first match had been repaired, the second match was about to begin. The problem child with her chuuni powers at full throttle, Io Kuzami set forth, and her opponent was one among the Elite Twelve, Slane Zolnuf.

Zolnuf was a young man who appeared to be about the same age as or slightly older than Aerith. His somewhat rusty red hair was smoothed down and he had somewhat graceful features, but because of the faint smile on his face, it took away from any refreshing feeling he gave off, and left a somewhat frivolous impression.

Following after Aerith, he also appeared to be a mage, and had a short magic staff in one hand. As the two of them ascended to the stage, they stepped up without any sort of etiquette. And then, the one to take the initiative in having a war of words before the match, was Io Kuzami. She put on her own faint smile as if not to lose to Slane, and questioned him.

“Now then, are you my opponent bastard? Are you not quite the seedy looking opponent? To have you come up as my opponent, I am being made light of.”

“I don’t know about you being the hero’s companion, but aren’t you getting a

bit too cocky? If you say too much, won't it just be embarrassing when you lose?"

In response to Io Kuzami talking down at him, Slane replied to her with a sneer. As one would expect, he had the judgment not to get angry over someone joking around. As her provocation was turned back to her, Io Kuzami did not seem to particularly care either.

"I would lose? No, that will not be. The one to get a full tasting of the dirt of defeat on the ground of this stage, is none other than you after all."

"That's quite the confidence you got there..."

"This is not confidence. It is something that is predetermined. It is that which is known as fate, not a mere coincidence."

"You have a lot of nerve to say something so conceited. Who the hell do you think I am. I am Slane-sama of the Elite Twelve you hear?"

Slane couldn't hear Io Kuzami's statements as anything but increasingly impudent, and gradually became more irritated. Though he was talking frivolously, his tone also sharpened somewhat. He then started to proudly brag of his own position, but...

"Like I care about something like that. It is sufficient to just call a bastard like you the receding hairline man."

"You fucking bitch! Despite having such a weird cloth wrapped around your neck you're going to fucking make fun of my great hair style..."

"Oi, did you just show contempt for the hero muffler of love, bastard?—Very well. I shall give you special care and show you the very depths of hell."

Having each of their charm points made fun of, they both ignited, and the flames of rage began burning. It looked like an extremely low level squabble, however, the surrounding audience was riled up at the extremely easy to understand dispute and had become rather noisy as they yelled out fairly inappropriate encouragement.

Seeing how she was showing contempt for the Elite Twelve, it was only natural that they were booing Io Kuzami. However, despite being an Imperial

military encampment, yells such as 'Die,' or 'Kick the bucket already,' were being directed towards Slane, which gave a glimpse of his personal virtue.

"I'll fucking kill you."

"Your sins are your ignorance, and your contempt for this favourite accessory of mine. You shall atone with your death."

As that childish and violent exchange ended, their match began... It began, but unlike Slane who immediately opened the distance between them, Io Kuzami showed complete composure at his actions and simply folded her arms with a fearless smile. She wasn't moving. She wasn't chanting. And so, the one to take the initiative was the member of the Elite Twelve.

"—Oh earth! Stretch out and rise, threaten my enemy's foothold! Lance Ground!"

Along with Slane's keyword, the ground protruded upwards. While destroying the stage, it extended towards Io Kuzami. However, without taking any evasive action, she stood perfectly still as if waiting for the collision. And then, in the instant that she was about to be swallowed whole.

"... Fuu. There is nothing more foolish than using the earth against me."

As Io Kuzami let out an excessively bored murmur, she stamped her foot on the grey stage. The brisk sound of liquid coming out struck the audience's ears, and the protruding earth settled down with an explosion. Slane showed a surprised expression at having his magic broken, but he immediately tightened in face.

"So you're at least not all talk huh."

"Of course. My name is Io Kuzami. The absolute existence who has hold of everything in the world."

As expected, she had to throw that in. As Io Kuzami declared that in a loud voice before the audience, Suimei and Reiji were left at their wit's end. There was no saving her, since this was a fantasy world, even when she said things that completely lacked any common sense, all they could really do was turn her a cold shoulder.

"So? Is it the job of that absolute existence or whatever you call it to just

stand there and fold their arms like an idiot?”

“You said it. Alright, just for a bastard like you, I shall specially put to use a rare technique.”

As she was teased about remaining immobile, Io Kuzami had seemingly gotten excited, and once more began ominously laughing. However, despite having said that, she remained stock still with her arms folded. Not only that, she wasn't accumulating mana either. And in that moment where anyone would think that nothing would happen, the surface of the stone stage snapped up without any prior omen. It was as if some invisible and strong power violently struck the stage. Seeing that happen, Slane showed a disappointed expression.

“Aah? Could it be that this is your technique? All you did was just make some damn noise. What part of this bluff is a technique?”

“A bluff you say. Fuu—whether or not this is a bluff, you should test it out with your own body. There.”

“Ah—?”

At the same time as a sound rang out, something happened once more without Io Kuzami doing anything. The moment she spoke, the side of Slane's face was violently struck from the side by an invisible force.

“Guhaa—”

A sound like a dry slap rang out over the stage. Perhaps because it was a strike to his cheek that he could not perceive, Slane was lightly blown to the side by its vigour. After immediately getting back up, he began shaking his head as if to wipe away his confusion and shock.

“Y-you bitch, just what did you...”

“That just now? That was a thrashing from the servants of mine that one cannot see with their eyes.”

“Servants that you... can't see?”

“That's right. Right now, atop this stage, my ever loyal and invisible servants under my command are present. In accordance with my will, at any time and place, they are ready to fight for my life. Look, it won't end with just a single

strike you know?”

“Gu—!”

Along with Io Kuzami’s words, the invisible thrashing continued to assault Slane. This time a powerful shock struck him in the back of the head. Because he was unable to sense it, he was only getting struck completely one-sidedly. In an attempt to protect his head, he put his hands up to guard himself and bundled his body tightly.

Slane’s bewilderment was obvious, but this also applied to those in the audience. It wasn’t magic, mana was not moving in the area at all, yet that phenomenon was happening anyways. It couldn’t be helped that they didn’t understand. This also applied to Felmenia who was sitting next to Suimei.

“Invisible servants? No, but that kind of thing isn’t...”

Anywhere to be found. Even if she looked for incorporeal existences, let alone servants, she couldn’t even confirm the traces of any such thing existing. As a result, unable to find the answer herself, she asked Suimei.

“Um, Suimei-dono? Just what is that technique Io Kuzami-dono is using...?”

As Felmenia looked to her side, Suimei squinted as he looked at Io Kuzami like he was trying to ascertain just what she was. And then...

“... Spontaneous psychokinetic control.”

“Spontaneous psychokinetic control... Is it?”

“That’s right. It’s a spiritualism type technique. Beneath the layer of consciousness—I mean, it’s a technique which reproduces the outbreak of phenomena in a person’s surroundings while they are unconscious.”

“U-umm...”

“Poltergeist. Even in this world, there are phenomena where a house will suddenly start creaking, or things within the house just start moving on their own right?”

“In old mansions—that thing that happens in haunted houses and old castles? If it is that, then I’ve heard about it here and there.”

Even in this world, they had poltergeists. Because an information network had yet to develop the way it had in the modern world, it seemed that it wasn't something well known though... Seeing that Suimei and Felmenia were chatting, Lefille drew closer while still holding the pom poms, but perhaps because she heard the word haunted house, her shoulders trembled once and she immediately did an about face and retraced her steps. In any case...

“Commonly referred to as RSPK, the things called spontaneous psychokinesis and spontaneous psychokinetic predisposition is something associated to a single part of poltergeists. Excluding the example where a spirit is interfering with the world, it's something when people with a strong sensitivity to the spiritual have an effect on their surroundings due to residual thoughts and ether. It's assumed to be something caused when the caster's spiritual power runs wild. Right now, that damn Io Kuzami is taking that phenomenon which occurs unconsciously, and has defined it as something that she can consciously manipulate.”

—LFPK, spontaneous psychokinetic control. To put it briefly, it was a technique to take the phenomena caused by poltergeists, consciously giving them orders, and manipulating them. Unlike regular mental magic, it was influenced by residual thoughts and ether in the air just like poltergeists. So it was a different phenomenon from mental magic. It was the same in that it required no movements to perform. But because of this difference, just using spiritual sight was insufficient to catch it. However, because it had an influence on the residual thoughts and energy in the surroundings, it had a form that took shape contrary to its description.

That was likely why Io Kuzami called them invisible servants. This was something that Frederic Myers proposed and was treated as something that didn't exist according to the present occultists, but the fact that the leader of theosophy, Helena Blavatsky, already completed the technique may have just been simple irony. It is said that she would freely manipulate this to scare people and took on the name of one who freely commanded ghosts and became the personification of the spiritual doctrine. Though in reality, it wasn't a technique which manipulated ghosts.

After hearing Suimei's explanation, Felmenia made a puzzled expression.

“I don’t have any doubts towards its effectiveness, but it seems like a very roundabout technique. If it’s like that then is it not more polished to perform a spell only with one’s mind?”

“It’s true that mental magic can do the same thing. However, it’s different in that the person in question perceives the shape, so the quality of the technique is high—Hah! That’s what it was! That’s why she called it quiet simplicity and subdued refinement!”

As Suimei seemed to have realized something, he yelled out in excitement as if to confirm his own conjecture.

“Suimei-dono?”

“Earlier, that damn Io Kuzami made a statement after recognizing Liliana’s fight right? Quiet simplicity and subdued refinement—she said she would give them a taste of simplicity and plainness. Unlike regular mental magic, that technique has a shape. And because it moves independently of the caster, you could even call it a familiar. The point is, she’s displaying a completely opposite way of using familiars.”

“Ah—”

At the time he just heard it as thoughtless words, but unexpectedly she was being quite clever. And then, as if acting in concert with Suimei’s realization, Io Kuzami looked back at him with a faint smile. That cynical smile got on his nerves, but it certainly was just as she said. The only thing he could say was that she got him there. Felmenia then began grumbling with a cute ‘Mumumu...’

“It’s an attack that seems difficult to oppose. There’s no movement of mana, and it’s hard to take countermeasures against something invisible.”

“No, as long as the technique’s foundation, poltergeists, are something that can easily occur naturally, only turning it into a technique isn’t all that high level of a skill. As long as one’s defences are tight, there’s nothing to be scared of.”

“Then its aggressiveness, isn’t all that great?”

“Cause it’s something that was originally only meant to be noisy.”

That was why, in a way, when Slane called it a bluff, he was actually right on

the mark. The technique was definitely unpredictable, but because it was possible to defend against with just one's arms, it could be said to be a surprise attack that was easy to prepare countermeasures for.

“—Slane! What are you doing!?”

As one would expect, after watching Aerith taste defeat in the first match, Gorgan couldn't help but panic at such a one-sided fight. His face was bright red as he let out an angry shout. It seemed that his anger was effective, as Slane's body stiffened, and he immediately began chanting.

“—Oh wind! Thou shall become my barrier and protect me! Air Wall!”

Immediately following his keyword, the wind in the area formed a defensive wall around Slane. As expected, the psychokinesis was unable to pierce through that wall, and the sound of thrashing came to an end. Seeing that her subconscious psychokinetic control was being defended against, Io Kuzami scattered her thoughts.

“As one would expect, you can at least stop this level of attack huh?”

“You really did it now you fucking bitch...”

“Well, it would be troublesome if at the worst I did not have to move myself. If my opponent is as brittle as the third bridge of a ship, it would be boring and the audience won't get excited after all.”

“You damn... You've been prattling nothing but nonsense for a while now! Is your fucking brain messed up or something?”

Perhaps because he was the only one being hit for a while now, Slane was quite irritated. He raved at Io Kuzami, but she didn't seem to care at all.

“For you not to understand my refined words, it seems not only your hairline, but the contents of your head are also receding.”

As Io Kuzami exquisitely turned around his insult, the grounds erupted into a vortex of laughter. Watching attentively over that exchange, Reiji suddenly drew nearer to Suimei.

“Io Kuzami-san. It seems it's alright up until now.”

“Yeah. Up until now.”

As Suimei was implying it was going to change, Reiji also made a troubled expression like he agreed. Since it wasn't over yet, they didn't know what would happen. They couldn't let their guards down. If something strange happened, they would have to stop her after all. On the other side of the stage, Gorgan once more yelled out at Slane.

“You hear me Slane!? You cannot lose! Any more defeat will affect our honour!”

“I know!”

The scolding of the first seat of the Elite Twelve had an immediate effect, and Slane's expression was only slightly panicked. Because Gorgan also collided with Io Kuzami back in the tent, he must have been overly conscious of her. After shouting at Slane, he just glared fixedly at Io Kuzami. Slane managed to calm down somewhat from the scolding, but the frivolous talk and irritation still stuck in his chest as he surveyed Io Kuzami. And then, she decided to put magic to use, and began chanting.

“—Oh earth and wind. Brave the skies with your compassionless sweltering heat and burn all breath. Sink the one who stands before me into gasping agony. Breath Down Burn!”

Along with her keyword, the sky above the stage began burning and coiling into a vortex. It looked like magic which increased the temperature of the atmosphere. If that air was breathed in, it would leave one helpless.

“—Oh wind! Thou shall act in accordance with my will and blow fiercely, send the sweltering heat and chilling air that threatens me beyond the horizon! Continuum Wind!”

And then Slane used wind magic to oppose Io Kuzami. He was likely defending himself by blowing away all the hot air in his surroundings. Having succeeded in meeting his expectations, the air above the stage ended up in a state where two kinds of air were struggling against each other.

... The two of them continued to compete by seeing who could pour more mana into their magic, and it became a contest of stamina. However, it was obvious that a human could not possibly compete against a spirit's mana capacity. Giving up first, Slane's breath was in complete disorder.

“Ridiculous... Just, how much mana...”

“It’s nothing. It really is nothing to talk about. But to give up only at this level. Fumu, the children of man of this time have become weak it seems...”

Io Kuzami was muttering in discouragement for some reason. And then, she undid the magic of fire and wind.

“You bitch...”

Slane’s gaze became excessively grim. He must have thought that she was pitying him by undoing her magic. However, Io Kuzami was in no way being considerate.

“—Now then, it is about time that we settle this. It seems that you have spent too much of your mana and it is already difficult for you to move after all.”

“Ku...”

As Io Kuzami’s weird laughter rang in the air, she pronounced Slane’s defeat.

“Let us see, the technique that I shall use to bring this karma between you and I to the ground this evening will be... The kick which kills billions.”

“Th-the kick which kills billions, you say...”

“That’s right. I am the Holy King of the Heavens, Io Kuzami. In the interval of the blink of an eye, I would have no trouble in killing beings in the mere billions.”

Atop the stage, Io Kuzami made that radically excessive statement. On the other hand, as Suimei and Reiji heard this...

“So she says, Reiji-san.”

“... Uun, just what does she mean I wonder? It’s not like her feet are going to multiply ridiculously... Right?”

Reiji began casually guessing what Io Kuzami meant. It was impossible that her feet would multiply as she delivered a kick, but the scary part of Io Kuzami was the possibility that she could make such impossibilities possible.

“Hear me, my invisible servants! It is time to hold a magnificent banquet right here and now!”

Io Kuzami used her spontaneous psychokinetic control to liven up the stage. And then, she approached Slane who had used up his mana and was no longer able to move—

“Oh man of receding hairline and brains! Take a glimpse of the surface of Schwarzschild with this kick of mine! Take this! THE KICK WHICH KILLS BILLIOOOOOOOOOONS!”

She elevated her leg elastically feinting here and there mixed in with the actual kick, leading Slane to try and dodge, however, he was unable to evade Io Kuzami’s kick. And the target of her kick, the centre of its focus was—Slane’s crotch.

“NOT THEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEERE!”

Slane’s sorrowful shriek filled the air, and Io Kuzami’s boot connected cleanly with the symbol of manliness, causing him to faint in agony. With foam bubbling out of his mouth, he collapsed on the spot.



It was a strike that should not have been used in a match, but the audience was greatly excited by it. There were those covering their crotches with their

hands, but phrases like ‘You deserved that,’ and ‘Well done,’ were also flying around. There was also the smaller perverted crowd going ‘I’m jealous...,’ or ‘I want to be burned too...’ And during all that, Reiji curiously tilted his head to the side.

“But, why is that billions?”

“It’s that, Reiji, it’s the number of sperm.”

“Aah... What a stupid technique...”

Having been informed of the nomenclature of the technique, Reiji let out a complicated sigh. On the other hand, Suimei, who came to that answer first, suddenly had some doubts, and knit his brows.

“Actually, there shouldn’t even be a billion in the balls? Accurately speaking wouldn’t it be lower?”

“It’s that. It’s probably her mood. Her unbearable passion is running wild and surging out her mouth, probably.”

“Aaah, as I would expect, you understand well.”

“Stop that, it makes it sound like I’m one of them.”

“... Hey, it’s already too late for us.”

“Don’t say it. I know.”

Saying that, Reiji planted his face into both his hands. And so, the second match came to an end with Io Kuzami’s victory and her loud laughter.



A little later, during the third match.

“Bastard bastard bastard BASTAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARD!”

Atop the stage, a stout yell was being raised.

“I am one of the Elite Twelve, a glorious noble of the Empire you hear!? So just why do I have to be pushed into a hard fight against a bastard commoner like you!?”

While letting out an angry bellow, his resolution was beginning to shake as he

panicked.

“Impossible! This kind of thing is impossible!”

Of course, the person who he was pointing his anger towards, was his opponent for the match.

“Rather, you seriously have an easy to understand personality huh...”

His opponent was a commoner from the same world as the hero, who was evaluating him in an exasperated voice.

—The Imperial noble Baaldan Dostolf Zegent, was atop the stage in a corner of the military encampment experiencing a predicament he had never experienced before.

That predicament was not his inferior position in the fight, but the fact that he was panicking at a complete loss on how to continue. Naturally, it had yet to be decided whether he would win or lose so there was still a fair bit of allowance, but it was without a doubt that Baaldan was being driven into a wall. At least, mentally, he was.

The position Baaldan held among the Elite Twelve was certainly something he bought with gold. However, even so, he happened to have the conceit that his ability with magic could not be compared unfavourably with the ability of the others in the Elite Twelve, and in reality he wasn't that far behind. Born into a noble house of honourable traditions and origin, he graduated from the Magic Institute and even engaged in a war with a southern nation. He possessed a fair amount of experience, and his disposition was nothing to criticize.

On top of that, Baaldan had a magic technique that only he was able to use, which led to his conceit carrying him along too far, but it wasn't a problem.

—The use of many magics. Using peculiar punctuation and intonation, he could chant spells incessantly. Between his magics, there was not even a hint of an interval, it was a technique that let him quickly use severe magics one after the other. This was the one hand that Baaldan relied on as his crowning jewel.

Using it, he had won numerous battles up until now. Whether it be wars, monsters or stray demons, he was always victorious. In spite of that, atop this stage, he was being led completely by his nose.

(Ridiculous! Ridiculous! Ridiculous! How can this be!?)

The one he was confronting was the commoner summoned alongside the hero in Astel. His face was plain, and there was nothing about him that stood out, he was a man who could be found anywhere. If someone were give an example of the riffraff on the streets, there was no mistake that they would point to this man. His appearance was the very symbol of mediocrity. Before the fight, Baaldan had told Gorgan the following.

—I shall show my cohorts which demonstrated such unsightly fights an example of how one who holds noble blood should fight!

—My opponent is clearly a mere country bumpkin! How unsatisfactory! It's a displeasure to have to fight such a seedy looking man!

And then, to that commoner...

—Can you even use magic? Do you even understand what magic is in the first place?

—No, just being able to use it doesn't mean you understand it. Only when you are endowed with knowledge, are you able to begin truly using it, then you would understand. Am I wrong?

From what he heard, the world the hero came from was one that had absolutely no relation to magic. They only learned magic after coming to this world. It was half a year since the summoning ceremony. Such youngsters couldn't possibly put up a fight against he who had touched upon magic for several decades—or so he thought.

However, once he opened the lid and looked, it was a different story. The commoner used completely bizarre magic choices to stave off Baaldan's magic. If it was being done by someone without composure out of desperation, it would be a different story. It wouldn't be a reason for Baaldan to feel cornered. However, this man was acting like he was toying with a child, and was fighting while humming. No matter how serious Baaldan got, that man's attitude would remain exactly the same.

Naturally, as they watched this, the audience became rather noisy. The large portion of that noise, was bewilderment. This was not because a member of the

Elite Twelve was being led around by the nose. It was because the way that commoner was fending off magic was something they had never seen before.

It was as if he was fighting like he found a blind spot that nobody had noticed as he casually poked around shrewdly. The first seat of the Elite Twelve, Gorgan Bartwood Goalt was also unable to hide the surprise on his face as he stared in wonder.

As an example, if Baaldan unleashed fire magic, he would use wind magic, which should have fanned the flames, to cause a spontaneous discharge. If he unleashed water magic, in spite of the well established tactic of forming a wall of earth to defend against it existing, he called out to the element of wood, and absorbed all the water. Even when Baaldan used his specialty of multiple magics chained together, he would continue to interfere with Baaldan's magic like that. Baaldan was unable to reach him with even the tip of his finger.

As that situation irritated him, he hurried to fire out more magic, and the moment he thought his magic would strike the commoner, it lost its power and vanished.

“Wha—!?”

It was just like when Aerith Melfein fired magic at the dog Liliana Zandyke brought out. As for the commoner, he was standing there laughing. Baaldan couldn't tell if he was laughing out of scorn, mockery or simply delight. He didn't know what that man was thinking, but he knew that man had enough composure that he could laugh in the first place.

“Making fun of me...!”

This behaviour fanned Baaldan's anger to the point where he was liable to die in a fit of indignation. However, even that strong feeling of anger wouldn't help his current predicament at all. Even as he fired out two or three spells in succession, every single one of them was staved off as he thought they would be.

—It was something that was quite common in gambling. No matter what measures one took next, the opponent on the other side always had a hand that surpassed what one had. Therefore one would lose their composure due to panic, and would become unable to make a calm decision.

It was as if he was in a bottomless bog. Once he slipped in, he couldn't get out. Such was the flow of this fight.

“Now then~, it's about time that I make my own move huh.—Oh wind. Heed my will, cut up my enemy. Strike Wind.”

As the commoner threw down the gauntlet, he fired magic out from his hand. The wind magic that he fired out was totally noncommittal and poor, however, it had enough destructive force that it couldn't be ignored. To a member of the Elite Twelve like Baaldan, it didn't pose a single problem. But it was annoying. Because it held enough power that he had to defend against it, it just irritated him more.

“—Oh earth! Surround me and become a firm bulwark! None shall pass and threaten this life! Earth Wall Rising!”



The earth rose up around him and hardened, forming a sturdy bulwark and the wind magic crashed against it, and dispersed.

“Did you think that kind of magic would work! You damn fool!”

“Well with just one it’ll end up like that—Oh wind. Heed my will, cut up my enemy x7. Strike Wind Seven Fold.”

“Wha—!?”

After the commoner’s complete joke of a chant, seven instances of the Strike Wind magic manifested, and assaulted the dirt wall. With seven times the mana, they pressured the wall greatly causing it to undulate, then crumble.

“No way... For such a low level wind magic to break my bulwark...”

It was impossible. After being led around by the nose he now had to put up with this kind of magic, it was inevitable that he would be furious.

“Th-then how about this!?—Oh fire! Turn thy body into an even more majestic appearance, and become the incarnation of incineration! Flame the Grand!”

“Well for me~ —Oh scarlet. By that mixture of deep black and red that you display, plunder the colour of red from all eyes. A flame with no colour, has no qualification to be a flame. Little Little Red Thief.”

Baldan fired out magic which created an enormous fireball. In response to that, the commoner also used fire magic. Compared to Baldan’s magic, it looked like a mere bean coloured in red, scarlet. However, many of those appeared all over the stage, and opposed him. It seemed like he was planning to counter Baldan’s quality with quantity. However, the quantity of heat that came from the enormous fireball would not let a single one of those beans through.

The scarlet beans were repelled by the fireball. A chain of magic explosions occurred, and they were all properly swallowed up by the large sphere of fire. And with that, the amount of red filling Baldan’s field of vision increased. And due to that, it felt like he was seeing a delusion where the red hue of the huge fireball was fading away.

And so, the enormous fireball—vanished together along with the small bean like flames. It was likely that with the many magics using flames, the element of fire’s influence was thrown out of order, and led to the huge fireball being

extinguished.

“Using such underhanded techniques all this time!”

“Isn’t it amusing? Red is the symbol of fire. Without being influenced by the rise and fall of temperature affecting its colour, the redder mystical fire is, the higher quality it is, and thus it becomes powerful. Therefore, the more it loses its colour, the more it loses its power as fire.”

“Losing its power because it loses colour!? Stop spouting nonsense! Magic does not lose the divine protection granted to it by the elements!”

“My goodness, so it doesn’t strike a chord, I can only describe it as you lacking sense.”

“Tch, if fire magic won’t work, then I’ll just just a different magic to...”

“—Nope, unfortunately it’s about time you run out of steam.”

“What?”

“It’s time for an interval. Let’s spare some thinking time.”

As the commoner greatly shrugged his shoulders, he started repeating nonsensical words and abruptly entered a defenceless posture. Letting all the tension out of his shoulders, he started rotating his neck and shoulders to loosen up his tense muscles. All this in spite of being in the middle of a battle.

“Are you an idiot? Doing that kind of thing in the middle of a match—”

Though Baaldan pointed that out, the commoner didn’t care at all like he didn’t hear him. As he was looked down on even more, Baaldan’s anger boiled up further, and he began to use magic.

“—Oh lightning! Light! Light-lightning...”

However, for some reason, the chant would not come out of his mouth.

“Ligh.... li...”

As his breath came to a stop, his throat shivered. And at the same time, a cold sweat broke out throughout his entire body without any cause, and his palpitations became furious. He was unable to weave more words, his chant. His voice wouldn’t come out.

—His brain was denying the chant. That thought crossed his mind.

“Haa, haa...”

Completely out of breath, Baaldan looked towards the commoner. He was making a tired expression like he was disappointed. It was as if he knew that this would happen, and he was looking down on Baaldan for not knowing it would. The commoner then looked at Baaldan like a scholar observing a research subject.

“My goodness, I knew the theory, but this is honestly the first time I’ve seen it.”

“What... are you...?”

“Hey, it’s better for you to stop unreasonably using magic in a chain like that. It seems you’re doing it because you have a larger capacity than other humans to do so, but it’s not like you have a radiator or water pump or something, so in the end you’ll end up overheating like that.”

“L-like I’ve been saying, stop spouting nonsense!”

“Seriously... If you’re a mage, get it from the nuance.”

Saying that, the commoner cut away Baaldan’s words. It was impossible. For him to have such a disgraceful figure exposed against such a commoner was simply impossible.

“I am a noble! A special human you hear!? There’s no way something like that can happen... Bastard, you must have used another underhanded technique to...”

As Baaldan accused him as if rebuking him, the commoner let out a grand sigh—and then having thought of something, his smile deepened. It was none other than a laugh that reached all the way to his nose, and an ominous smile filled with darkness.

“Kukuku, that’s right. No, if it’s been exposed then it can’t be helped huh?”

“Bastard, as I thought...”

Just what did he do? As Baaldan looked at him critically, the commoner held his chin in a bold manner.

“See, look over there?”

As he pointed out with a snap of his fingers, Baaldan looked over, but beyond where that commoner’s finger was pointing, there was—



“What’s over...”

On top of the stage, the Imperial noble—Baaldan Dostolf Zegent’s voice reverberated in the air. As Suimei snapped his finger and pointed something out, Baaldan carelessly looked over. But, naturally, there was nothing there but the usual stage—

“There’s nothing... Haa!? It can’t be!”

“You fell for it you idiot!!”

As he realized the meaning behind those actions and turned back around, it was already too late. As Baaldan was reduced to such pitiful antics, Suimei closed the distance between them completely. As for Reiji and Felmenia who were watching that...

“Suimei, no matter how you put it, you can’t just do that...”

“Suimei-dono...”

The two of their dejected voices rang out. The tactic Suimei just employed was the same as ‘It’s a UFO!!’ or ‘There’s a flying pig!’ that would sometimes come up in manga, a completely sly sneak attack. The success rate of such a tactic was abnormally low, a tactic which could be considered a complete fossil, but from his posture and acting in that battle, Suimei managed to tragically drag Baaldan into his plot.

And then, he rained down an incessant barrage of fists at Baaldan. As Suimei drove his fists into several vital spots at the centre of his body, his last punch was focused below the chin and he raised his fist in victory. Though he realized Suimei’s intention, Baaldan had no way of dealing with it, and was defeated.

“Goh, ah... T-to such a classic, move...”

“It’s your fault for falling for it. Rather, to not properly pay attention to your surroundings, it’s at a level where you have to start over from the basics. No

matter how you put it, you're underestimating people too much, idiot."

Before Suimei's verbal abuse, Baaldan fell over with a thud. In the end, it wasn't an interesting fight at all. But setting that aside.

"Well, with that much blood rushing to his head, he couldn't think properly anyways."

Naturally, Baaldan couldn't hear Suimei making fun of him anymore. After surpassing the limits of continuous magic usage, due to a shortage of breath like condition based on his mana, his head became delirious with a fever. In that condition, it was useless to expect that he wouldn't show any openings. At first he seemed to be treating Suimei as a lower ranked opponent, but this was proof that people with such poor imagination were exceptionally easy to manipulate. As the disdain for one's opponent reached its peak, the gap born of carelessness was just as large as the gap between their actual abilities. And because of that, he ran out of steam. It was different from when Graziella fell into the trap of magic melt and could be said to be an extremely low level failure.

The continuous use of serial magic, in of itself, wasn't that strange a thing. It was under the premise that one did not fully grasp entropy, but in the other world it could be said to be an indispensable skill. Everyone could do it. However, the people of this world did not possess a mana furnace. Because of that, they were unable to change the wasted heat and mana into steam to radiate it. Hence, they would run out of breathe just as Baaldan did.

The most extreme cases could lead to blindness or the restriction of one's field of vision. While Suimei was thinking of such things, he descended from the stage, and listened carefully to what Reiji and the others were talking about.

"Hey, Tia. Suimei's fight and the one before it were on the same level, weren't they..."

"I lost to a man who does stuff like that... Unforgivable."

"Suimei-kun. This is a matter that is going to require a sermon."

Reiji was exasperated, Titania was burning with an aura of anger towards Suimei, and Lefille was brimming with the intent to give him a sermon.

“Eehh...”

And in the third match, Suimei’s victorious strike was sneak attack.



Immediately after the matches came to an end, in a corner of the encampment.

“There is no way that such a thing could...”

He likely didn’t think even a little that the Elite Twelve would be defeated. As he observed all of the matches in a corner of the encampment, Gorgan was in a dumbfounded state muttering the same words over and over.

The members of the Elite Twelve he chose were all supposed to win against their opponents. There was a possibility that Aerith would lose to Liliana in an unlikely event, but after that, Slane and Baaldan’s victories were supposed to be certain.

However, the results were different. The up and comers and veterans of the Elite Twelve were all defeated. On top of that, the last two lost in unsightly manners. As the first seat of the Elite Twelve, he couldn’t possibly accept this. However, the shock of the defeat was so strong that Gorgan couldn’t even think of anything to say. While he gazed in wonderment, without being able to put his thoughts in order, Reanat appeared accompanied by his attendant.

“Gorgan.”

“Y-your Imperial Highness...”

Even as his head was jolted from the defeat, he at least had enough intelligence left to remember his manners before one superior to him, and Gorgan fell to a knee in a fluster. Reanat then asked for confirmation in a tone like he was admonishing his subordinate.

“The matches have ended. With this, you have no complaints correct?”

“... Ha. I cannot apologize enough to have members of the Elite Twelve show you such unsightly battles.”

“It cannot be helped. Only in this event were their opponents poor matches.”

“However, to have the Elite Twelve led around by the nose in such

underhanded fights... Setting aside Aerith's fight, it is only natural that the pride of the glorious Imperial army would be affected. I feel that we must take some sort of responsibility."

"Responsibility you say."

"Ha!"

Taking responsibility. This was one of Gorgan's desperate measures. In short, if they went down, they would do so all together. If the Elite Twelve took matters into their own hands, he could carry some of the burden of those who took part in the matches. Aerith and Liliana's fight left him at a loss for words, but the attitude of the other two opponents only left him with doubts in his heart.

Instead of taking responsibility for those, he would lodge a complaint. If he did, it wouldn't be a complete defeat, and he would be able to reduce the damage done to the Elite Twelve's name. If the voices of sympathy came in great number, then it would be something to celebrate.

Because of that, Gorgan deeply lowered his head as he was hoping for Reanat to accept that. However, whether or not Reanat realized those expectations, along with a soft tone, he shook his head.

"Gorgan. This match, you cried about the carefree attitude of the opponents to your surroundings from the very beginning, it has nothing to do with responsibility. Thus, there is no need for you to take responsibility."

"But..."

He couldn't leave it unsettled, and as Gorgan tried to cling on further.

"—In that case, from here on you'll refrain from such impertinent developments."

The one to call out to him from behind in a haughty manner, was Graziella.

"Your Imperial Highness Graziella..."

"What's with that grim face? Do you disapprove?"

"With all due respect. This case is not only the responsibility of those who fought. It is something that affects the dignity of the Elite Twelve, as well as you

who are one of its members.”

“Are you in any sort of position to plot that kind of thing? In any case you plan to find fault with their fights and lessen the damage right? I’ve already seen through your ulterior motive.”

As Graziella laughed scornfully, Gorgan was unable to say anything back to her and kept silent. Graziella then went from laughing heartily to a suddenly serious face.

“... Well, regardless of the circumstances of your expectations. I also properly understand your discontent with the current situation of the Empire. In the status quo where our allied nations show no enthusiasm, if the Elite Twelve play an active role here, it would demonstrate the Empire’s strength to both domestic and foreign parties.”

“If your Imperial Highness understands such things then...”

“Gorgan, did my elder brother not say so just now? It was a bad opponent. Put up with it this time.”

Even as Graziella rebuked him, Gorgan did not seem satisfied. It was likely because of the conceit he had accumulated from playing an active role as a mage for so many years. His grim expression and the light in his dull eyes were complaining that he wasn’t satisfied at all. As Graziella read the subtleties of Gorgan’s heart, she let out a single sigh, and began speaking.

“You must have also seen it. Liliana has already been released from dark magic, and become a powerful caster. The one who named herself Io Kuzami atop the stage took a role in repelling a demon general. With those kinds of opponents, it would be childish to prattle on about finding it unacceptable.”

“However, the man who fought at the end. That man was joking around far too much.”

“Did you see that as joking around?”

“That kind of fighting, all I saw was him teasing his opponent.”

“... Fumu. Did it also look like that to you, elder brother?”

As Graziella respectfully asked him, Reanat made a slightly bitter expression.

“Let’s see. Regardless of what the truth is, looking at it from the side, it honestly could be said to be an insufficient fight. Lyla, did it not appear that way to you?”

“As I thought, if you do not understand, the gap in how you look at something becomes quite large. Especially having fought against that man once, I feel that the skill he has for tactics and magic is bottomless. That last one was out of the question though.”

Though the last battle ended like that, from Graziella’s point of view, it was a trick that was worth thinking about precisely because he was able to see through Baaldan’s personality completely. Because Graziella had also fallen into one of Suimei’s trap before, just seeing that wasn’t enough to make a proper judgment.

“With all due respect your Imperial Highness. Just how is that man bottomless? I don’t see that at all though?”

“... My goodness, so you still can’t tell? You’ve grown senile. Among all of them, he’s the most vicious you know?”

“That man is?”

“That’s right. Besides, you yourself said that he was joking around, but if you turn that around, it just means that to that man, that fight was at the level that he could get through while joking around. From the very beginning Baaldan was making light of him and asking for it, so it ended up that he played around that much though... Do you have something to say back regarding Baaldan’s carelessness?”

“... No.”

And then, Reanat spoke up as if he remembered something.

“Lyla. Back when you fought against the guest from the other world, I heard that you overwhelmed him?”

“It’s something I heard afterwards, but when he fought against me it seems he was suffering from severe wounds that brought him close to death. Though I resent it.”

Hearing Graziella's voice, they could hear discontent and emotions which had no more outlet mixed into it.

"But, to think he would so frivolously defeat one of the Elite Twelve..."

Reanat did not evaluate him all that highly. At the time he thought he was around or below the level of the Elite Twelve. That was because Reanat did not know. About that.

"Elder Brother, that invasion of demons in Astel some time ago, I believe you've heard the reports about it before."

"Aah, about the near ten thousand demons and monsters being defeated you mean? What about it?"

"... The one who did that, seems to have been that man."

Hearing Graziella's meek attitude and words, Reanat's expression became severe.

"... Ridiculous. Ten thousand demons? No matter how strong he is, to do so alone is..."

"I do not think her Highness Titania would lie about this. Besides, the fact that Liliana Zandyke had built up her strength to such an extent in such a short amount of time, is also sufficient proof of his strength."

"... I had a report saying that the guest from another world was not a hero though?"

"Aah. That seems to be no mistake. However, in that world there are apparently masters scattered about who surpass that man who overwhelm the demons."

"Is that the truth?"

As Reanat asked with a hint of fright in his voice, Graziella meekly nodded. Seeing that, Reanat was at a loss for words. And with a sidelong glance, Graziella looked towards Gorgan.

"Gorgan. Do not even think of attacking that guy under the cover of darkness you hear? If you use that hand, it will definitely not end in a joke."

Gorgan could only nod back at Graziella's warning.

... On the other hand, the sermon that Suimei was receiving from Lefille (tiny) and Titania, was still not over.

Chapter 3: Their Respective Battles

And thus, under the command of Reanat, the battle between the Imperial and demon armies was proceeding smoothly. Just as his plan proposed, atop the stages of the many paths which led from the northern savage lands of the Empire into its territory proper, they setup ambushes for the onslaught of demons, attacked them upon discovery, and crushed them. Scouts were even sent to places where humans couldn't traverse, and for the time being, the front was doing everything it could to devote itself to defence so that the line wouldn't collapse, and they were in a state where they were waiting for the arrival of reinforcements.

Because it was both a series of ambushes and defensive battles, the advantage naturally lied on the side of the Empire. Unlike the flat wastelands of the northern Alliance, they were situated in a location that they held the advantage terrain wise, and the number of places that they could stage an ambush was quite large.

It could also be said that this was because they had accurate information beforehand. If the countries on the way to the Empire were attacked, then accurate information would naturally flow to them, and they took the time to prepare their defences. The Empire was too far away for the demons to push in unnoticed.

In any case, as for Suimei and the others, just as initially planned, they were charged with watching the headquarters, and were not part of the actual strategy up until now. This was largely because of restrictions put on them so that they wouldn't raise their military gains ahead of the Imperial army. But now that the Imperial army had raised up their achievements over the past few days, they were now being put into action. And since Lefille had returned to her original form during that time, she was the first one Reanat requested for cooperation.

“Is it alright to entrust a unit to one such as myself?”

“I am aware that Shrine Maiden-dono's powers are not limited only to your

prowess in battle. I would like you to lead a unit and unleash the power of spirits to your heart's content.”

And so, Lefille led a unit of Imperial soldiers to take part in the operation of stalling the demons. She had marched together with that unit into the northern mountain range and was now looking down over the demons. Her unit was lined up in a grove of trees at the top of a cliff. Below her eyes, the demons were walking along the thin and snaking mountain path. Naturally, the demons did not realize she was there, so it was the perfect opportunity for a surprise attack.

“—It seems, it's about to rain over here, right?”

At the front of the unit, at that boundary between the thickets and the cliff, a voice lamenting the signs of rain came from behind. As Lefille lightly swayed her red hair and turned around, she spotted Liliana among the soldiers atop a small horse. She didn't know whether Liliana had just arrived or whether she was mixed into the troops earlier, but appearing when least expected was just as one would expect of someone who worked in the intelligence division—no, it could be said that it was because she was the Sword Master of the Lonely Figure's daughter.

“Lily, what's the matter?”

“Yes. I've come to report the current situation.”

“Please do.”

“Just as planned, the troop headquarters has started to prepare to retreat further to the back. If nothing in particular happens, then the hero Reiji and her Royal Highness Titania who had been left at the headquarters will remain out of the battle and retreat at the same time. It seems they plan to put them to work in the decisive battle.”

“As I thought they haven't moved yet huh.”

“It's because the hero Reiji doesn't have much combat experience, rather than fighting on such rugged terrain, I guess it was judged that he would better be able to display his power on flatter terrain. Besides, if the formation of troops is thicker, than the probability of his survival would be higher, and it

would raise morale as well.”

As Liliana gave her conjecture, Lefille let out a long breath as if expelling everything that was lurking within her chest.

“What’s the matter?”

“No, I’m just a little relieved is all.”

“You were uneasy about how they were going to use Reiji, right?”

“It’s not like Reiji-kun was summoned in the Empire after all. It was on my mind how they would put him to use is all. It couldn’t be helped if they didn’t want him to take away their glory, or groundlessly claim he would be alright because he is a hero and make him take part in some strange strategy.”

“It’s alright. His Highness Reanat, doesn’t stand for such severe schemes, like his Majesty the Emperor.”

In other words, it would have been possible if it was the Emperor. Certainly, if it was that Emperor, it felt like he wouldn’t stop at employing some absurd strategy once the Goddess got involved.

“How about Suimei-kun?”

“Seems he’s just moving around as he sees fit. There was no specific location pointed out for him to go, and his Highness Reanat left him without any finer details. Since military gains aren’t being stressed as important now, he said it would be about fine as long as he doesn’t get in the way.”

“Which means, his Highness Reanat has Suimei-kun as a pawn to move around, but couldn’t think of an effective way of using him.”

“Probably. His Highness Reanat’s strength is moving around forces at the level of units. Suimei is special after all.”

In this world, Suimei was an individual like Lefille and the others who could be considered on the same level as an entire unit. Therefore, no matter what strategy he was put in, he would be beyond the control of any other units attached to him. While that may be true, even if they moved him as an individual, they didn’t know how strong his war potential was or what kind of specialty he had. That’s why it turned into the strange situation where they

wanted to make use of him, but didn't know how to. If he was like Lefille and had the charisma to lead a foreign army corps it would be a different story though.

—I'm a magician and a student you know? Ain't it obvious I don't have anything like that?

So he said before they departed. As Lefille recalled this strange conversation with a smile, Liliana looked over their surroundings.

“And so... Over here, is also just as planned.”



“Yeah, look. The damn demons have defencelessly extended their ranks. If we attack here, we should be able to make more gains than we were expecting.”

Choosing this location to place the unit was Lefille's strategy. Having said that, the routes the demons were taking were confirmed beforehand, and all she had done was cast the net. Since the demons were walking along the thin mountain paths, their ranks were quite thin as they meandered down the road. Since they were only lined up two or three in a row, the rank of soldiers from the side was very shallow. If they were ambushed from above they would be thrown into disorder, and it wouldn't be impossible to exterminate every last one in a melee.

"Is the oil's preparation, already...?"

"With no delays."

Saying that, Lefille pointed out to the far left and right flanks. There were the figures of several soldiers together with large earthenware pots prepared next to them. In this situation, it wasn't like they weren't going to put fire into play. Because of the divine protection from the Evil God, the demons wouldn't grow anxious over a regular fire, but because monsters were mixed into their ranks, the situation was quite different. After dropping rocks at their front and back and pouring in the oil, the mage unit would light a blaze and further cut off their path of retreat while the main unit struck at their core. It was a simple strategy, but when properly set up it was one to expect great results from. As their likelihood for victory was demonstrated to Liliana, she closed her eye in relief, and stroked the neck of her horse.

"Then, with this I will leave."

"What's next?"

"I've finished going around to even Suimei, so I'll return to the headquarters for now. After that, I'll probably be used for communications again."

"I'll leave it to you."

"Yes."

As Liliana fell back to the rear, she suddenly vanished together with the horse she was riding. If it was just herself it would be one thing, but for the horse to vanish as well, it left Lefille wondering what kind of wiles she was using, and whether it was a technique of the Sword Master of the Lonely Figure or due to

Suimei's tutelage. No, it could have been a combination of both too—in any case. As Lefille mounted her own horse, she turned to the soldiers behind her. And then, as if she wasn't affected by the demons below them at all, she let loose her orders to the soldiers.

“It's about time we also make our move! As soon as the falling rocks are set in place, the mages will let loose fire magic at the front and rear as planned. Instead of food and drink, give them a full taste of oil and rocks, and entertain them with a banquet of flames! Ready!”

As she gave out her sarcastic encouragement, the soldiers kept their volume down but still returned powerful voices in response with shouts of ‘As the Goddess Alshuna wills it!’ and ‘All hail Shrine Maiden-dono!’. Morale was high. It was far beyond the required amount. This was likely because faith in the Goddess was being shown in force. Just as Reanat planned, the effect of the Shrine Maiden of the Spirits' glorious name had an explosive effect in the fight against demons.

Just as all the soldiers finished their preparations, a large number of rocks were pushed off the cliff. The pure weight of them surpassed the limits of what could be endured, killing off several demons and monsters. And together with that, the viscous and extremely flammable oil was scattered about and the mages began raining down fire magic.

“Ooh, the demons' ranks are in complete disarray...”

“Good... Just like that...”

As the demons at the front and rear began moving about in confusion within the smokescreen, the confusion slowly made its way to the core of the group. Eventually, the vortex of confusion filled the entire force of demons, and the march came to a complete halt. Next, having noticed the forces atop the cliff, the demons let out a strange voice while beginning to climb up. It was well past the point where cheap tricks would seal the deal, therefore—

“Leave behind the defences for the mages, all cavalry charge into the damn demons on the cliff! Mages, continue to threaten the front and rear with fire! Let's go!”

At Lefille's command, the soldiers came down all over the cliff like an

avalanche. They diverged, and brought the fight into a melee. And exactly as Lefille pictured, the mountain road was bleached with the corpses of demons.



—No matter how much individual demons surpassed the abilities of humans, it was obvious at a glance what kind of advantage an organized group of soldiers had over one in complete disarray. This was all the more apparent on a narrow path. Having being designated a place to fight, Lefille and her soldiers wished for a fight where their ranks wouldn't be thrown out of order, and speaking of the opposing force who were completely thrown out of order, they were colliding into and wounding each other from the sheer disorder. They were like a self destructive group pushing their allies off of a cliff, and only accelerated the rate that they lost their forces.

Even on the narrow mountain road, Lefille was skillfully handling her horse as she scattered the surrounding demons. Urging the horse to turn around at its neck, she swung her enormous sword downwards and hacked apart the demons before opening the distance between them.

And as any demons drew near her, without exception, they fell prey to her large sword. Before long, the demons taken aback by her power stood before her in a dense formation. On top of this narrow mountain path, because her own forces would be harmed, she could not unleash Gala Walner. In that case...

“Oh red wind... Heed my will, become our furious mantle.”

As Lefille hummed those words like she was praying, the red wind wrapped around her horse as if donning it in armour. It didn't only apply to the horse's large body, but it also coiled around extremely thickly at its feet—and then.

“HAA—!!”

As she yelled out to urge the horse and kicked its sides, she advanced towards the demons. The horse moved towards the wall of demons without showing a hint of fear, and the red wind around it blew away the demons. It was needless to mention the demons directly to the front were forced into the bitter experience of being crushed by the red wind coiling around the horse's hooves.

Right as the hostilities opened, she maintained a superior position. All that

was left was to exterminate them as planned—or so she thought. Just at that time, a runner came sliding down the hill. And then, while still sliding, he yelled out an emergency message.

“Shrine Maiden-dono! Demon reinforcements to the rear!”

But even as that report came to her in a painful voice, Lefille did not panic and gave out her orders.

“I see. So reinforcements have come... Then take action without panicking! Just as we decided beforehand, we will rout the demons at the front and retreat. I will take care of the rear guard, so everyone with spare energy remaining come with me!”

Because the retreat was part of their original plan, the soldiers took action at her command without any confusion. After defeating the demons at the front and securing a path of retreat, the injured and exhausted soldiers would immediately break away. While the mage unit atop the hill poured down magic in support, the retreat began. In the meantime, the demon reinforcements eventually came into sight... The path to the rear was a winding snake like mountain path, but the view behind the demons didn't seem bad. But just from the fact that there weren't any reinforcements on the road...

“I see, from the sky.”

With the clouds in the sky as a backdrop, demons with bat like wings were coming down. As Suimei would put it, they looked like the malignant spirits with wings called devils. They flapped their wings with a thud, and flew in like a dark red mark in the cloudy sky. From above... To humans, it was a natural blind spot and a troublesome place to be attacked from.

“Everyone calm down and deal with it! Just because the enemy is coming from the sky, they aren't an opponent to fear!”

Lefille anticipated the soldier's unrest and let out a yell. However, there was no reply from the soldiers. In their stead, an extremely coquettish voice came out from directly above.

“—Oh dear? Is that so?”

It was an extremely lustful tone. It was completely unsuitable in a place like

this, like the obscene coaxing voice of a prostitute. Looking up, Lefille spotted the shadow of a demon with wings. Like the other demons, those wings were shaped like those of a bat, but its actual figure was completely that of a human woman. With soft light brown hair fluttering in the wind, men would line up in front of her, and women would resent her for her figure.

While playing with her black tail, she was floating there with her back slightly curled forward. The one bringing in the demon reinforcements from the sky, was a demon in the shape of a woman. And that demon was one that Lefille had seen before.

—No, there was no way she could forget. That demon was one of the demon generals who attacked Noshias, it could be said that she was Lefille’s arch-enemy.

“You’re... The bastard from that time!!”

“Long time no see~. How’ve you been doing? Well if you’re trying this hard, then you’re likely doing it vigorously with all your might huh.”

As she smiled like she was laughing and toying with her, Lefille’s rage burned up. Just like that time, she was sneering at those who were trying their best to survive. In response to that frivolous demon, Lefille fired out a sharp red wind from the tip of her sword without speaking any further.

“HAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

With a shriek of fighting spirit, the red wind roared as it rose to the skies. And without erring, it rushed up in the dull sky towards the demon general—Latora.

“Whoopsies, risky risky. It’s scary if you just suddenly attack like that~.”

However, the slash meant to bisect the demon, along with a witty tone, was dodged by a narrow margin. The red wind that passed her continued reverberating in the air as it blew away the demons behind her, but Latora didn’t seem to care at all.

“... So you dodged.”

“Of course I would~. No matter how you put it I won’t get hit by an attack like that right? Are you underestimating me? Looking down on people is supposed

to be my privilege though~.”

Saying that, she licked up her saliva with her red tongue and let out a seductive tone. Hearing such frivolous talk, a fearful chill suddenly ran down Lefille’s spine. Naturally, it was an instinctive sense of disgust. As she shook off that fear and glared to the skies, Latora then began smiling like she was in a great mood.

“My name is Latora. From the looks of it, it seems you remember it well right?”

“Of course I do! There’s no way I could forget a bastard like you!”

“Ahaaaaah~! For you to think of me that much, it makes me happy~. I’ve also been waiting impatiently to meet you again~.”

—Just how will I torment you the next time we meet.

As those words with inhumane emotions coming out of them, it further kindled the flames of rage burning within Lefille. All she remembered was the humiliation bestowed on her by this demon. Without being satisfied with just defeating her in battle, that demon killed many of Lefille’s comrades, and cast a wretched curse on Lefille herself. There was no way she could be forgiven. Even if she cut her in a thousand pieces right here, she would surely still not be satisfied.

As if hailed by Lefille’s over brimming anger, the red wind in her surrounding became markedly stronger as if clad in flames. As she was now fully prepared for battle, a soldier’s voice abruptly came flying at her from behind.

“Shrine Maiden-sama! The preparations for the rear guard and retreat are complete! Please prepare to retreat as well!”

“Don’t worry about me! All of you go ahead!”

“But if we do that...”

“I must defeat this demon! For the sake of those who died in obscurity in the fight just now! That’s why you should go ahead!”

As she yelled back to the soldier, he replied with a simple ‘Acknowledged,’ and passed down the orders to the other soldiers. The reason they didn’t insist

on staying as well, was likely because they were soldiers of another nation, they were thinking of their own well being. Even if she was the Shrine Maiden of Spirits, it was unreasonable to think they would put their lives on the line for a guest acting as a general.

Before long, the remaining Imperial soldiers broke away towards the troop headquarters. The demons behind Latora took chase after them, but they were unable to overtake the rear guard let alone reach the main body of the soldiers.

“Aaaaah, there they go~.”

“Fuu, your reinforcements are a step late.”

“Looks like. If it’s like that we won’t catch up until they reach the headquarters huh... Well, that being the case, I don’t really care though.”

“...?”

Sensing a hidden meaning behind Latora’s giggling, Lefille knit her brows. It was as if she didn’t mind not being able to catch up with the Imperial forces, and it made Lefille remember a certain sense of discomfort.

“You’re making a face like you don’t get it. Fufuu, we don’t particularly care if you lot run away~. I mean, the place they’re running away to is going to go through something terrible after all.”

“Wha—!? What do you mean by that!?”

“Nothing in particular, it just means you’re all stupid. Did you really think we wouldn’t see through a strategy thought up by mere humans? Ahahahah! You really are stupid aren’t you? Right about now, Lishbaum, Ilzarl and

Grallajearus should be launching a surprise attack on that troop headquarters of yours you know?”

“A surprise attack on the troop headquarters!?”

“Yup. Completely unexpected right? You thought you were stalling us, but in reality you were lured out here and divided up. Even if they run away with all their might from my troops, there’s a far larger force deployed where they’re going.”

Hearing her say that, Lefille fully understood. Everything about crossing the

rugged mountain district in the north of the Empire was a decoy. Using that as a cover, another detached force made their move. In that case, the demons were certainly a step ahead. A crisis was presented to her, but Lefille's expression became bold.

“What's with that face? Do you think you can win?”

“Of course I do. You said they were attacking the headquarters, but there is the hero and many mages there. The elite of the Empire are there. Even if they were caught in a surprise attack, they won't fall behind so easily.”

“So you trust them? Well whatever~.”

Latora gave an indifferent reply, she likely seriously didn't care at all. As Lefille pointed her sword at the demon, Latora made a complete change and smiled as if making light of Lefille.

“—Fufu. Despite being left in tatters to such an extent last time, do you intend to win against me?”

“Of course I do. I won't fall behind like last time!”

“Well, it looks like you're a bit stronger than before, but is that enough to win~?”

“I'll definitely win!”

Lefille returned her derisive laughter with a yell, called out to the red wind, and clad herself in it. With Lefille at its centre, a flowing red tornado manifested around her, and the earth and stone around her fluttered in the air.

And in response, Latora seductively slid her finger through the air with a smile on her face. Her movements were as if she was feeling the skin of a man. Eventually, threads and strings overflowed out of the dark tip of her finger and fluttered in the wind.

Because Lefille had prior experience fighting her, she already knew. Latora manipulated the dark power of the demons in the shape of strings. And those strings had an ever changing appearance. They were able to bind their opponent, and if they were stretched out around the surroundings—

“Now then, for the first move.”

Latora repeated her technique in layers as she laid her strings out around the surroundings. The strings drilled into the ground, into the cliff walls, once, twice, then a third time. As if to hinder anyone who tried to approach her, she deployed over ten layers of strings. As Suimei would put it, it could be said to be a simplistic barrier. Just touching them could tear one's body apart, no, considering Latora's personality, they would likely only entwine the target.

To break through, it would be required to cut them all down, or to slip through the cracks without letting them touch her body. However, this demon would not spread something out that was so easy to get rid of. It was probably impossible to cut them down. In that case, the only option left was to slip through the cracks. The crevices weren't even half the size of Lefille's body. However—

“Do you really think I don't have a way of breaking through this!?”

“Of course I do~! They're strings that I've woven you know? They can't be cut down all that easily!”

“In that case all I have to do is slip through the gaps.”

“What are you stupid~? No matter how much of a nice thin physique you have, you can't slip through that kind of—heh? HAA!?”

Latora's surprised voice resonated over the mountain trail. It was only natural. While she thought Lefille was just simply trying to pass through the cracks in the strings, the moment she was about to touch them, she turned into a red wind and slipped through cleanly.

“Wait! You couldn't do that kind of thing before!”

Seeing a technique that Lefille had not been able to do the last time they fought right before her eyes, Latora let out a yell close to a shriek. And treating that shriek like an unrelated matter, the red wind slipped through the gaps in her string. And as the red wind continued to slip through at a steady tempo, it quickly moved into Latora's surroundings. They were movements which disturbed her sense of vision. And eventually Latora's gaze was no longer able to keep up.

“Just cause you can use that kind of technique...”

While listening to Latora's irritated voice, Lefille hooped around to her back, threatened her sides, and then once more jumped out right before her eyes. Latora never expected the attack to come from right in front of her, and was late in reacting to the slash—however even so, the demon general's power wasn't just for show, and she was just able to evade it by a hair's breadth.

“Hup, whoops, hoh, whoopsies... Dammit!”

Perhaps because her escape brought her from the skies down to the ground, her steps as she evaded Lefille's sword were like drunken staggering. She didn't seem accustomed to fighting on the ground, and her movements had no delicacy and were awkward. But still, she recovered. As she continued to run away from the chain of slashes, Latora finally found a chance to strike back, and unleashed her strings like a whip.

“How 'bout this!?”

Because the whip undulated in the air, it was difficult to deal with, but even so it wasn't something all that unusual. Speaking of someone who used such a weapon, just recently in the matches with the Elite Twelve, Aerith Melfein also used magic to produce a similar weapon. Therefore...

“I said I wouldn't fall behind!!”

“N-no way...”

A single outbreak of thunder. A single slash of the enormous sword. The strike that was coiling in from the side like a snake was completely blown away by the strong blow. The whip that Latora had made just as she got enough time to do so was tragically obliterated by the red wind. And carrying the vigour of her strike, Lefille pushed in towards Latora herself. And then Latora's composed smile that she was wearing up until then had vanished, and a strong panic broke out on her face.

“Uwaa, this is bad, I'm gonna lose... Not~!”

The panic was a ruse. After she implied it was all a fabrication, Latora suddenly pulled out a doll out of nowhere. The doll was shaped like a woman with red hair, and at a glance it resembled Lefille—

“What—”

Just as Lefille was about to ask what it was, she suddenly remembered. About the time she met Suimei. About the time he taught her about the curse that had been cast on her.

—Unless we do something about the medium used when the curse was placed, it can't be dispelled.

At that time, he said that for this kind of curse, a medium had to exist. In other words, something which mediated between the curse and herself. As she remembered what he said like it flashed before her, a chill ran down her back. That was it. That was what was tormenting her even now, the root cause. Latora's face twisted with a smile. And in an instant, a pain like a fever ran through Lefille's body. Without being able to bear it, she stabbed her sword into the ground and fell to a knee.

“Uguu... Ah...”

“Ah, AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA! You're really an idiot! What do you mean 'I'll definitely win!' There's no way I would lose to you right~? I have this you know? This right here that I used to place that curse on you!”

“Sh-shit... This, kind of...”

“Isn't it obvious I would have it? Rather isn't this the only reasonable result~? Thinking that you had a second chance after losing to me once is the epitome of stupidity you know? Or is it that? You got so mad that you forget to think about anything? Isn't that a bigger problem than the fight itself!? Stupid stupid stupid idiot!”

“Uu, gu...”

From the deliberately loud abuse, Lefille's anger, frustration, and humiliation built up, but because of the fever flowing through her body, she couldn't move as she wanted to. It was vexing. However, Latora didn't take any action to kill her right away—

“Well then~, this all got finished easier than I thought it would huh~”

“What, are you, planning...”

“Un? Isn't it obvious that I'm going to bring you along like that all the way to

your headquarters while tormenting you? If I do it right before the eyes of your companions and soldiers, don't you think they'll definitely fall into despair? To see someone they relied on being teased at their wit's end you see~."

Watching her put her finger to her moist lips, suddenly—a cold sensation ran down Lefille muscles. Hearing Latora speak, a humiliating scene came to mind. The figure of her being tormented at her wit's end after being caught. As a miserable, and pitiful warning.

"God, dammit... I'm, once more..."

Going to lose. Lefille was once more biting down on the taste of defeat. As that thought came to her mind, her body could no longer stop shaking. She was unable to stop the frustration from filling her up. And then, a high pitched woman's laughter rang in the sky. It was an evil laugh befitting of one called a demon. And as Lefille endured the fever afflicting her body, as she trembled in anxiety and humiliation...

"—What a shitty bastard with horrible taste... My apologies, shitty bitch isn't it?"

And just as those foul mouthed words came down from the top of the cliff.

"Eh—?"

"What? Who—?"

"Over here."

As their identity was questioned, they declared their presence with a firm resolve. Guided by the gentle, yet dignified voice, Lefille looked to the top of the cliff. And over there, with religious clothing clad around her body, was a single therianthrope. She had wavy pink hair, two cat ears poking out, and a gentle face. This was also a face Lefille could never forget.

"S-sister Clarissa!? Wh-why are you here!?"

"That is of course, because I came to save you."

Lefille could see her composed figure with the pale sunlight showing through the dull clouds behind her. And in a complete change from that state, Clarissa descended from the cliff towards Lefille. She was just like a cat jumping down

from a high place with complete composure. As she made an enormous leap from the top of the cliff and a completely silent landing, Lefille looked at her with a suspicious gaze.

“You came to save me? What are you planning? Aren’t we your enemies?”

“No? We do not think of you as our enemies you know? Rather you would be allies. You are comrades that are walking down a different path towards the same goal.”

“You’ve been giving nothing but evasive lies for a while now.”

Without looking timid at all, Clarissa put on a boastful smile as Lefille spoke with criticism in her voice. And then, Clarissa made a gentle smile before abruptly tightening her expression.

“... That’s right isn’t it. Allow me to correct myself. We are not your allies, we have come to save you in hindsight. In truth, I have come here only to defeat the demons.”

Defeat the demons—that must have been her true motive. However, this still did not clear all of Lefille doubts, if anything they only increased. Because the ones who were kidnapping heroes were now fighting demons, Lefille’s couldn’t grasp their intentions from those conflicting actions. Due to that, she still looked at Clarissa with a suspicious gaze, but—in any case, Lefille was not the only one casting such a gaze at her.

“What’s with her? Your friend?”

Having been left on the sideline for a while, Latora let her caution show as she questioned Lefille. And in her stead, Clarissa answered.

“Just now at this time, I will be accompanying her.”

“Fuuu. I don’t really care no matter how many enemies show up though. It just means the number of people I get to torment increases~. —Well, more importantly you know~”

Having thought of something important, looking carefully, they could see Latora’s pointing her gaze in the direction that the Imperial soldiers retreated towards.

“... If you came from over there, you should have clashed with my troops though.”

“Aah, if you’re talking about those fucking worms, they’re probably drowning in a sea of blood, vomit and shit about now.”

As Clarissa’s words grew more and more foul mouthed, Latora now looked at her with careful vigilance.

“... You’re saying they were all defeated? All on your own?”

“Oh my? It isn’t all that much of a feat is it? Lefille-san right here could take care of that level of opponent as well.”

“Fuu. So you want to say that you’re strong?”

“More or less.”

Making a boastful claim while still sounding humble, Clarissa smeared pigments on her face, and began cladding her body in mana. And what manifested, was what caused Lefille great pains in their previous fight, the ferocious mana that felt like the aura a beast unleashed when they were hunting. It thickly filled her surroundings to the point where one thought they could visualize it clearly. And then, Clarissa laid bare her true nature. She extended out sharp cat like claws and her upper canines protruded out down to her lower jaw.

And so, she completed it. Tribalism. Grasping the faith in symbolic powers, it was a magic which granted powerful abilities. As Latora watched Clarissa literally transform, her face twitched.

“Ugeh!? What’s that what’s that!? People like you aren’t my type at all!!”

“That is a good thing. I am also not fond of opponents like you.”

As she finished speaking, a gust of wind blew by. And that wind was the mana drenched in a thirst for blood, in which case it was an attack from Clarissa. A single cut appeared on Latora’s face. And while glaring back at Clarissa, she wiped the blood from her face.

“... You’ve been acting cocky for a while now, I’ll kill you. Seriously—”

Her blood thirst and dark power swelled up. And then, in a way that was

completely incomparable to when she was fighting Lefille, she gave concrete form to a strong and fiendish power.

“What... It was to this extent...”

As Lefille muttered dumbfounded at the presence of such a power, Latora spoke up.

“Isn’t it natural? I’m still one of the vanguards who attacked your country together with Rajas you know? Could you not put me in the same group as those shitty small fries like Vuishta and Mauhario?”

Those must have been the names of other demon generals. Setting aside the specifics, with that much power...

“Ku... S-sister Clarissa...”

“Lefille-san, please take a rest over there. I will clean up this fucking worm.”

As the two of them finished their preparations for battle, a flash appeared right in the centre between them as the dark power and the heat haze of mana like a mass of killing intent collided together. As that dreadful amount of power struggled for supremacy, the therianthrope and demon clashed.



And just around that time, a panicking voice from a messenger resounded through the main tent of the Imperial’s headquarters.

“Enemy attack!! I-it’s an enemy attack!!”

The cloth at the entrance of the tent was violently thrown to the side, and the message came in like thunder to convey the fact that they had been caught off guard. As news of the sudden attack came in, the high ranking officers in the tent all simultaneously pushed aside their chairs and stood up.

Naturally, as the sky outside the headquarters was completely clear, this could be said to be a complete bolt out of the blue, but—in any case, Reiji and the others who had yet to take any action were also there. As Reanat and Reiji’s conversation was cut off, he yelled back at the messenger with a severe expression.

“An enemy attack!? Just where from!?”

“Ha, from the rear!”

“The rear! Impossible!”

As the messenger reverently gave his reply, Reanat let out a loud voice at the unbelievable information. In a severe voice, he asked for further confirmation of the unexpected news.

“Is that true!? There shouldn’t have been any information about demons slipping so deeply through though!?”

“If we think about it at the scale of a surprise attack force, it would likely only be a few of them taking covert actions...”

“What’s going on...? Even if they make that kind of move here...”

Rather than worrying about being outwitted by the demons, Reanat was more concerned by the incomprehensibility of the strategy itself, and was murmuring as he gazed blankly at the messenger in wonder. Graziella then called out to him.

“Elder Brother! Now is not the time to be thinking about it! If we don’t form up now!”

“Y-you’re right...”

As Reanat came back to his senses, he began giving out orders to all the generals and staff officers gathered inside the tent.

“I’m going!”

“Reiji-sama!”

“Reiji!”

While that was going on, Reiji grew tired of waiting for instructions and dashed out of the tent. Chasing on his heels were the voices of Titania and Graziella. And whether it was a reaction to dashing out of the tent, or whether it was because he heard their voices, as Reiji drew his orihalcum sword, he looked to the back of the large tent. And from the large cliff which flanked the headquarters, a mass of demons came pouring down.

... As a low shroud of dust was kicked up, they trampled over several of the

tents and emplacements on the path, on top of the roars of the demons, Reiji could hear other groans. They likely came plunging down from the cliff without looking where they were landing, and the soldiers below them were having the bitter experience of being crushed. Following after Reiji, Reanat and Graziella came out of the tent.

“Ku... Does this mean the force to the front really was a decoy...?”

“Elder Brother, please step back here. Gather some forces, and retreat to a safe location.”

“No, Lyla. Now that it has developed like this there is nowhere to step back to. —Without dispersing the forces, gather them up and harden the defences. Call all the remaining Elite Twelve who stayed behind here!”

Reanat shook his head towards Graziella proposal, and immediately gave directions to the soldiers to assemble the Elite Twelve. It was an established tactic for the supreme commander to retreat when the situation had deteriorated, but instead of withdrawing poorly by splitting up the soldiers to act as his escort, he decided it would be better to use those soldiers to harden the defences. Since the number of demons were outnumbered by the number of soldiers left behind in the headquarters and since most of the Elite Twelve were still there as well, it wasn't a bad decision.

However, the soldiers at the headquarters largely were not ready for battle, so a surprise attack from behind created quite a bit of chaos, so it was clear as day that they were at a disadvantage—

Disregarding the chaos in the headquarters, the demons began to spread out in a circle in a mad rush. They trampled everything before their eyes in a complete stampede. Let alone hardening the defences, the soldiers couldn't even take up a formation, and it immediately broke into a free for all fight. The races could be clearly distinguished, so there was no worry of friendly fire, but that was a minimal relief.

“Burn Boost!”

As Reiji readied his orichalcum sword, he let out the chant to reinforce his body with magic. His physical abilities were normally enhanced by the divine protection of the goddess, but to overturn this situation, that would not be

enough. Flames wrapped around his body like the incarnation of a dragon, and raised his physical abilities.

Bringing it into close combat like that, was Reiji's strong point. It was simple, yet effective. It could be said to be the most suitable tactic for Reiji who had good senses. As Reiji passed through the soldiers and slipped deep within a group of demons, he swung his orichalcum sword. While the other soldiers were still in complete disorder, it would be bad to let the demons any further into the encampment. Until the troops could form up properly, he had to force the front line into as much of a deadlock as he could. If the soldiers continued fighting in such thin ranks, it was inevitable for them to collapse and the base would be overrun.

Therefore Reiji had to step forth, and cut them down. He had to stand as far to the front as he could. Until the Imperial troops formed up, he had to hold back the line. Though the demons held stronger individual strength than the individual soldiers, compared to the demon general Ilzarl he fought in the self governed state, they were nothing. He could fight them. However, because he was at the front, the number of demons far outnumbered him, and if he lowered his concentration, there was a possibility for him to be defeated by them right there.

(They're strong. They're certainly strong. But—)

Every time he met a demon, he would think this. They were certainly strong, but he felt like it was a strength that was lacking a piece somewhere. The demons were tough and numerous, but were out of control and weren't strong to the point of desperation. If the soldiers grouped together there was still hope.

In the first place, the demons didn't scheme. For humans, they accumulated many schemes to use their sword skills and magic to attain victory, but the demons used their claws and fangs, and relied entirely on brute strength. They all attacked in the same way.

“...”

Remaining silent, the demons swung its arm at Reiji and he lopped it off with his sword. Whenever he fought demons, they were always like that. Without

exception. As if they were robots who performed predetermined commands, every single one of them used the same attack. That's why they were easy to manipulate. Just as always, the demon who lost its arm raised its voice as Reiji cut its head off, and it collapsed ever so easily. And so its strength also vanished. They were strong, but nothing more.

“HAH!”

At the same speed, with the same arm, Reiji dodged to the side as usual. And as usual, the demon's side was completely open, and easily had its vitals slashed. It was fine to move just as always, with the exact same movements. That was why...

(Can these guys really exterminate humanity like this—?)

Do they really think they can? Do they feel like they can win? Do they have the conviction to do so? No matter how many of them there were, are they actually motivated when they fight like that? A while ago back in the Royal Castle Camellia, Suimei said it was unreasonable and absurd to fight the demons. That was because the demons were far too numerous. But in any case, Suimei was always someone who was fundamentally cautious. No matter what happened he would calmly judge the situation and he would never pick a hand which had low prospects for success.

However in the end, once they opened the lid and looked inside, it was a different story. Even Suimei who so strongly refused to take part was no longer saying it was unreasonable. In his own way, that was like he was saying there was a prospect for success.

Reiji didn't have an ounce of doubt in Suimei's sharp senses. He had never once lost at anything that Reiji knew of before. So if Suimei thought that it was a fight they could win, that meant there was a chance at defeating the demons.

Reiji didn't know if that was just optimism because of the power the Goddess bestowed upon him. However, it was also true that this was not enough to shake his firm resolve and lead him into despair. That's why, he thought—

(Do they seriously, seriously think this is good enough?)

They were trying to accomplish things in such a childish way that even if they

tried correcting it, it couldn't be corrected, which was why Reiji couldn't help but doubt things. Why do the demons not try to get stronger? Do they not feel like it, or are they not able to? In any case, as Reiji held on to those thoughts as he swung his sword, he could hear the sound of something rubbing against the ground.

“There's still more...?”

The demons taking part of the surprise attack weren't limited to just the first wave. As Reiji looked up to the sound of more of them sliding down the hill, he could see another wave of demons descending.

“However, what I must do hasn't changed!”

As Reiji firmed his resolve with a shout, he cut down the demon before his eyes. Just like always. And suddenly, a presence appeared behind him, and it was just then that it happened. It was the presence of the dark power that the demons used. Because he was focused on the enemies before him, he was negligent of his surroundings. As Reiji turned around in a fluster, it went without saying that it was already too late.

(After thinking about that kind of thing it ends up like this huh—)

The demons never schemed when they fought. As Reiji was thinking deep down that they always fought in exactly the same way, he ended up showing an opening and was in danger. It was just like the act of a petty small fry.

“Ku—”

As he brought up his sword to fend the attack off, he understood full well that it was obvious he wouldn't make it in time—

And right before his eyes, two silver flashes flickered. It was nothing other than the lustre of mithril intersecting, and it swallowed up the demon which was threatening Reiji's back without erring. The girl before him was now wearing a sand repelling mantle and her mouth could not be seen. Her ever gentle eyes were now narrowed and sharpened like the point of a blade. Those eyes were just like the silver light being given off by the swords in her hands. As Titania gave off an atmosphere like she would cut down any who touched her,

without soaking in the afterglow of her strike, she turned her back to him.

“Reiji-sama. Leave your back to me. I will tidy up all the trifles here, so please swing your sword as you please.”

“Un. Thank you, Tia.”

Reiji gave his honest thanks to the gallant yet dreadful and cool girl. She was reliable. As an ally, she was truly reassuring. But in contrast, Reiji’s feelings towards himself only worsened.

—Is this really what a hero is? Is it really alright for a hero to be like this?

In all his fights up until now, he was always being saved. He couldn’t count the number of times he fought on his own to the bitter end without being able to save his comrades. He was aware of his lack of ability back in the Imperial Capital, and it was as if he had not progressed at all. Could he really call himself a hero and fight on to the bitter end like that? As those doubts sapped away at his spirit and made him anxious, he could feel a weight leaning on his back.

“—Reiji-sama.”

“Tia?”

“I am sure that you have various things to think about, but right now, please focus only on the tip of your own blade. If you are to be a swordsman, you must become one with your own sword.”

Even in the middle of that mayhem, Titania’s transparent and composed voice rang out. As she remonstrated him for getting caught in idle thoughts, Reiji came to his senses.

“Un. Sorry. Thank you.”

As Reiji looked over his shoulder and thanked her once more, Titania didn’t return her usual gentle smile, but a fearless one. That was likely proof that she was one with her swords. As a swordswoman, Titania was different from her usual princess self.

“—Let’s go.”

“Yes.”

Accompanied by Titania, they dove deeper and deeper into the demons, and cut towards the foot of the cliff. Their purpose was to strike down the demon commander who would definitely be there.

Cutting down, three, then four demons, Titania pushed back and cut down all the demons behind him. And as they arrived at the bottom of the cliff—all that was there was a massive lump of flesh.

Seeing that completely bizarre form, Reiji's footsteps unexpectedly came to a stop. Using a crushed tent as its throne, there was a mountain of meat in front of him. He couldn't express it in any other way. It was a grotesque mass. And then, that thing, also seemed to have found what it was looking for.

“—Our name, is Grallajearus. Oh hero who is the apostle of the Goddess. To fulfill the long standing desire of our God Zekaraia and Demon Lord Nakshatra, we will have you crumble here and die in obscurity.”

With a boisterous voice like it was made up of children's voices piled atop each other, it made a pledge to kill the hero.



—A little before Reiji and the others came in contact with Grallajearus.

On a hill far away from the Imperial army headquarters where they were fighting, as if lording over the land like a god would from heaven, there were two shadows standing atop a hill. One of those shadows, let out a somehow dissatisfied sigh with slight wonder, and spoke.

“To think a surprise attack would be so easily carried out.”

The one to put those thoughts into words, was a good looking man with copper chain wrapped around his body—the demon general Ilzarl. And next to him, the other shadow was—another demon general, Lishbaum, who replied to him in a somewhat cold tone.

“The reason this strategy is able to display its effectiveness is only because the other side had been just that negligent. It is likely because we have only been straightforwardly attacking head on up until now. The demons are like a savage tribe with no intelligence. You could say that they wouldn't doubt at all that they were wild boars.”

As he pointed out the enemy army's complete oversight, Ilzarl still had doubts.

"If you can do it this well, then why have you not attacked up until now?"

"That is naturally to make the other side think that their strategies are working well. When the situation progresses smoothly, they'll become just that much more careless."

Ilzarl had intended to return the accusation of oversight, but that cold reply came back at him.

"Then it was all to stir up the negligence of those offerings?"

"Yes... If we were to attack, the other side would either intercept the advance, or in the case where their numbers don't overtake the number of attackers, they would take on a plan to stall for reinforcements until the requisite numbers are met. In any event, if they cannot avoid a defensive battle, it is a simple matter to make them think we are attacking head on with foolish honesty while we attack with a smaller number of forces. It is something that happens often. Lure out the enemy, and attack where they are shorthanded. Anybody can think of such a plan."

"Fuu—And that is something you set in motion?"

"It is a most satisfactory result now that they'll be more vigilant of our actions in the future. If we can provide a serious blow to their headquarters it would only make it better."

"I don't think it balances out the damage done to us while waiting for the chance though."

"That is not the case. There is enough of an effect, rather, we have excess change."

So he said, but Ilzarl was unable to make the same calculation, and had doubts towards Lishbaum's statement. Certainly, the plan Lishbaum put in place was quite effective, however the losses taken to do so didn't match the results gained, no matter how he thought about it, it did not add up. The losses were the force used to perform the surprise attack, as well as the forces who were marching straight on through the treacherous mountain path.

If they could crush the main force it could be said to be a price worth paying, but the encampment put in place was only the vanguard. It was only there to buy time for reinforcements. Thinking that they would fall back to a much larger scaled army, it definitely did not balance out. Therefore...

“Will they really be able to take advantage of this? Rather, with the current situation isn't it more likely that those guys just take flight?”

Those guys—By that, he meant Grallajearus and the force used to perform the surprise attack. Because they were taking action in small numbers, it was likely for them to be overthrown by sheer numbers. Since the force was made up entirely of demons, he didn't think it was actually possible, but as he wasn't a demon himself, Ilzarl had sufficient reason to have concerns regarding that in the corner of his mind. And in response to that question, Lishbaum returned a cruel smile that even made Ilzarl's blood run cold as he replied.

“—And just what is the problem with that? It is fine for them to take flight. For argument's sake, even if they were annihilated, it is not something to really care about right?”

Ilzarl had no idea what he was basing that answer on. The demons were all supposed to be completely focused on victory, but within that faint smile which gave off a penetratingly cold sensation, Ilzarl could sense an ominous feeling like Lishbaum had different expectations. After Ilzarl hardened his expression for a while, he once more looked over the flow of the battle with a once more bored expression.

“... I thought you weren't a bastard who used tactics like Vuishta did though?”

“You overestimate me. I am not a strategist, so I am someone who is unrelated to tactics. All it means is that I can only think of hackneyed methods at this level.”

“Are you speaking seriously? Aren't sinister tricks your damn specialty?”

As Ilzarl spoke with a hint of sarcasm, Lishbaum replied with a seemingly happy smile like he was being praised.

“No no, it is only to this extent. Only this extent is fine. Trapping an opponent or completely reading their movements would be largely impossible. If I could

do such a thing, then I would in fact be a crafty schemer who drowns in his own schemes. A battle is something where sacrifices are essential. For an amateur at tactics like me, calling it a plan is far too impertinent. That is why if I'm going to do it, it is fine if it is at this level where it is guaranteed to work and only good for harassment. Right?—When it comes to offensives, we'll have a countless number of opportunities after all.”

As Lishbaum treated the lives of demons like a complete afterthought, Ilzarl narrowed his eyes and glared back at him.

“... Lishbaum. Just what the hell are you thinking about?”

“Regarding that, if things proceed quickly, I'll be able to tell you very soon. —Oh my, rather than that, it seems they are making a move.”

As Lishbaum's gaze shifted its focus, it was just about the time that Reiji was scattering the demons with Titania at his back. And right before him, there was a mountain of flesh in his way. And that lump of meat, was something Ilzarl knew well.

“—Grallajearus. You're going to do it?”

“The hero is likely taking on everything from the front to reduce the stress on the soldiers. If the hero dies right there, then the morale of their troops will probably plummet.”

Just as Lishbaum said, the death of a hero would have a tremendous effect. Even to the demons, defeating the heroes was one of their greatest priorities. However, Ilzarl had a somewhat dissatisfied expression on his face.

“How unexpected. For that hero to be right there.”

“Was it something you couldn't foresee?”

“That hero still hasn't gotten used to the power of the Goddess. The offerings around him are probably treating him preciously and taking him out to grow stronger as he gets accustomed to the power. To that man, it is absolutely necessary.”

“Indeed.”

“However, it seems those offerings do not yet understand just what a hero is.

It is somewhat premature to thrust him before Grallajearus without keeping him restrained.”

“Hohou. Then are you saying that the hero does not have even the smallest chance of winning?”

“It’s obvious. Grallajearus is at the level where he is called a demon general, he’s at least that strong after all.”

That was why, the hero couldn’t win. On top of the hero not having enough skill, the demon known as Grallajearus was one who was particularly strong among the demons. That was why—

“So is that why you look disappointed? Because the meal that you purposely left aside is being snatched away?”

“Well, yeah.”

Back in the grotto in the self governed state, the reason Ilzarl let Reiji go was because the power he could gain from consuming him was currently insufficient, because he saw the potential to fatten up his offering. That was why he didn’t get serious in that place, and was waiting in anticipation—no, just waiting. But now that was being snatched away from him. The disappointment of having one’s favourite food that they left atop the plate to be eaten last snatched away was something anybody could understand. While talking of such things, Lishbaum abruptly changed the flow of the conversation, and brought up something else.

“—Ilzarl-dono. If I remember right, you gave that thing that I had asked for to that hero correct?”

“That thing that you asked for—that, huh. Fuu. Since I didn’t do your little job, is your anger building up?”

“No, I do not particularly mind. I didn’t expect anything from anyone in the first place.”

From anyone. Without being affected by his sarcasm, Ilzarl put his doubts into words.

“You don’t mind? Does that mean it isn’t all that much of a threat?”

“Goodness no, that—the Sacrament is something that can reach the Evil God, just as I said before, this is the truth. However, it is not something that can be so easily used after all.”

“Even if he is like that, that man was chosen by the Goddess right?”

“That kind of thing is unrelated. Between being selected by the Goddess and being accepted as worthy by that thing. Which of the two is more difficult is something that doesn’t even need to be considered after all.”

“...?”

Ilzarl couldn’t understand the meaning behind Lishbaum’s words. However, he didn’t question him. That was because it was inconsequential to Ilzarl. However, Lishbaum answered without being asked.

“The main focus, is whether that hero’s inner voice can be heard. If that hero’s thoughts can reach its very roots, or if that Lapis Judaix answers him. The power he would obtain is—”

Lishbaum did not speak any further, and only made a faint smile as he stifled his laughter, and let it leak out without any hesitation.

Chapter 4: So That I Can Be Myself

—On that mountain of pale pink flesh, there was a countless number of grotesque eyes and small arms and legs. The demon general, Grallajearus. It was neither a human shaped demon, or one which walked on four legs like a beast. It was just a lump of meat. An existence who could only be described in such a way. It was like a tumour that had swollen up without ever being cured and did nothing but grow earnestly.

It was questionable to conclude whether this was a demon, or even an actual living being. It was to the extent that as long as that conspicuously grotesque existence did not explain what exactly it was itself, there was no way of knowing.

“Oh pebbles of Isa—”

As Grallajearus’ voice rang out, tiny, tiny iron scraps of iron shot out like gunfire. Propelled by a dark flash, they could hear the sound of several objects piercing through the air as countless holes opened in Grallajearus’ body. In response to that attack that they were unable to capture with their eyes, Reiji and Titania could only run and evade. Before that relentless attack, they had no opportunities to mount a counterattack.

“Shit, we can’t get closer like this...”

If they got closer, they would fall prey to those projectiles, but having said that, it wasn’t a situation where they could keep their distance. Even if they took a wait and see approach, the moment they stopped they would be pierced. Unable to advance, unable to withdraw, they were unable to do anything they wanted.

It was an opponent where it was unclear just how it fought. Despite its sluggish appearance, they couldn’t even guess how well it could move around, which only dragged them further into the disadvantageous situation they found themselves in. It felt like they were forced to confront a number of machine guns that were never exhausted. However, if they couldn’t get closer, then it was fine to just unleash their attacks from a distance.

“—Oh earth! I make a request of the solid lands! Turn thy pulsations into a violent tremor and gather below my feet! Exercise your authority and pierce through the air before me and rupture evil with this unavoidable stone! Grand Geyser!”

Reiji rapidly chanted a spell of the earth attribute and unleashed his keyword with no delay. And as he did, a countless number of enormous pillars shot up from the ground around Grallajearus and took aim at that mountain of flesh. Reiji didn't take the time to properly aim all the pillars, but there was enough of them covering a wide enough range that it didn't matter. The pillars tapered to a point and pierced into Grallajearus, however—

“Do you really think this kind of makeshift attack could strike us down, hero!?”

As an unpleasant shriek reverberated like sheer noise in the air, Grallajearus' mountain of meat began bubbling and swelling as if to compensate for the damaged portions. By the time the pillars of earth brought about by Grand Geyser vanished, Grallajearus' body looked like it had not received a single wound and was just like it was before.

“So this guy can regenerate...?”

Reiji muttered as the impatience scorching his back grew stronger. The menace of something which could regenerate its wounds immediately dulled his judgment. He couldn't just carelessly swing at it, and any halfhearted attacks would surely be useless. As he bit down at a loss of what to do next, Titania called out from behind him.

“Reiji-sama. I will take the front for a moment. While the demon general's is focused on me, go around and attack him.”

“Got it—”

After accepting her suggestion, he distanced himself from her. Taking advantage of the fact that the demons were also keeping their distance because of Grallajearus' attack, Reiji quickly began moving to circle around his target as Titania resolutely cut in straight from the front. While moving left and right as if making sport of her opponent, Reiji felt like he could see an optical illusion of her leaving behind an afterimage like a blur. It seemed that even with its many

eyes, Grallajearus was unable to keep up with her movements, and focused entirely on the front to deal with her.

—It went just as planned.

Confirming that the plan was working, Reiji circled around to Grallajearus' rear. Cutting down the demons in his path, he ran up the cliff as if drawing an arc, and spotted Titania retreating a great distance.

“HAAAAAAAAA!”

Judging that the timing was right, Reiji let out his fighting spirit with a single slash. As his orichalcum blade plunged towards Grallajearus from behind, the eyes that had been entirely focused on Titania as well as all the other eyes buried deep within that body moved and turned towards Reiji.

“Ku—!?”

Even the little arms and legs, as if following those eyes, began to move chaotically. And then the iron scraps came out at him—the pebbles of Isa. As if escaping from the blast radius of buckshot, Reiji twisted his body and threw himself to the floor in a roll. However, even the place he rolled to was within the extent of the pebbles of Isa's aim.

“—Ku, oh earth! Surround me and become a firm bulwark! None shall pass and threaten this life! Earth Wall Rising!”

Chanting a defensive spell, Reiji created a wall of earth with his mana as he laid on the ground. That wall which was supposed to be able to defend him from any attacks fended off the first wave of the pebbles of Isa just as he planned. However, just like a machine gun, the attack was incessant. After stopping the first wave, the iron scraps just kept raining down and gradually wore away the wall of earth. At that rate, it would only hold for a few seconds. As Reiji intuitively perceived this, he hurriedly stood back up to get away from there.

“What a relentless attack...”

“Don't underestimate us hero! Did you think we would fall for such an infantile plan!?”

Grallajearus' angry shout came flying over.

... Reiji was bewildered by the failed attack to Grallajearus' rear. Just how did it accomplish that? Even though it was supposed to be entirely focused on Titania to the front. Even all those eyes it had were certainly pointed towards her. It was as if all its organs were operating independently. As if it was an existence made up of many beings.

“—I see.”

That was probably it—

“You're, a colony, right?”

“That's right! We are an army of hundreds, and we are one! We will not be destroyed by such narrow minded attacks by you damn humans!”

Grallajearus let out a loud shriek about the merits of its body. This explained the mysterious way it referred to itself as 'us' whenever speaking in first person. Its arms, legs, eyes and those pieces of meat were all independent of each other. When it fired out the pebbles of Isa, it was a peerless opponent who was difficult to approach.

... 'This is bad.' A bitter taste began to spread in Reiji's mouth as he thought that. The fact that he was in a hard fight with a demon general was one thing, but it was also bad that the demon army was digging deeper into the encampment. He had no room to take his time.

“Reiji-sama! For now you should...”

“Ku... Is it too much of an opponent for me...?”

“Obviously. You will die in obscurity right here bastard. Depart as you regret the fact that you made light of us demons.”

And at Grallajearus' command, the demons in the area attacked. It looked like they were planning to surround and crush Reiji. However, it took all of Reiji and Titania's efforts just to deal with Grallajearus itself. Graziella was busy protecting Reanat with the other members of the Elite Twelve, so she wasn't there to support him. At the current rate, they would be unable to do anything and defeat would be inevitable.

“... Tch, Tia, what should we do?”

“It is vital that we withdraw from here for now. The only choice is to breakthrough in the direction of our allies.”

“But if we do that, we’ll be showing our backs to that demon general.”

“Yes. Therefore, I will serve as the rear guard. Reiji-sama, break out of the circle of demons as fast as you can and reorganize our position.”

“I can’t do that! If I do that, Tia will...!”

Unable to accept her directions, he yelled back at Titania. However...

“It is alright. Reiji-sama, please believe in me.”

“Tia...”

Reiji couldn’t approve of using her as a shield and running away, however it was also true that he was unable to think of any other means of getting through the current situation. At the current rate, it was certain that they would just both die. Thus, Titania proposed to carry the heavier burden. Reiji ground his teeth. Once more, he had to go through the feeling of being powerless. He had to be protected by his companions. And just as he thought he had to make a bitter decision...

“—Oh earth. I make a request of the solid lands. Turn thy pulsations into a violent tremor and threaten all from beneath. Exercise your authority and become the foundation which supports all in existence. And so, pierce through the air, rupture evil, become an unavoidable stone and break through. Grand Geyser Refinement!”

As a young girl’s voice rang in the air, Reiji heard a keyword he had never heard before. However, it was magic which was far more powerful than the magic Reiji used earlier. Immediately following that keyword, the earth protruded outwards. The magic Reiji used created enormous sharpened pillars, but the magic which manifested here looked like the needles of a porcupine as large swords of earth stuck out diagonally from the ground.

And the demons were torn to pieces at the excessively dense cloud of blades, and were annihilated exceptionally easily. Before long, the effect of the magic

vanished, and the ground evened back out. And from that cloud of dust, a single young girl stepped over the pile of demon corpses which made the ground seem uneven—Io Kuzami appeared.

“... My goodness, do not create such a tightfisted atmosphere on your own when you are right in front of me.”

“Io Kuzami-san...”

“Umu. Oh fiancé of mine. The fact that you had forgotten about me is something I will be questioning you about deeply, very deeply, deeper than the Japan Trench. So stay there as you prepare for that.”

As Io Kuzami thrust her index finger at him vigorously, she laid bare her dissatisfaction. Despite the situation being what it was, she was calm and composed as she always was. However, in complete contrast to her attitude, the demon encirclement was still going strong. The path she created to them from the direction of the Imperial soldiers had already been sealed back up.

“Io Kuzami-dono, please take care of Reiji-sama. I will take the rear and—”



“Like I’ve been saying, do not just decide it is a disadvantageous situation on your own.”

“But at this rate!”

As Titania persisted, Io Kuzami let out a grand sigh for some reason. It was as if she was tired of them worrying about pointless matters—

“What kind of misunderstanding are you bastards making? Even though we are not the only ones fighting here. Do you seriously believe that you are the only strong ones present?”

“Eh—?”

Bewildered by Io Kuzami’s words, Reiji inadvertently let out his voice. There were other strong people. So she said, however in the current situation, the only ones who could probably break through were himself, Titania, Io Kuzami and Graziella. Reiji and Titania were hard pressed regardless of whether they advanced or retreated. Graziella and the Elite Twelve had their hands full with other matters. That was why Titania planned to entrust Io Kuzami with protecting Reiji.

Was there somebody else that could break them out of their predicament? While thinking about that, Reiji could suddenly feel a tremendous agitation of mana from the Imperial side. He could feel it in his body along with the shaking earth. It felt just like the resonance one felt before a tremendous power was unleashed. Reiji wondered whether it was Graziella’s earth magic. And while making that guess, an unnatural sound echoed in the air where there should have been no walls for the sound to bounce off of. It was the chant of a woman. And those words were...

—Mana Furnace Core. White Fire, Immediate Critical Load!”

A severe, yet gentle singing voice could be heard, and immediately following that...

The agitated mana that had been shaking their surroundings explosively swelled up. A wave of mana which blew against them. Accompanied by an intense heat, it felt like the very sun had descended down to the ground. Faced with that mixture of a shockwave and hot wind, let alone Reiji and the others, even the demons were completely rooted to the ground.

And then, a cruel chill suddenly assaulted Reiji’s body. It was a similar

sensation to when he heard a scary story, or when he went to supposedly haunted locations, a sensation that something bad was going to happen, that kind of trembling that anybody would have felt in their lives at least once. And everything that was making his body tremble, changed into that cold sensation.

“Th-this is?”

“Suimei? No, just who...?”

“Kuku, I see. So that guy has drilled this much into her. Though he’s always playing the fool, he unexpectedly does not miss a step, its an interaction that makes me envious to the point where it stimulates this curse of mine.”

Following after Reiji, Titania also showed her bewilderment. And as if ignoring them completely, Io Kuzami understood what was going on as she made a bold smile. She knew something. And the moment Reiji was about to ask her, the next chant echoed in the air.

“—Rain, oh rain. Oh hot, hot rain of fire which pours incessantly without exhausting my mysteries. Just like the white smoke of clouds and fog worn by the skies, cover the earth with a baptism of white fire which pardons no evil. Show not the mercy of compassion to those who disturb the world, to those who soil the world. And so, purify the lands and admonish them with the fires of judgment handed down from the heavens.”

—Rainblaze Clouds. (Gather the Burning White Rainy Clouds.)

The keyword that came out, was Rainblaze Clouds. Those words sounded just like they made apparent exactly what the characteristics of the magic was.

A large white magic circle stretched out across the ground, and acting in direct opposition of it, the same magic circle formed in the blue sky. As they revolved in opposite directions from each other, a white electric current ran loose in between them. And as those currents struck the clear sky, white clouds gradually took shape, and swirled into a vortex.

The sky was gradually becoming cloudy. However, in complete contrast to that reality, the ground below was still bright as day. As magic, its activation was slow. Moreover, from what Reiji could see, it only seemed like magic which created clouds. However, as he thought, that wasn’t all there was to it. With a

drip and a drop, raindrop like objects began falling from the sky.

It began to rain incessantly in a drizzle over the battlefield. Perhaps because of the white clouds covering the sky, the small raindrops looked like they were white. And as they left a thread like trail in the sky, they fell towards the demons. They were all headed straight for just the demons.

But those drops were not rain, they were plasma which gave off a white light. What was pouring down incessantly, was a rain of white hot threads. As it came in contact with the demons, their bodies turned into a mass of white flames. Naturally, they had no way of resisting it. Even as they clad themselves in the dark power they used to resist magic, their bodies were completely exposed to the rain, their defences destroyed, and eventually they became fire. White fire. As they immediately tried to brush it off, it spread to the other nearby demons. The speed at which it did so could be described as the blink of an eye. The white fire spread out like a blaze in a field, and pretty much all the nearby demons were annihilated.

“ ... ”

Seeing that disastrous scene, Reiji was at a complete loss for words. And at the same time, a cruel chill assaulted his back. This was not because of the power of the magic. The power of the magic was certainly great, but the fear he felt from it was only to that extent. Creating a large amount of clouds in the sky, and bathing everything underneath it in white fire, it was only surprise to that extent. Moreover, the clouds hanging over the skies still seemed to be spreading out, and soon it would cover the entire encampment.

—The scale is too different.

At the unusual phenomenon that he wasn't even sure whether it was even proper to call it magic anymore, he lost his words, and Titania who was standing next to him was also in complete surprise while squinting her eyes and staying alert. Io Kuzami was standing there with her brows knit in dissatisfaction. And then, it was not just Reiji and the two girls who were caught completely by surprise.

“Wh-what is this!? This magic!? Magic on this kind of scale is impossible!?”

The one to raise that chorus of shock, was the demon general Grallajearus.

Even to a demon general, it was the first time it saw this kind of magic. When it faced off against Reiji and Titania it always had a composed attitude, but right now it was extremely perturbed. Before long, the one who came walking up to them, was the caster of that magic—Felmenia Stingray.

“—To call this level of magic impossible, that in itself is the definition of foolishness. There are only a small handful of things that are truly impossible in the world. What I’ve done is none other than a simple matter compared to those impossible feats.”

“This magic, was it your damn doing!?”

As Grallajearus raised its voice to ask her, Felmenia quietly nodded. And Grallajearus only questioned her with more bewilderment in its voice in response.

“What the hell are you!? Despite not being a hero, why can you use so much power!? Are you really a damn human!?”

“No, that’s—”

—Just the other day, I made my resolve to take my leave of being one.

Quietly, and coldly, she declared this, and a sudden mix of fear and cold ran up the backs of every single being present. To take her leave. The one who was caught on those words, was none other than the one who asked her, Grallajearus.

“T-took your leave, you say...? Are you saying a human stopped being a human...?”

“Regarding that, let us just say that it is of no concern to a demon.”

“M-making light of me...”

“By the way, is it fine to only worry about me? There are more of your enemies here than just myself right?”

“What—?”

And what could be heard after Grallajearus’ confused voice, was a hearty war cry.

“ORAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!”

It was a very manly and violent cry, but the voice was that of a woman.

DON—Along with that deep low frequency sound which resounded in one’s stomach, a mass of bodies flew into the skies above the circle of demons who were still burning in white flames. Their bodies were extremely gruesomely scattered into pieces from the shock of the strike.

Following that, the fence of burning demons were blown back by the shockwave. And beyond that fence, was a young girl carrying a gigantic halberd with bright blue hair and a small stature. And that young girl, as if she just touched something nasty, grimaced and she shook her hand in the air. Her expression was definitely not one of someone who was fighting the sworn enemy of humanity, but one of someone who was driving away an unpleasant insect.

“Who is...”

As Titania was about to ask who it was, Felmenia answered before she could finish.



“Your Royal Highness, that is an ally. But do note to add, for now, in your mind...”

“For now?”

“Well, yeah.”

The one to reply to Titania was the young girl who Felmenia called an ally. She must have heard their conversation. She then thrust her halberd towards Reiji and Titania.

“Yo, Hero of Salvation and the Twilight Beheading Princess. My name is Jillbert Griga. Just for today I’ll be lending you a teensy hand alright? Aah, also, I won’t be answering uncouth questions like ‘Why?’ or ‘What’s your aim?’ you hear? That’s cause it’s all things there’s no point in you knowing! Seiyah!”

After declaring that, she once more swung her halberd and separated the axe portion from the grip. And along with a chain which tied to two pieces together, she began to scatter the remaining demons around them.

Along with Felmenia’s magic, pretty much all the demons in the area were defeated and left powerless. And the one to gnash down on their teeth in response to that, was naturally Grallajearus.

“Th-that many, by just the two of them...”

“Hah!! You’re naive for thinking you can just drag along a mish mash of these damn powerless pests! Don’t look down on humans stupid! Idiot! Ah, I’m a dwarf though...”

“Besides, it is not just our power. There are the Imperial soldiers here as well.”

As Felmenia glanced behind her, Graziella had already pulled together the soldiers, and were exterminating the remaining demons.

“Everyone, show some spirit! We’re going to support Reiji!”

“HA!”

As Graziella gave her orders, the Imperial soldiers shouted back in unison. They were thrown into chaos and left at a disadvantage, but from the looks of it, they quickly rearranged their position and were now pushing back the ambush.

However, it could be said that what granted them a means of survival, was

without a doubt Felmenia's magic. As Grallajearus also seemed to fully understand that fact, it fired off the pebbles of Isa towards her with rage.

"You damn little girl!"

"—Oh barrier. Deploy."

In response, Felmenia muttered out a chant. And immediately, a thick wall of mana appeared before her, and obstructed the countless iron scraps sent flying by Grallajearus.

"A magic shield cannot stand before our pebbles of Isa!"

"Unfortunately, this is a barrier."

"Nonsense!"

And after that, the pebbles of Isa were continuously fired out, but the barrier put up by Felmenia didn't crumble. Despite the fact that the wall of earth Reiji used crumbled in an instant, with a far shorter chant, using a spell he had never heard before, with no keyword, she created a shield that could withstand it.

Before long, Grallajearus could tell that the pebbles of Isa would not work, and stopped the barrage. And as he did, Felmenia's barrier also vanished.

"Demon general. That kind of attack will not work on me. Resign yourself."

"Gu...! This, kind of..."

Felmenia further increased the mana clad around her, and threatened the demon with overwhelming pressure. Seeing her like that, Titania let out her admiration with a smile.

"As expected, White Flame-dono is quite reliable."

"N-no, it was nothing much..."

In a complete change from her dreadful aura just now, Felmenia began to feel embarrassed. Her expression crumbled before the praise and admiration of the princess of her own country, however the mana she was accumulating remained the same, she didn't show any signs of carelessness. Before long, Graziella had finished cleaning up the remaining demons and joined up with them.

“Is all that’s left that monster?”

“Yes. A demon general, it named itself Grallajearus.”

Titania answered her. Perhaps because of the battle, her tone was somewhat gloomy, but Graziella responded with a fearless laugh.

“With this much power gathered together, no matter if its a demon general...”

“You’re Imperial Highness, it is still dangerous to be so careless.”

“I know that much without you telling me. Right, Reiji.... Reiji?”

Though Graziella called out to him, Reiji didn’t respond. And as she was baffled by his unexpected behaviour, Reiji suddenly stepped towards Grallajearus.

“Reiji-sama!?”

“Oi! What are you being so impertinent for!?”

The two princesses began panicking as Reiji stepped in on his own. Though they tried to restrain him as they called out, Reiji did not turn to look at them.

“I will defeat this guy on my own. I want all of you to stay out of it.”

“But Reiji-sama—”

“I have to do this on my own.”

Reiji shook off Titania’s voice. He had to do it himself. The origin of that will was naturally something that came from the battle just now. Because he was worthless for having to decide to cast away Titania as a sacrifice, so that he could surpass that wall, he had to do this on his own.

Despite seeing that determined back, Titania still insisted on stopping him, but before she could, Jillbert thrust out her halberd to get in the way.

“—Let him do it. Anyone will feel like they got to do it themselves once in a while.”

“What are you...”

“That’s a ritual. For a man to become a warrior, right? You’re also, one of those aren’t you?”

Saying that, Jillbert winked and smiled at Titania. It was true that one had to stand firm to become a warrior, so Titania was unable to say anything back. As Reiji stepped forward on his path to becoming a man, Grallajearus started making an uproar.

“You’ll defeat us all on your own you say? It was already proven that your damn power is not enough to defeat us! Are you touched in the mind!?”

“I haven’t gone crazy or anything. It’s just because, this is what I must do, so I will do it.”

“Don’t get carried away you damn brat! Did you misunderstand the power given to you beyond your means by the Goddess as your own strength!?”

“I know full well that this is temporary power that I was given. That’s why... That’s exactly why! I need to surpass it!”

“Are you saying we’re your damn stepping stone!?”

“That’s right!! I will defeat you and step over that boundary!!”

With a roar, Reiji advanced towards Grallajearus. Just as he screamed, it was for the sake of surpassing that wall. As he drew closer, the pebbles of Isa were fired out in a flash. And Reiji began evading them as he circled around Grallajearus.

“After howling so vigorously is all you can do evade!?
HEROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

“Ku...”

A pebble of Isa grazed Reiji’s face and left a cut on his face. He stepped forward with authority, but as if he was being toyed with, it took all his effort just to keep moving, he couldn’t spot any opportunity to attack, let alone attaining victory. No, that kind of thing never existed in the first place. Just by the fact that he was immediately forced into a hard fight, any hope of victory was wiped out.

But even so, Reiji had to surpass that wall. Even if it was reckless, even if it was foolish. He was pushed back by Rajas, Elliot took it easy on him, he was completely subdued by Ilzarl, even here he was completely half baked. He

couldn't just resign himself to being such a half baked hero from here on out.

That was because he had companions he could rely on. Even now, they were behind him calling out to him in concern. Let's cooperate and defeat it. Don't be reckless. All he heard was kind voices.

He was always being saved like that by someone. But was that really what a hero was? Was it really okay for him to call himself a hero like that? Without saving anyone, while only being saved himself, only to be placed on a pedestal and carried above others like a buffoon.

He could not accept that. Ever. Being an ostentatious show with no reality behind it held no meaning. There was no way he could accept such deception.

"I won't lose."

"For the sake of the Goddess!? Or perhaps for the sake of the people!?"

"Wrong! It has nothing to do with heroes, goddesses or the people of this world! It is all for myself!"

That was why. That was exactly why. The time to make a great stride, was now. Up until now, he remained the same and took advantage of the good will of his companions. But it was time to separate himself from that half baked self.

Even if he couldn't fly, as long as he never took the leap on his own, he would in fact never fly. That was why, he had to step forward now. That was why—

"I will... I will become stronger! I want to become stronger!!"

His thoughts, his desires, he yelled them all at himself, and just at that time.

—If you desire it, then request it, and call out.

"Eh...?"

—The final gate which connects to a great power, at all times, exists within you.

"Wh-who—?"

As a robotic pronouncement suddenly resounded in his head, Reiji unexpectedly raised his voice to question it. And when he realized it, he was standing all alone in the middle of a mud like darkness.

“Wh-what? Where? Wh-why...?”

As a baffling situation presented itself around him, Reiji was seized by surprise. He was definitely in the military encampment of the Imperial army, and was right in front of Grallajearus. And in spite of that, he couldn't see those things anywhere. They were nowhere to be found. Everywhere he looked, there was only darkness, and something which looked like a light far in the distance.

However, all of that was wiped away in an instant. That was because the small light in the depths of the darkness, became bluer, and bluer.

“Ah—”

As if entranced by the distant sparkling blue light, an enraptured voice came out of his mouth. With no intent to do so. His mind was the same as that enraptured voice, simply dumbfounded. That passion with which he was denying himself as he yelled was wiped away, and all that remained was that blue light.

He had seen that light before. It was none other than the light given off by the gem installed in the Sacrament.

And in that instant, he suddenly understood. That light was something that he had to head towards no matter what. Beyond that light, the answer to everything was awaiting him.

That's why, he broke into a run. He ran and ran, with all his strength—to grasp that blue light.

And immediately, words appeared in his head. A voice with no voice, and that was...

—By my Lapis' blue brilliance.

—Crystallize the sword spirit.

And as those words repeated, the blue light grew stronger. And as that light spread, it gathered in his hand—but before he could hear the last words, the dazzling light vanished.

... When he realized, that tunnel of darkness and blue light were no longer there, and the scenery returned to that of the Imperial military encampment.

And before his eyes, Grallajearus was sneering.

“Fuu. Just as I was wondering what you were doing, all that did was give off a bit of light.”

“...”

If it was as it said, he was likely giving off a blue light just now. In his right hand, he was suddenly gripping the Ishar Cluster. He had unconsciously grabbed it, or perhaps that blue light he was grasping was in fact the Sacrament itself.

As the Sacrament continued to give off a pale light, it was like the trailing memory of that blue light he was staring at. If it was just as Grallajearus said, all it did was give off light. He was probably always right there as a blue light overflowed from his hand. As proof of that, unlike the time he fought Ilzarl, the Sacrament didn't turn into a weapon. Because he couldn't hear those last words to manifest the weapon, it was only a natural conclusion.

However, even so, he was able to grasp that blue light at that time. He could see the path. He could see the door. He could hear the mysteries of that blue light, the voice with no voice. Therefore, the amount of power he grasped—wasn't zero.

“Wha—!?”

Grasping his orichalcum sword once more, he moved with the same speed which overwhelmed Ilzarl, and could hear a chorus of shock in front of him. It was likely, that it looked like he vanished before its many eyes.

This demon general, wasn't stronger than Ilzarl. In every respect, it was inferior. It was remarkably inferior. If Reiji was going to lose against such an opponent, his suffering from this point would be unfathomable. That was why—

The number of times he could deceive its eyes, was only that one time. Winning against an enemy of such at level straight from the front, was truly suitable of a victory to be praised.

“...”

One step. With one step, in complete silence, he swung his orichalcum sword.

Repelling the pebble which flew like a bullet. Trampling the earth under his feet. With that tenacious single step, his boot sank into the ground, and the ground around his boot swelled up like goosebumps.

“ ... ”

As he drew close, Grallajearus' voice—couldn't be heard. He could no longer hear anything. It was raising an uproar, but Reiji no longer perceived it as sound. 'Ridiculous,' 'This kind of thing,' all those sounds at the height of bewilderment were no longer perceived by him along with his pity. His blood ran cold from being pushed back by this opponent only a moment ago, but he understood the ultimate reality. However, there was not a particle of happiness in him. He did not step forward to gain that sense of superiority.

The demon general, was only a few more steps away. It was in range if he stretched out his sword. At that distance, the demon general abandoned hope and poorly fired out the pebbles of Isa in desperation. But it was too slow. Before they were even fired, Reiji could see through all of it, and the march to victory was determined before it began. As he drew closer with his sword at the ready, Grallajearus screamed.

“We are a colony! Know that an attack from a sword is meaningless before us!”

He could hear, angry voices. No, there was a very small amount of bluffing mixed in. Having fallen into an inferior position, it simply voiced the strong point of its body to cheer itself up. Just as it said, the fact that it was an army was a nuisance. However.

“—Is that so?”

“What?”

“Even if you are a colony, the fact that you have a single consciousness, means there is a control tower which houses that consciousness. If there wasn't, you would be a disconnected mess of chaos. Isn't that right?”

As the truth was thrust before it, Grallajearus' voice became filled with panic.

“Wh-why, do you... Why do you know that!?”

“Light...”

“What?”

“That blue light, told me.”

What gave him that idea, was the blue light. When he touched that blue light, the voice with no voice whispered it to him. ‘That is definitely, not an opponent that you cannot defeat.’

And so, as Reiji swung downwards, he cut apart the small vital deep within Grallajearus without erring.



It was around the time that Lefille’s fight with Latora and Reiji and Titania’s fight against Grallajearus started. Having distanced himself from the headquarters, Suimei was about halfway between the headquarters and where Lefille was positioned, and was clashing against a force of demons.

“—Fiamma est lego. Vis Wizard.” (Assemble flames. Like the cry of the magician’s resentment.)

After his chant, he unleashed the fire magic of Ashurbanipal’s flame at the swarm of incoming demons. With a curse from Assyrian legend as its origin, the magic had particular efficiency against living creatures. When the chant started, it formed many small magic circles irregularly in midair. And as the chant progressed, a sphere of fire formed in the centre of that space. It burned like the shining stone was its core, and clad in a complete incandescence, it was no normal flame one could normally see. Like a burner, the flames had directionality as they shot out plasma, and destroyed their target. An explosive blast danced in the centre of the crowd of demons. The demons caught in the incandescence didn’t even have the opportunity to let out a death cry, and turned to ashes and they fell to the ground.

Even if he fell behind in numbers, the difference in their war potential was evident. But even so, the demons did not falter and still headed towards him. As if they were faithfully devoted to a single order, they were like machines that knew nothing of adaptability.

Suimei was currently taking independent action against the army of demons.

His goal was a search and destroy mission against the demon forces. A few days had passed since the match at the headquarters, and after the officers and soldiers of the Empire managed to start raising their achievements, Reiji's group was finally allowed to head towards the fight. In a private conversation with Reanat, he asked whether demons were coming along any paths that the units sent out to stall them weren't positioned in, and if he would allow him to take independent action to take care of them. Of course, since he was acting alone, he added the words, 'to the extent that I can.'

“—Originally I planned to get paid for this, but it isn't so bad if I think about it as lowering the burden on Lefille and Reiji huh...”

Before heading out, Suimei had made that statement in the military encampment. In the other world, the work of magicians was always compensated with money, so it was perfectly natural for him to think like that, but this time there was his companions as well as the fact that he was supplied with food and any provisions he needed, so he thought he should at least work off that portion, and took on such a responsibility.

Of course, it was also true that he thought it would be unreasonable to do absolutely nothing after sticking his neck in. For the time being, so that Reiji didn't suspect him, he was supposedly taking action together with Lefille who was asked to take on a duty first. And after that, just as planned, he split off to take on independent action.

Spreading out a map and confirming the position of the stars, he determined where he was and where the units sent out to stall the demons weren't located. Staying away from the routes the Imperial troops were using, he strengthened his body with magic and advanced through the steep mountain paths as he hummed, and eventually discovered a force of demons.

They numbered around two hundred. They were composed entirely of demons who moved along the ground, an infantry unit. In a single clump, they advanced through the forest. They looked just like caterpillars moving along a leaf while devouring it. The trees were mowed down as they pushed forward like they owned the place.

And unlike the somewhat human shaped demons which looked like demons

one would see in stories, these demons had the characteristics of beasts and insects. They had large builds about twice the size of foreign basketball players. The surface of their bodies were covered in pitch black cuticles, they had exoskeletons, and they looked to be quite robust. Like they were talking among themselves, the spider like mouths they had were clattering in an ominous way.

“Ugeh...”

It left an unrivalled feeling of revulsion. Compared to that, the fantasy demons he met before were much easier on the eyes. Their external appearance was much better put together than these ones. Suimei instinctively found it physiologically revolting and unconsciously let out his voice. Now that he had found them, he had to do something, and was now at the crossroads where he had to decide how to proceed.

Should he annihilate them? Or should he just deal serious blow to them and then retreat? With that number of them, if he used two or three grand magics he could annihilate them, but thinking about it from the perspective of the strategy the Empire was putting into play, it would be fine if he didn't go so far. Just like the other units, he could stall the demons, if circumstances permit, he could lower their numbers, and report in. However—

(If I think of the things to come, huh)

His sudden anxiety, wasn't about the fight before him, it was about himself. He didn't have much in term of apprehensions towards the current fight against the demons, but right now he was in a situation where the shadows of other threats were flickering over him.

That would be the ones named the Universal Apostles by that mirage man, Eanru's group. To Suimei, they were without exaggeration, a serious threat. There was Eanru's physical strength, and the clear talent the mirage man displayed with his magic even from Suimei's perspective as a magician. Thinking about the inevitable conflict with them, he would have to jump into danger on his own, and build up his strength. So that the next time, he would be able to stand up before the dilemma in front of him.

“That's why, well, I know I need to sharpen my battles senses, but...”

It just seemed like a poor plan to just thrust himself in the middle of the

demon army just to do so. For a magician, it was obvious to find a way to fight like a magician. There was nothing to be gained from recklessly piling up battles, and above all else, the goal he was hoping to obtain was very ambiguous.

But, as he was right now, he felt pressured to take on that reckless and ambiguous task deep in his chest. Discontent with the current situation, if he stood still without pursuing it, the day would once more come where he would be smeared across the earth.

Reaffirming the determination in his heart, he jumped out from the shade of the tree, and the demons immediately raised their ear grating voices as they rushed in. With their claws and sharp insect mouthpieces, they desired to tear apart and devour the weak human body.

However, the power to grant the demons that desire wasn't limited to just that. The chief source could be said to be the dark coloured power wrapped around their bodies. As if it was an aura, it was a mysterious glimmering aura of authority. Different from the negative powers behind dark magic, it was the power which used the Evil God as a source. If someone who did not possess the divine protection of the Goddess which opposed the Evil God took that with their bare flesh, it wouldn't end with a simple wound.

“... However.”

—However, just what was there that he had to fear about that? Certainly, the Evil God's power was astounding. Since it had to do with divinity, it would likely be classified in a powerful category. However, if he had to say whether all the fights he had experienced to date had fallen behind that power, it was definitely not the case, fights he had beyond them were a dime a dozen.

Naturally it was needless to say that those were fights against those who wielded mystical powers. No, it could be said that the common battles in the other world simply surpassed the ones over in this world. In the modern world, that applied to any battle that broke out in any place. Using the tools of science, they thoroughly came up with military tactics which made full use of them.

Machine guns which could fire a hail of bullets. Anti-tank grenades like the RPG-7 which granted an individual the ability to deliver a tremendous blow.

Flying at mach 2, anti-ship missiles that could accurately strike from two kilometres away and the missile cruisers which housed them. Assault helicopters which could suppress humans from the sky, the Super Hind.

Remembering his fights against such things, just how could fighting against demons even compare? Remembering his battles where he fought against opponents where attacks came in at basically the speed of sound from unknown locations, the threat of an attack right before his eyes at a much lower speed was something with such a low difficulty level to deal with that he could do so with his eyes shut.

Dodging the strike straight from the front and defending against the claws swinging in from the side with magic, he returned the attack with fire magic. As the circle of demons narrowed in, he dealt with it by blowing away the ground. And then, jumping into the air at the same time...

“—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.)

... After the chant, Ashurbanipal’s flame burned the demons.

Below the clear blue sky, flames burst into his surroundings, white smoke from incinerated flesh rose to the air, and the red world began to spread. Looking at it from the side, it likely looked like scenery out of a waking dream. Below that refreshing blue sky that would calm anybody’s heart, a banquet of a burning hell was unfolding. The impression didn’t seem to change no matter how many times he saw it. While knitting his brows at the screams of carnage, Suimei indulged himself in idle thoughts for a moment.

(... In any case, what does it mean that the demons move in such a monotonous and predetermined way?)

What came to mind was something he was curious about for quite a while now. From what Suimei had seen to date, the demons he fought used the singular strategy of just pushing straight into human territory. Even when Vuishta trapped Hatsumi in his scheme, the force which attacked the main army at that time also did so by just charging head on.

With tactless frankness, simplicity, they at least took up formations, but they didn't have a single hint of the push and pull born of strategies. It was a tactic which relied entirely on pushing in using the force of numbers. If one had enough numbers, it was certainly a useful method, and without intelligence, it was naturally how they would end up fighting.

However, when there was a way to oppose that method, that was no longer the case. To fight the demons, the people of this world wielded magic and strategies. They even summoned heroes from other worlds. That was why, up until now, the demons were pushed aside, and left to survive in a corner of the world. And in spite of that, the demons still single-mindedly attacked with such simple honesty.

(It's like...)

Yes, it was like, they were saying that they wanted to be killed. In spite of the fact that their opponents took countermeasures against them, all they did was take up the same old fashioned fossil of a fighting style they used before. It was like they were running towards their own death.

Suimei incidentally recalled the story of the famous hoax involving creatures which performed mass suicide. It was an anecdote where lemmings would strangely form into groups, and one after the other, throw themselves off of a cliff into the ocean to drown. In reality, there was no such thing as mass suicides among lemmings, but in a sense, what was happening before his eyes seemed like a similar phenomenon.

“Or the demons attacks are so monotonous so that their opponents become careless as a grand lure... But there's no payoff to that. The stages they could put that to use are severely limited, and it isn't something that they can use to overturn the overall situation of the war when it is going against their favour. It isn't essential to the war either. I may be just thinking about it too much, or perhaps their goal is something else altogether...”

While fighting back the demons, Suimei gradually fell deeper into thought. From what he was thinking, it was possible that the main force attacking the Empire was a decoy, and another force was slipping under their sight to attack another location. However, they attacked head on both in the Empire and the

Alliance, if a detached force was moving it would be going to the Astel Kingdom, but the losses they were taking just to send a force there left great doubts as to what they could have to gain from doing so.

Certainly, during the chaos where they had to accept refugees from the other fallen nations to the north, it was the right time to attack, but—they were still extending the front far too much. It also had the demerit where the offensive went beyond the supply line.

Just what were they planning? No, maybe there wasn't anything in particular. While he was deep in thought, little by little his movements slowed, and the encirclement of demons around him grew thicker. The mob around him started to get in the way of his thoughts as they moved around irritatingly. Therefore, Suimei began a chant to blow them all away.

—And then, the demons surrounding Suimei suddenly vanished.

“...”

It was like they were grasped by a gigantic invisible hand and crushed. Three. In three places. In a nearby space. It looked like there were glass spheres of mana which reflected the images of demons within it. And without permitting any resistance, it crushed them. And as Suimei turned around and glared at the presence that appeared behind him, he let out a question with a sharp tongue.

“—What are you planning?”

“Nothing, they were gathered in a such nice formation, so I just had them all blown away.”

As he turned around, he questioned the man with silver horns standing in the middle of the pool of demon blood and meat. Wearing clothing similar to traditional Japanese garments, he had white clothing wrapped around his body with his chest exposed. He had a glossy black rosary like necklace around his neck. His face always had that fearless smile which found all phenomena in the world enjoyable as he spread out a delightful atmosphere around him. However, for that reason, as he stood in that bloody scene, he transformed into the incarnation of battle. The dragonnewt of the Universal Apostles, Eanru.

As he stifled his laughter, the dragonnewt drew nearer, he didn't seem to see

the demons around them. Or perhaps they just never entered in his field of vision. As that man showed blindness to any sense of danger, Suimei also showed the same blindness.

“I think it’s a little early for a rematch though?”

“What are you saying? There’s no early or late when it comes to fighting right? As long as the two are enemies, whether it be at the ends of the earth or the end of time, the moment and place they meet is the place they fight.”

“To turn a meeting place into a battlefield, are you some kind of Maeda clan member...”

Suimei let out an exasperated voice, and Eanru let his blood thirst rise as if coercing him. Even in this situation where they were surrounded by an enemy army, he looked to be dressing himself up for the return match. It was certainly true that a conflict wasn’t something where one chose a time and place. Even so, to do so in this kind of situation was slightly too whimsical.

However, for a dragonnewt who held supremacy in such a battle, even such an environment was nothing to him. As long as fighting against the demons was some worthless trifle to him, fighting against Suimei in the middle of them was something he could do in his spare time. Even Suimei also wished for this. When two strong people fought on the same stage, the moment they met, it was something they desired.

The atmosphere gradually began screaming. The demons who weren’t stopped by Suimei’s flames were no longer moving. They were beings who knew not the emotion of fear, but from the accumulation of Suimei’s mana and the immense power being let out by Eanru clashing against each other, they were physically bound in place.



However, Eanru's fearless smile suddenly changed completely—

“Haha, it’s a joke, a joke. As I thought, there are many useless things that would come up upon meeting you.”

“Ah?”

“It’s nothing, it just means I didn’t come here today to fight with you.”

“Then—”

“Well listen. Today I came to here to defeat these damn pests. And so, incidentally, I happened to find you.”

“Incidentally?”

“Yes, incidentally.”

“You came all the way here just to defeat guys like this?”

“The guest of honour comes after this. This is the opening performance.”

“In other words, a demon general or something will come huh. Abducting heroes then fighting demons, the things you’re doing are quite mismatched you know?”

“That would only be from your point of view. For the time being, from our point of view, it conforms together.”

Eanru said that as he evaded the topic. Suimei understood he was here to fight the demons. However, despite the fact that he had no intention of fighting against Suimei, he held doubts as to why Eanru bothered to make contact in the first place.

“So, what do you really want to do?”

“You are also here to defeat those damn pests correct? I just thought it would go faster if we did so together.”

“You’re saying since our goals are the same we should cooperate? I don’t have any intention of getting along you know?”

“Neither do I. If we got along too well it would only become a hindrance during our rematch after all.”

“You seriously only care about crap like that huh.”

“So?”

In a change of tone, he asked. It was a question of whether Suimei would go along with his suggestion. That man was an enemy, However, he was one who would definitely not be scheming something. That was because that man was truly someone who desired conflict. Even in the face of his duty, once he met someone he deemed worthy, he would fling aside said duty. That was just the type of personality he had.

... If Suimei refused, it would prove a poor move to have their fights overlap. There was no need to deliberately increase the number of enemies, and since it was also Suimei’s goal to defeat the demons, it would be an extra hand to do so. However, if they fought together right there, no small amount of his hidden hands would be exposed—but that was the same for both parties. At any rate, they were both hiding their secrets away, so there was no meaning in refusing.

“... Alright.”

“Then it is decided. Just for now, I will entrust my back to you.”

Suimei nodded silently back to Eanru. And then, without saying anything, they turned their backs to each other, and redirected the mana and fighting spirit that had been crashing against each other towards the demons.

—In an unexpected development, he now had a united front with a dragonnewt.

In a sense, it was a massacre. From the very beginning, it was a fight without a single sense of danger, but now there was no more need to worry about their backs, and the two of them only needed to focus straight ahead and to their sides.

Using magic, Suimei reduced the demons to ashes. But to his back, double the amount of demons were scattered by Eanru’s fist. There wasn’t even the slightest thought that they would lose. With such a measly amount of demons, it would end in a flash. When he realized, Eanru obliterated the demons to the rear, and moved to crush the ones around them. His eyes glimmered, and each and every demon he was glaring at with both eyes were crushed in an instant.

“Tch, Draconic Eye...”

It was the technique which defeated the demons surrounding Suimei earlier. Among all techniques which caused harm using only one's gaze, it was the easiest to imagine—Evil Eye. In the magic world, it was one of the most simple and ancient techniques. It was originally a type of curse using a glare of envy or jealousy—though obviously, what Eanru was using did not have the same origin, but there was no mistaking it was an astounding attack. One could not recognize it as an attack, so from the target's perspective it was irresistible. After cleaning up a large number of demon, Eanru suddenly smiled.

“What are you laughing at now?”

“No, it's just even with such worthless pests as opponents, standing shoulder to shoulder with someone strong while scattering them about, I just felt like it was unexpectedly exhilarating is all.”

“Haah?”

“No, it is truly unexpected. Despite fighting for several decades, to think a day where I would feel like this would come. Even small fries have their own use as small fries in their own little way.”

Suimei couldn't tell just what he was thinking about. Perhaps it was like a game to defeat more small fries, no, if he was pushed to say it, this would be like a chain in puzzle games. Eanru had no sadistic tendencies. In that case, the only example he could think of, was something close to that pleasant feeling of showing a bunch of them lining up together, and having them vanish all at once.



Conquering the skies, was a flock of demons.

Just like a large large flock of black swans, they looked to be painting the sky black as they moved across it.

—The demon general Striga, was leading a single portion of the demon army, his kin, through the skies and was earnestly headed straight south.

“The human armies cannot ambush the skies, thus, I would like you to charge straight in, was it? —Fuu.”

While flapping his wings with composure in the sky as he muttered to himself

in discontent, those were the words passed down to him by Lishbaum, who had decided on the strategy.

—It was likely that in this battle, the human armies will hold no doubts towards our simple strategy.

—Using that against them, myself, Ilzarl-dono and Grallajearus-dono will perform a surprise attack on their headquarters, so I would like Latora-dono and Striga-dono to serve as the decoys. That way, we'll be able to deal a severe blow to the human army, and defeat them easily.

That was the contents of their war council before departing. It was certainly as he said, if they were able to outwit the human army, they could expect to deal a serious blow. The gathering of humans who fell victim to a surprise attack would fall into chaos, and the wall of bodies would collapse. It could be said to be extremely obvious. However, the problem was whether or not the humans they were launching this surprise attack on were truly something that they had to go to such lengths for.

“Even without using such strategies against mere humans, isn't it fine to just trample them underfoot? Just what is that guy afraid of from such worm like creatures?”

Strategies were something reserved when faced down with an opponent who truly required it. It was the power of intelligence required when brute force was not enough to defeat an enemy. However, the enemies they were headed towards had none of those qualities.

Human soldiers were absolutely nothing to be feared. In truth, after the humans gathered their soldiers and began moving, a few of their forces managed to win, but whenever each and every one of them was crushed, they begin to retreat. And the way they ran away was by scurrying in shame.

It would be one thing if they were being pushed on the back foot, but using a strategy in this case was practically a joke. That was why Striga held doubts towards such a plan, which only intensified his doubts towards the one who brought it up, Lishbaum.

“Did he lose his nerves? It's seriously ridiculous. That damn fool.”

His dissatisfaction had surpassed the permissible limits. Idle complaints were just overflowing from his mouth naturally. At each and every opportunity, Lishbaum would say, 'It's a plan,' 'Outwit them,' and 'Crush them before they become a threat,' as if he was afraid of the humans' power, and had devoted himself to tricks. And all that despite being a newcomer among the demons. He spoke as if his thoughts were the same as Nakshatra's thoughts, and pushed those schemes on them with no hesitation.

There was nothing more frustrating than that. If he had abilities like Ilzarl and Latora it would be one thing, but for someone with such uncertain abilities to put on such a grand face, there was no way Striga could accept it. Flying while throwing idle complaints and curses at Lishbaum, one of his kin that he sent ahead for reconnaissance returned.

—There are humans up ahead. They are probably soldiers who got separated from their unit.

Reading its thoughts, he didn't get any particularly good news. If they found a full human unit deployed, he was planning to kick them around, but it was only two mere stragglers. It would have been perfectly fine to leave aside one or two worms, but changing his course to ignore them would also leave him with resentment.

He planned on just going on the same course, trample the stragglers, and kill them while they drowned in despair. This choice was also best for his own mental health. The moment he found them, it would be fine to take all the dissatisfaction he held in his heart and unleash it on them. While thinking of that...

—The force that he had sent ahead, was nowhere to be found.

"Mu?"

Striga suddenly held doubts towards the information brought back to him by his kin, but—he immediately shook his head as he deemed it worthless.

If they couldn't be found, then it likely meant they just got lost somewhere. The force of demons he sent ahead was composed of nothing but sentries that had nothing resembling intelligence. Demons who had wings had enough intelligence to understand words, but those in the shape of beasts and insects

had none of that, all they were given was physical strength. In which case, if they got lost in a twisting mountain path, then they didn't have the intelligence to correct their course, and would only loiter around.

—They couldn't possibly have been defeated by those damn humans.

Striga rejected such worries over his kin with a laugh. That in itself, was impossible.

If it was just as his kin saw, then there were no human forces ahead. So there was no way that something that could surpass the demons and wipe them out was there. It wasn't surprising, if it was in fact the case, it would mean an entire battalion which could defeat demons was freely moving around the mountains in a place where his eyes couldn't reach. If they could fly through the skies it would be one thing, but humans had no way of accomplishing such a feat. Which only left the possibility that the two stragglers did the deed, but that was even more impossible.

Lowering his altitude, he continued proceeding south. And as he did, an open area came into view. Isolated in the craggy mountain area, it was completely flat land without any trees. Just as he saw from his kin's eyes, there was only two men standing there. As he expected, they were pitiful stranded soldiers. Naturally, he had no intention of showing them mercy. The desire of the Evil God Zekaraia and the Demon Lord Nakshatra was the eradication of humans after all.

—The only mystery was the fact that in spite of being discovered by him, the humans didn't show any signs of surprise.

Despite having quite the large force in the sky, they simply looked up calmly at him, a man in white, and a man in black. Green hair, and black hair. The combination of a human and one of the races was somewhat unexpected, but—well, Striga just left it at the possibility existing after all and stopped thinking about it. Flapping his wings with thuds much louder than necessary, he descended.

“—Humans. You truly are unfortunate bastards. To be left behind in such a place, and to be found by my forces.”

He made that declaration to overawe them, but neither of them opened their

mouths. One just stood there calmly, and the other only looked at him with an idiotic expression.

“What’s the matter? Not going to let your voices out? It’s fine to cry and wail like the other humans while begging for forgiveness. Show me that little sideshow you bastards often do on the verge of death.”

“No, I’ll refrain from doing something so lame.”

As he poured on his scornful laughter, in no time at all, the one with the idiotic expression shrugged his shoulders as he replied. To speak so frivolously despite being left in such a situation, the fact that his attitude didn’t change, this in itself was also amusing.

“Kukuku... You sure can talk after seeing such a large force. I’ll give praise to your damn fake stoicism.”

“No, it’s not really fake stoicism or bluffing or anything though...”

Saying that, the man in black grimaced. And as he did, he tilted his head slightly and looked to the man in white next to him.

“It seems the other side is making some kind of misunderstanding or something, but what do you think? Are they a threat?”

“—Fumu, then I shall ask you in return. Do you feel any threat from such a medley of pests like that? These things are pretty much the same as a mosquito swarm on the side of the road right? Is that not the case?”

At the question the man in white returned, for an instant, Striga lost his words.

“———”

Just what were those humans talking about? Was their fear too strong and it affected their brains? Let alone their composed attitude of being left behind, they were insulting the demons like they were pests. It wasn’t something that such fragile beings like humans should be uttering.

Since things were progressing in such an unexpected way, he forgot what was going on, and finally, he gradually caught wind of just what the conversation before him meant. And in proportion to that, the flames or rage were swelling

up. They were making fun of him, and as they did, those grand flames of rage roared. While that was going on, as if pouring more oil on the fire, the man in black spoke up.

“They’re certainly just annoying huh.”

From the man in black’s words, the flames of rage reached its peak. A mere small fry was showing such contempt towards the demons. These humans could not be left alive, it could absolutely not be permitted.

“You bastards, don’t go thinking that you’ll die painlessly...”

What he practically squeezed out of his mouth as he spat out, was a sentence of death and pain. Matching that, he raised his arm to the sky. Once he swung it down, his kin would take action. With a single order, these humans would be swarmed by his kin, and would be completely drained of blood as they died.

But that was far too halfhearted. He wanted to leave them right on the very brink of death, and torment them. That was the punishment that had to be bestowed on those who made a fool of demons. All his dissatisfaction towards Lishbaum had vanished. It had been completely painted over by his anger, and he swung down his arm—but.

“What—?”

Immediately following that, Striga unintentionally let out his voice at the completely unexpected development in front of his eyes. After swinging down his arm, his kin should have painted them over in a black cloud, but in complete contrast to his imagination, without any cause, all his kin completely vanished right before his eyes.

—What just happened? Without understanding at all, the two men in front of him spoke to each other.

“You sure defeated them easily.”

“Seriously. I was hoping to have to chew them down a little, but... against such pests, that kind of desire is useless I see.”

Their attitudes remained completely the same, and they spoke to each other like they were merely gossiping. They seemed to know exactly what happened.

“Bastards, just what did you...?”

“Just as you saw. It’s nothing, it was also just as I saw though.”

Saying that, the man in black put on a bold smile. He was repeating ‘just as you saw,’ like it was some meaningful phrase. Just what meaning did those words have? Striga couldn’t deduce what those words implied, but—

“Wh-what the hell are you bastards!? Aren’t you soldiers who were left behind!?”

As he let out his doubts and screamed, the man in white knit his brows in a dubious manner.

“Fumu? That one seems to have been making a misunderstanding for some time now.”

“We’re just waiting here is all. For a demon general to show up. But—”

—Hey, just when is something like that gonna show up? Rather, is it really coming?

—Who knows. Maybe they won’t come? This world is nothing but events which go against one’s predictions after all.

The two of them had that kind of exchange. They were speaking with an attitude as if they felt no danger at all. They were likely only able to say such things because they didn’t know that Striga was a demon general.

“These lowly humans... To make such a fool of me...”

And so, his anger further surpassed its limits. Letting out a voice as if transmitting the wrath that was boiling deep in his blood, he unleashed it into the surrounding air, and let out his blood thirst. As his kin began trembling, his true nature was revealed. Baring his fangs, spreading his wings wide, his face also transformed to a pale figure. And, perhaps because the man in black sensed something from that—

“Ah? Wai—isn’t this guy a vampire!?”

As his true nature was revealed to the man in black, he suddenly began panicking. Noticing his honourable bloodline, he finally felt the fear that he should have felt from the very beginning.

“Fu, FUHAHAHAHA! It’s too late to show your fear now!”

“Ku... This is a little bad...”

The man in black muttered with a bitter expression and took a stance. However, it was far too late to take such action. Taking the dark power and changing it into the form of his kin, he let loose enough of it to cover one’s entire field of vision.

“First will be you! DIIIIIE!”

A pronouncement of execution. He fired off the Bat Tide. The man in black’s mana became highly excited, but the pseudo-kin created by dark power crushed even that—or they should have.

Ringling in the azure sky, was a snapping sound, and it blew away his Bat Tide, and let out a strong shockwave.

—With a snap. After such a casual sound, Striga’s body was blown backwards.

“Hmm?”

“G-guu... What the...”

Receiving a completely unexpected attack, Striga was forced backwards, Just what happened? It was a completely incomprehensible attack, and filled his head with bewilderment. On the other hand, the man in black had a posture like he just snapped his fingers. His expression was like he was completely befuddled, and it immediately changed to one of bewilderment. In any case, his attitude was completely out of place—

“Eh? Why are you getting damaged by attack magic? What? You’re a vampire right? You’re not a vampire? Eh? Eh?”

Gazing in wonderment with a bewildered voice, the man in black looked left and right. Just what did he find so mysterious? Just what was wrong with his understanding? Was he expecting something more chaotic? The man in white then turned towards him.

“What about it? It’s certainly true that the one there has more power compared to the other ones, but... It’s striking feature is only its ability to suck blood you know?”

“No, just sucking blood you say... There’s, like, immortality, or like, the ancestor of gods.”

“I’ve never heard of that kind of thing though? In the first place, that wouldn’t be a demon right?”

“—EH?”

What the man in black finally spat out, was an excessively puzzled voice. And the man in white also looked at him with a curious expression.

“Just what are you misunderstanding that thing as?”

“No no no no no. I mean! You know!? In our world, vampires are beings classified as the highest breed, they’ve lived since ancient times, and are existences which would take several battalion scaled groups of human heroes and magicians to take down, so, you know...”

As the man in black was making some kind of incomprehensible misunderstanding, the man in white shook his head. Having such an unexpected reply returned to him, the man in black stood there perfectly still with his mouth partly open. Eventually, completely ignoring Striga’s own surprise, the man in black’s bewilderment turned into irrational anger, and he turned it towards Striga.

“What the hell!? You’re just a fucking imitation!? Don’t fucking scare me! I wasted my damn shock! Are you that!? You just putting on a fake show like that Vuishta or whatever guy!?”

The man in black seemed to be angry at the difference between what he was thinking of and reality. In any case, the name that came out of the man in black’s mouth was something important to Striga.

“Bastard! You know Vuishta!?”

“I know him! I mean, I beat the crap out of him a while ago!”

“Wh-what did you say!? You did!? You defeated he who was a demon general like me!?”

As Striga demanded an explanation, the man in black once more made a dumbfounded expression, and—

“... Ha? Eh?”

“Wh-what is it?”

The man in black went from bewilderment, to an even more unreasonable dumbfounded expression as he looked at him.

“... What? You, were a demon general?”

Like it was completely unexpected, he threw out that question. It was just like he had been looking for something he lost all over the place and then it just casually showed up where he wasn't expecting it, like he was extremely disappointed in that flow of events. As that man looked at Striga with that excessively befuddled face, the man in white began laughing.

“See? Isn't it just as I said? If we wait here a demon general would come.”

“No no no, why are you making such a triumphant look? With this timing? Ain't it strange?”

As the man in black criticized him, the man in white only stood there cackling with laughter. Despite the fact that their enemy was right before their eyes, they were acting like they couldn't even see him, which once more boiled his anger.

—I'll kill them. I'll kill them with everything I have.

Making that determination in his heart, he flew up into the skies where he reigned supreme.

“You bastards humans cannot take to the skies! From here you won't even be able to—”

Reach me. But, even with that truth thrust before them, their attitudes remained unchanged, and—



The cool autumn wind that would refresh anybody's heart blew through the air, and the perfectly clear blue sky was overhead.

—While gazing up at such a sky, the reason he may have found the demon flying there to be pitiful, was likely because he was a magician of the Society. Or

perhaps it was because he received his father's wish, and was walking down the path to save those who could not be saved.

The magician Yakagi Suimei, watched the demon general Striga fly up into the sky, and was suddenly captured by a helpless feeling in his heart, and let out a sigh.

“What's wrong?”

“... No, you know, I just felt bad getting rid of it. From the way it talks, it's completely a villain proud of its own success, but in the end, all those things called demons are pawns moved around to fulfill the Evil God's motives, puppets right? Whether or not they have self awareness, no, precisely because they have self awareness, I feel bad getting rid of it. Those guys don't have any free will after all.”

While still looking up, Suimei let out his thoughts with a hint of pity. If every single demon were pawns in the hand of the Evil God atop the board known as the world, then the thought of exterminating humanity and all of their other goals, were all something imprinted in them.

He couldn't help but see them as pitiful. From the appearance to their thoughts, they were all just designed to match the whims of the Evil God. And since it was impossible to change the way they thought, the only choice left was to put them to death. It made him feel helpless.

Just how were they any different from puppets and dolls? If he thought of dolls as pitiful, then he would probably spend a week losing his speech from the anger of one of his colleagues who was a doll, but in this case there was no way to save them. Therefore, such emotions sprouted. Perhaps because his complex mental state showed on his face, the dragonnewt next to him spoke with cynicism as he laughed.

“Is that something you say after making such a fool of him?”

“Well it's still an enemy, provoking them basically just comes out automatically. This time, how do I put it, I'm just being thrown into disorder on my own...”

When he caught a glimpse of someone who couldn't be saved like he did just

now, regardless of whether it was friend or foe, such feelings would suddenly swell up inside him.

—Perhaps, just perhaps, this was also someone that he had to save.

“What you are trying to say, well, I do understand it. However, what we must do hasn’t changed you know?”

“...”

“Are you hesitating?”

“It’s a habit. Whenever I see someone who can’t be saved like this, somehow...”

“In that case, you should instantly put them at ease. In this world, without exception, there are—”

“Stop. Don’t say anymore. If you put the rest into words, I won’t be able to kill that guy.”

Suimei interrupted Eanru’s sentence. He couldn’t let him finish. Yes, without exception, there are those who cannot be saved. If he heard that to the end, he would no longer be able to reach out his hand. The moment he did so, he would be putting out his hand to go against his own dream. As he warned Eanru, for some reason, the dragonnewt began laughing. He was truly someone just filled with joy.

“How green. You’re so green it practically mismatches the power you hold.”

“... I’m just one among a gathering of people like that. It’s exactly because I’m like that, that I—”

—Became strong.

As he put that into words, Eanru’s smile became bold. Just what did he find so pleasant? Suimei wasn’t sure what had him in such high spirits, but Eanru suddenly stopped laughing.

“That is why. That is exactly why. To save or not to save. Holding such thoughts like you are above them is the exact definition of undeserved arrogance. If you hold on to such thoughts where you do not understand your own place in the world with such religious zeal, one day, it will become the fire

that burns you, do you understand?”

“Unfortunately for you, I was given that warning long ago. Above all else, I’ve been burned by such a thing many times already and gone through painful experiences because of it.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah.”

Saying he would save them, he stuck his neck into the affairs of others and always ended up covered in wounds. That was the punishment and price for his own arrogance. It was something he made his resolve to face long ago without having to be told. As the two of them silently came to an agreement with those short words, they once more looked towards the demon general.

It was likely planning to crush them in a single strike. High up in the skies where their arms couldn’t reach, it was accumulating that dark power and kneading it endlessly. In that position, they couldn’t just run over there. Since their attacks couldn’t reach, the demon was just steadily and assuredly preparing the attack that would definitely kill their opponent. In a sense, it was perfectly reasonable. But that was only if their attacks really couldn’t reach—

“You mere pest. Take my incandescent howl, and depart without leaving even your bones—”

“—Permutatio. Coagulatio. Vis Lamina...” (Transform, Solidify, Achieve Power...)

The words that came out of their mouths, were the means to crush the demon general. On one hand, was the terrifying pronouncement of a howl, and on the other was the mercury sword formed by alchemy. And the first to cause a change in the air, was the dragonnewt’s roar. In preparation for that howl, the sound of a tremendous amount of air being inhaled spread through the air.

“Hoooooooooooooooooh...”

It was as if all the air in the surroundings was being sucked into his chest. Seeing Eanru take that posture, Suimei moved to his own position. And as he was in the middle of walking—

“... If you’re saying that you have no other goals in life than eradicating humanity, then you are likely all properly made puppets of the Evil God. So

pitiful. So pitiful, but if you plan on bringing harm to others, regardless of whether or not you are demons, after all, I think you are all something that cannot be left to exist. After killing so many of them, I also think I'm a bit of an idiot for saying it now of all times though—My goodness, I didn't think that the demons would be this far past redemption.”

As Suimei spoke with sorrow towards the sky, he brought forth his mercury katana, and closed his eyes.

“—The power to transform the perfectly clear blue light into the heavenly sky. The indistinguishable horizon over the ocean. For this single instant, that boundary lies within my hand. Cut through the azure sky. It's name is the dazzling blue among blue.”

Holding the mercury katana in both hands, he pointed it to the ground as he chanted his spell. As the chant echoed out mysteriously in the air, a large sky blue magic circle spread out at his feet, and blue flashes of lightning were unleashed in the air due to his mana. Debris rose from the ground, and began soaring towards the sky.

Accompanied by his crackling mana extolling his magic, Suimei's mercury sword inhaled the spectrum from the sky, and his sword turned blue. The enormous surplus of power gave rise to violent gales around him. Trees, rocks and grass all jumbled together as they were all uprooted and torn to shreds as they were blown away. Looking up, the blue sky had lost its colour, and appeared to be a completely dark night. And so, the dragon's incandescent roar, and the blue light from his sword took to the skies.

“—Breath Blade Distract!” (—Oh purifying blade which plunders blue from the sky, expel evil!)

An incandescent roar, and a blue, ever blue and pure brilliance. As the mixture of blue and crimson threatened the pitch black skies, the flock of demons and Striga were not permitted any resistance, and were completely obliterated by the purple wave.



In the end, the demon general Striga and all the kin he was leading were completely wiped out.

The curtain came down on them in such a way that one could call it far too easy, but in that regard, his opponents were simply just a bad match for him. The winning technique was the dragon's roar, and the purifying power of the Breath Blade. As the two came together, it became a ruthless attack which reminded Suimei of the violent torrent of lightning breath. From Striga's point of view, all it would have seemed like was a violent thunder assaulting his ears. Without even having the time to plug his ears from the reverberating lightning, Striga was unable to do anything before such an enormous power.

“—How do I put it, that's just bad luck huh.”

“Seriously. That demon's misfortune is truly excessive.”

Even though they found the curtain call to be somewhat humorous, they still took lives, so Eanru didn't show a smile either. It ended far too quickly. With that, there was only four demon generals left. That was only the case if another one hadn't been defeated out there somewhere—but, there was still something that Suimei found unconvincing. It was what he was thinking about before Eanru showed up. It was just stuck in the corner of his mind.

“What's wrong? Is there something with the back of your neck?”

In response to Eanru's question, Suimei turned his back to him. And the direction he faced, was where the Imperial military encampment was.

“—I'm going back. I have a really bad hunch.”

“A bad hunch?”

“Yeah, a bad hunch that I get all the time.”

As he put it in an annoying way, he strengthened his body with magic, but Eanru still had more to say.

“Fumu. Then I shall accompany you.”

“Ha?”

“It's nothing. If you have a bad hunch, then it means something that I can enjoy is going to happen is all.”

“—You really need to put a rest to that.”

As Suimei took on a resigned attitude as he spoke, Eanru once more began letting out a pleasant laugh.

Epilogue: The Ten who Fell to Greed

The battle with the demons came to an end, and the calm atmosphere of the Imperial headquarters before the surprise attack had started to return.

Because they still had to clean up, most of the people there were still moving about restlessly, but the chaos and danger from the blood thirst in the air had already vanished.

In any case, the leaders of the Empire and the main force were in fairly good health, they hadn't suffered any major casualties. The soldiers being able to collect themselves quickly, Felmenia's efforts and Reiji's fighting style were all quite effective.

And so, by the overwhelming power Reiji took in hand, the defeated demon general, Grallajearus—was still alive. The core which tied its many consciousnesses together had been cut by Reiji's sword, and its body had half collapsed, but it was left alive to be interrogated.

It could be said that Reiji was not gripped by the need to kill, and was proof that some reason was left in him. Creating a wall of soldiers around the back of main large tent, it was in a state which escape or resistance would not be permitted. Just from Reiji's strike, that was already impossible, but it was all prepared just in case. Naturally, Reiji and the others were standing at the head of that wall of soldiers, and Reiji had his sword thrust forward. Coming through the wall of soldiers, Reanat stepped forward. It seemed his orders to the other groups had finally ended. Gorgan and the other members of the Elite Twelve were together with him ensuring his safety. He then spoke to Grallajearus.

“Demon general. Why were you able to poke at our rear?”

“... Do you bastards think... We would say anything... That would benefit you...?”

“That's right isn't it? There's no way you would just honestly answer. In that case, it just means we'll have to hear it by force.”

As Reanat raised his hand overhead, the Elite Twelve began moving. And just

as he said, they began hurting it, and were likely planning to torture it. However, even in that vortex of pain, Grallajearus poured out scorn in a feeble voice as it wheezed.

“Demon general. What’s so funny?”

“It’s funny... Isn’t it obvious... That it’s funny? To think that we would, give you information, just from pain, you bastard humans are truly... Truly foolish...”

With a sardonic laugh, it showed its intent that it wouldn’t give in. As Grallajearus continued to let out laughter, Jillbert, who had been listening nearby, cut into their conversation.

“Isn’t it pointless to ask that kinda thing? Those demons are beings who think in a different way from us after all. Even if you threaten them with violence and torture them, they won’t say anything. Fundamentally, they don’t know the concept of holding one’s life dear.”

“That’s right! To grant the dearest wish of the Evil God Zekaraia, to build up the honour of the Demon Lord Nakshatra, that is the way of us demons! We fear neither pain nor death!”

After letting out a loud shout, a chorus of laughter rang out. That shrill noise was certainly none other than the mad laugh of one on the verge of death. An interrogation was useless. In that case, there was only one thing to do. Just as Reanat looked towards Reiji asking him to finish it off...

“—That is obvious. If it wasn’t the case, they would be more worthless than trash after all.”

A voice came out of nowhere. It was a voice far more severe than even the rigorous climate of this northern Imperial territory. It wasn’t clear whether it was a man or woman’s voice, it had far too much of a certain beauty to it, and if it wasn’t for those words, it was a voice that felt like it could bring one to ecstasy. However, that beautiful voice, was one Reiji’s party had heard before. No, there was no way they would forget.

“That voice is...”

“It can’t be!”

Forgetting he had a sword pointed at Grallajearus, both Reiji and Titania raised their voices as they looked towards the source of that voice. And standing there, with long white hair and the deep red eyes of a fierce god, was Ilzarl.

“You’re...”

“It has been a while, hero. To think that you would defeat Grallajearus. It exceeded my expectations you know?”

Ilzarl’s baffling statement was as if he was delighted over the defeat of his ally, however Reiji’s focus was...

“You were watching?”

“Aah, I was spectating. From the very beginning.”

Kukuku... Softly, but with a definite joyful look, he began laughing. On the other hand, wondering just who Ilzarl was, Reanat turned to Graziella.

“Lyla, who is...?”

“A demon general. A powerful one...”

“That’s, a demon...?”

His bewilderment was likely due to the fact that Ilzarl looked more human than demon. Reanat, the Elite Twelve, and all the Imperial soldiers began to stir—however at Graziella’s immediate command, they prepared their magic and drew their swords. And during that, one person stepped forward. It was the one who was able to compete with Ilzarl back in the self governed state, Io Kuzami.

“To think you would once more show your face before me, demi-ogre.”

“You have quite the mouth as always, little girl. I will devour you later, so wait there for now.”

As Io Kuzami and Ilzarl were having that little exchange—

“—Is it about time that I can come out?”

Another voice rang out from nowhere. As they wondered where that voice was coming from, a demon casually appeared from Ilzarl’s shadow. He had

blonde hair and bangs lightly hanging over his forehead and a slender face. With a gloomy atmosphere, he appeared to be quite close to resembling a human, but he had strange horns on his head, and dark power hanging over him. He was definitely a demon. And as that demon came out, it suddenly took on a gentlemanly behaviour and bowed down.

“For the present, allow me to offer you my congratulations. Hero from the Astel Kingdom, Reiji Shana. To have reached the blue radiance beyond the distance that you desired, allow me to give my heartfelt pleasure at the good news.”

“Why do you—”

Know my name, and about the blue radiance. As Reiji was about to ask that, the demon who appeared from the shadow cut him off.

“Aah, that’s right isn’t it? It is a pleasure to meet you, my name is Lishbaum. I am not a demon general, but I am being allowed to do fulfill a similar role. It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

As he spoke with excessive politeness that one would never use with one’s enemies, Lishbaum smoothly introduced himself. Reiji couldn’t tell if he was just showing his composed attitude, or whether he simply had the free time to introduce himself, or whether the situation itself was just worthless to him.

“Ilzarl, Lishbaum, why, now of all times...!?”

On the other hand, the one to speak up, was Grallajearus. There was definitely anger in its voice as it criticized them for arriving so late. However, Ilzarl took no notice of that.

“Grallajearus. Do you resent us for not coming to save you? How foolish. To shift the sin of being weak to others, it is far too gutless an attitude for a demon general to take.”

“Bastard... You’re saying, you’re different from us?”

“Of course. I am not born of the Evil God. It just means my way of thinking is different.”

While Ilzarl and Grallajearus were having a little dispute, Graziella shouted

out.

“Everyone take your positions! These are not enemies to be underestimated!”

The soldiers were already prepared for battle, but after receiving Graziella’s command, they knew not to carelessly move. There were two enemies on the level of demon generals before them. Furthermore they just finished going through a difficult battle.

“Mere offerings, you want to go?”

As Ilzarl fearlessly pointed his fangs at them, Reiji yelled back.

“It won’t go like last time!”

“Don’t get conceited just because you defeated Grallajearus. Well, if it was that female mage or dwarf over there, they seem considerably worth eating though...”

“I’m your opponent!”

As Ilzarl focused on Felmenia and Jillbert, Reiji pointed his orichalcum sword at him. And just as the battle was about to start...

“I don’t particularly mind going at it with you here, but—mu?”

“Fumu. A hindrance is it—”

Just as Ilzarl and Lishbaum seemed to notice something, they suddenly leaped back. And immediately following that, from the clear blue sky, a lightning like flash struck the ground between Reiji and Ilzarl. A tremor occurred from the powerful strike, and a cloud of dust kicked up. And eventually, from within that dust, a single man with green hair and silver horns—Eanru appeared.

Seeing those white clothes which resembled traditional Japanese clothing, Jillbert suddenly yelled out in anger.

“You damn dragonnewt! Why the hell did you come here!? This ain’t your damn post you know!?”

“No, it’s nothing. I ended up finished up over there quickly you see. I heard something interesting was going to happen, so I came running over. But to think—it would be to this level huh.”

Saying that, Eanru's fearless smile grew even more. It was like he struck gold. As Reiji and the others were completely confused by the appearance of someone they didn't know, a voice they did recognize came running over.

"Don't just run off on your own dammit!"

"I found something interesting, so my reflex kicked in."

And in the direction Eanru was speaking, they could see Suimei's figure. Seeing this, Reiji yelled towards him.

"Suimei!"

"Ou, I just came back, but it seems something outrageous is—"

And just as Suimei was trying to talk, a powerful rage began swelling from the other side. It was coming from the direction that Reiji and the others were just confronting, from where the one who resembled a fierce god, Ilzarl, was standing.

His bright eyes further flared up, and he let out an overpowering pressure that sent shivers down one's skin. And at the end of that gaze filled with anger, was definitely the green haired dragonnewt, Eanru—

"Bastard, the Silver Dew..."

"—Ku, HAHAAHAHA! How long it's been! It's truly been a long time, Man Eater! To think you're still alive, contrary to expectations you're quite tenacious! What? Did you have cold meals in the back regions of the north to survive?"

This fierce god's anger was returned with a pleasant laugh from Eanru. Seeing that attitude, the sound of Ilzarl gnashing his teeth could be heard as he expressed his severe anger. As for Reiji and the others, seeing an opponent who held boundless composure against them break down in rage left them completely perplexed. After coming here, unknown people were just appearing on their own one after the other, so it couldn't be helped that they were confused. In any case, as Eanru showed a ferocious smile towards Ilzarl—

"I am lucky. To think I would be able to meet you. Though it is unexpected that you are together with those pests."

“I am also lucky. I can finally return the debt that I owe you.”

The two shot off sparks at each other. One was showing joy at their reunion—no, rematch, while the other was filled with rage while wiping aside his drool. From the way they were talking, they already knew each other well, and it was certain that there was some fate between them. As their tremendous fighting spirit clashed against one another, Reiji casually called out to Suimei out of habit.

“Suimei... Suimei?”

He called out, but Suimei didn't reply. As Reiji looked at him, he was simply staring at a single point. Reiji thought Suimei was bound in place by the terrifying collision of fighting spirit—but in truth, Suimei was completely ignoring it. Yes, because a far greater existence than those two, was right before his eyes.

“—What's wrong? Making a face like you've seen a ghost? Did something that unexpected happen?”

Suddenly, a voice came out from nowhere, and Reiji and the others couldn't tell who was speaking for a moment. All they could hear was a deep, cold, but youthful voice of a man. But Reiji remembered hearing that voice somewhere before. It hadn't been all that long since he was just talking to the owner of that voice. Yes, the one who was talking, was the demon named Lishbaum—

“Why, are you...”

It was a puzzled and shocked mutter. Just as he said, it was a voice gripped by fear like he had seen a ghost. And the one who did so, was none other than Suimei, who had completely stiffened up as he looked at Lishbaum.

“Why are you here...? No, why are you alive—”

—Kudrack the Ghost Hide.

“Kudrack?”

“Ghost... Hide?”

As Suimei said that name towards Lishbaum, both Reiji and Ilzarl reacted. They both knit their brows at the name they never heard before. It was a

completely different name from the one Lishbaum introduced himself to Reiji with. And with a completely different tone than when he spoke with Reiji, the deep and cold voice of the man rang out.

“It has been a long time, Yakagi Suimei. Unexpected? I bet it is. I should have been obliterated by you at that time after all.”

As if satisfied by Suimei’s shocked face, Lishbaum let out a weak stifled laughter. And in response...

“... What does this mean? Why are you alive? Why do you have that form?”

“That is the obvious question isn’t it... But unravelling it so simply just isn’t amusing.”

“Don’t fucking joke around!”

Suimei yelled strongly with wrath, but Lishbaum didn’t answer him. On the other hand, Ilzarl looked at Lishbaum with a skeptical gaze.

“Lishbaum, is that offering a damn acquaintance of yours?”

As Ilzarl asked, in a complete change, Lishbaum replied in an excessively polite tone as he did earlier.

“Yes. That is the man who served as the trigger for me coming to this place.”

“The trigger to bring you here, you say?”

“Yes.”

As Lishbaum nodded, Ilzarl couldn’t understand. On the other hand, Suimei’s anger increased from being ignored, and let out an even louder voice than before.

“Kudrack... Fucking answer me!”

“Don’t be in such a rush, Starfall. It ended up that I’m fighting on the demons’ side. Isn’t that all you need to know? What else is there you need other than that? The goal that I mean to achieve in battle, don’t you already understand it completely?”

—That was certainly true. Suimei’s fate with that man was deep, and he knew well. Lishbaum’s, no, Kudrack the Ghost Hide’s reason for fighting. No matter

where he was or what he was doing, there was only one goal. In that case...

“... Then why are you on the demons’ side fighting in such a poor way? If your goal is the same as it was before, just what the hell are you thinking about making them move like that? Are you seriously motivated?”

“Of course I am. Now, just as before, my dearest wish has not changed.”

“Then why...?”

“Am I using tactics which pointlessly wastes demons, is it? Let’s see. I am certainly doing that. Surely my actions right now must seem baffling to you.”

In a complete change from his faint smile, Lishbaum began laughing gloomily with a shadow behind his smile. And after calming down...

“I guess it’s fine to unravel it here. It seems you’re not the only one who wants to hear it after all.”

Saying that, Lishbaum glanced over at Ilzarl, and began explaining.

“Starfall. I do believe you already know, the demons are a race born of the Evil God. Just like all divinity, the Evil God pressures other faiths antagonistically while increasing the number of pawns it has. And building up its power to interfere with the world, it ever so gradually increases the number of its pawns. That could even be considered its job.”

“You’re saying it’s the same as any other god?”

“That’s right. However, even if it does well in increasing the number of pawns, eventually a problem comes up. The pawns born of its weak power to interfere in the beginning are unable to keep up with the changes surrounding them, and gradually they become more and more out of their depth. But even if they create new ones, eventually the seats are all occupied by those that were already created. Then—”

—To improve that situation, just what should one do?

Just from that one word, Suimei figured it all out, and shock appeared on his face as he muttered.

“Wha— then it’s not about increasing resources, you’re working to open up spots after reaching capacity...?”

“That’s exactly it. It’s nothing, so to speak, it’s like a strategy type adventure game. At the beginning you can only afford poor soldiers due to the low municipal and military levels. But as you progress in level, you can gather much better soldiers. Then in that case, it is just a matter of where to send those low level soldiers. It is the fate of those useless demons is all.”

Suimei continued to gaze in wonder at the lich. The fate of the demons. After saying so much, that answer wasn’t difficult to arrive at. In a strategy game, one would either just delete and overwrite the data of those soldiers while in the city building part, or in the war part, one would just send them on a suicide attack. This wasn’t a game, but reality. But even so, if that was being overlooked...

“So they’re not your allies...”

“Didn’t you already know? As I desire to purify the world, it is impossible for me to have any true allies. All living things, great or small, are all the same muck and filth to me after all.”

“But you still follow something weaker than you?”

“That’s not the case. That is an existence worthy of my devotion.”

That—From that word, it was either the Evil God, or perhaps the Demon Lord. In any case, it was unrelated to the matter at hand. As Suimei finished asking everything he wanted to ask, all that was left was to head towards the decisive battle, and he kneaded his mana. He already didn’t care at all about concealing it before Reiji.

—In the worst case, it was possible that they were completely annihilated right where they were. As Suimei began gathering mana which surpassed the force with which Felmenia was doing so earlier, Felmenia yelled out to him.

“Suimei-dono!”

“Stay back! This guy isn’t something half assed like a demon! He’s one of those immortal liches I told you about earlier!”

Hearing those words, Felmenia was able to figure it out. Last time they had a lesson, when they were talking about the ether body, he told her about those who released themselves from death. As she swallowed her saliva hard, he

could see the tension in her face. As the air further filled with blood thirst, even Ilzarl had a surprised face. As for Lishbaum who had all that mana pointed towards him, he was stroking his jaw.

“You don’t have any allies you can depend on today you know? Alzbayne’s doll princess, Gerard the Melkia, and the Unlucky King are all not here right?”

“Even so, I won’t step down.”

“That’s right. That’s what makes you Starfall. An opponent like you who is bad at giving up is most suitable to me.”

Saying that, Lishbaum took on an attitude like he was accepting the challenge, but in the next instant, his attitude suddenly changed.

“Well, I didn’t come here to fight today though.”

“What?”

As if waiting for Suimei’s question, Lishbaum made a broad grin that spread further. And as he turned to another direction, forming ranks in front of his gaze, was the wall of Imperial soldiers. It was foolish to even ask what he was about to do. He was one of the Ten who Fell to Greed. He had no compassion towards humans. He had no compassion towards any living being.

“You can’t be—STOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOP!!”

“—Phase Severance.”

Immediately following that keyword, the air was divided in two, a boundary line appeared in the air, and slipped the two pieces apart. It was just like, everything in the air was drawn over with a pen in a single line and separated top from bottom. And the portion covered by that line, was the majority of the Imperial encampment, it was none other than the Imperial soldiers. And they fell. Heads. Heads. Heads. In an instant, heads all over went tumbling to the ground. It was just like a really bad joke. The slipping piece of air was right at the level of a human’s neck, and everything above it, the tents, the hills behind it, everything was split in two and slipped to the side.

“Ri... diculous.”

“No way...”

The only ones to escape from harm, were those near Suimei, his companions, Reiji's party, Eanru and Jillbert, Reanat and the Elite Twelve. Seeing that excessively bizarre scenery and the dreadful power which manifested it, Graziella and Reiji muttered completely dumbfounded. And during that, the one to yell and raise his voice, as one would expect, was Suimei.

“KUDRACK, YOU FUCKEEEEEEEEEEER!!”

“—What are you getting so angry for, Starfall? I saved them you know? I saved those caught in the fetters of suffering that is this earthly life, this many of them! So many of them! Death is salvation! It is the salvation beyond all other means!”

“Doing that kind of thing! Do you intend on being a fucking god!?”

“A god? That's wrong. I'm not that kind of being. From beginning to end, I am a human who bears the sins of the world. I will take up the sins of all living beings! Yes! The one who bears all sin! Haha, Hahaha, HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHHA!!”

Lishbaum let out a truly insane laugh.

“That which saves all living things! I'll show that I can remove all the muck! Throughout the entire world! Without leaving a scrap!”

As Lishbaum finished loudly yelling in the air, he made a complete change as if a switch was flipped.

“Now then, it's over. Let's withdraw. Aah, I forgot something.”

“Lish... baum.”

“Grallajearus, your role has come to an end. Go back to his side.”

“BASTAAAAAAAARD!!”

“What are you so angry for? It's the Evil God's side you know? You have finished your duty, and are now returning to where you came from. I don't think there's anything greater than that though?”

“Do you think Nakshatra-sama would permit such a—”

“—The lord told me ‘Do as you like.’ The weak have no qualifications to live in

Fell to Greed, the lich, Kudrack the Ghost Hide vanished together with Ilzarl into the threshold between phases.