

風波しのび

Kazanami Shinogi

THE NEW
ザ・ニュー・ゲート
GATE

06.狂信者の野望



Eline Spermizer
25 years old human.
Upper class chosen one in possession of a formidable weapon. His gentle-looking mask hides an arrogant personality.

Shibaid Etraku
521 years old High Dragnil.
Shin's support character since the game era. First king of the Kilmont dragon empire.

Wilhelm Avis
22 years old Lord.
Adventurer wielding the magic spear "Venom". Unlike what his appearance and tone might suggest, he possesses a strong sense of justice.

Schnee Raizar
521 years old. High Elf.
Shin's support character since the game era.
She waited for Shin for 500 years.

Millie
8 years old Beast.
Young girl living in the Church's orphanage. She possesses the title of "Star Reader".

Vizzy Laurette
524 years old High Pixie.
Support character of Rokuten member, Cashmere. Raises multiple monsters.

Tiera Lucent
157 years old. Elf.
A salesclerk of "General Store Tsuki no Hokora"
Her hair is mostly black due to the effects of a powerful curse.

Shin
Main character of this story.
21 years old. High Human.
Strongest player who was renown in the online game.
After clearing the death game, he was transported to the game world 500 years in the future.

Main Characters

Elnia Continent

Sea

Sigurd

Dragon Empire
Kilmont

Falnido Beast
Alliance

Sacred Place Kalkia

Larua Grand
Woods

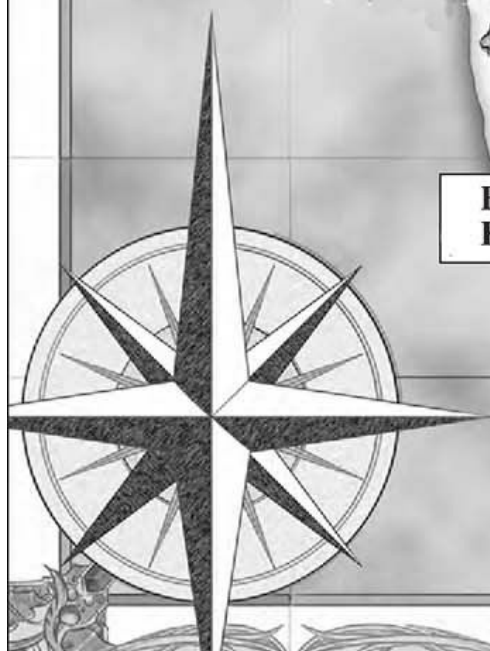
Beirun

Balmel

Wraith Plains

Bayreuth
Kingdom

THE NEW GATE



Chapter 1

Part 1

Several days passed after the party, in which they celebrated the victory over the annihilation of the monster hordes that marched toward the fort city Balmel.

Shin and others were still in Balmel to help with matters after the ‘Great Flood’.

Besides the other remains that had been scattered around the plains, Schnee’s magic skill 【Blue Judge】 and Shin and the others’ 【Complete Destruction Palm】 caused many monsters to be turned to charcoal.

Cleaning up the bodies had started before the celebration party, but it has been taking time because of its unusual number.

“Anyway, it’s amazing. The monsters’ bodies around here were killed by a guy whose name is Red, right?”

“Yeah, I could see it very well as I was on the city wall. There are many who saw it as well. He killed the monster hordes that looked like a black wave all by himself. Whoever he was, he was really amazing.”

These conversations reached Shin’s ears.

Some people in the crowd who were heading to the gate after cleaning up bodies were talking about the mysterious person “Red”.

Even in the castle, various rumors were spreading and people were exchanging their opinion about the identity. Some opinions were reasonable but others were far from the truth.

For example, he probably served under a High Human, or he probably was one of the heroes who remained in this world, or he might be the incarnation of

the god of fire Iira Suura and so on.

In fact, because Schnee or Shibaid, who were Shin's support characters, could do it, the "Serving under a High Human" theory was the most dominant.

As for the third theory, it seems like people thought the god of fire Iira Suura who appears in myths joined the battle, as the armor's color was red. It was one of the gods of war and people somehow believe it.

(So a God joined in huh? In the game world, Iira Suura was a boss monster...)

In the game, they could fight against the incarnation as part of a trial. Perhaps because of it, Iira Suura was known by people in this world as well.

Additionally, the boss monster's appearance was a human form holding a long fire sword.

It might be close to the scythe that Shin, or Red in this matter, used.

"But, why is his name Red?"

"Maybe it's because his body is red, isn't it?"

"That's too simple. Don't you think there should be a better nickname?"

Ouch!

Shin was quietly hurt. It was just made up on the spot, but was it really that weird?

"(Is the name "Red" that strange?)"

Yuzuha asked from overhead.

"(I don't think that it's a strange name.)"

It should not be strange, though there was no objection against the people who had said it was simple.

By the way, there was a plan to invite Red to the party but there was no way to make contact with him, of course. Schnee had been inquired regarding Red, but Shin asked her to answer that she didn't know where Red was.

Shin was chatting with the middle age adventurer Rahl Ratt whom he got along with through working together everyday.

“Nevertheless, it’s harder to clean up than to fight.”

“Well, that’s a first world problem. There were no people killed in that tough battle. If we complain more than that, we would be punished.”

“I understand it, but I feel depressed if the number is that big. Besides, you didn’t fight that much. Some guys said they didn’t know why you were there.”

“Oh no, they found out. Hahaha!!”

Shin was talking with him using polite speech but started talking casually after he heard Rahl didn’t like to use polite speech.

Rahl was a rank B adventurer, so he didn’t know the word “Chosen One”. It seemed like he thought the adventurers who were fighting in the front line were from higher ranks.

As Shin said, there were no opportunities to join the fight for the adventurers of the raid.

Because they didn’t have coordination similar to the knights, they couldn’t charge into the monster hordes just like that.

Besides that, their position at the battlefield was right in front where monsters were rounded up by the magic of Schnee and Guile. If they had assaulted, they would just get mixed in and vanish.

It seemed like they guarded Guile and others to some extent, but it was hardly a battle.

“At any rate, Schnee Raizar is really amazing. No matter how hard we try, we would never be like her.”

“She is a monster to the general people. If she felt like it, she could erase a country. Are you scared of her?”

“Of course Shin! I don’t want to deal with her, though I think it’s okay to be killed by such a beauty!”

“...Well, I can understand your feelings.”

“See? I used to think it was just an exaggeration from those who said Schnee is a goddess or a holy woman, but once I saw her in the flesh, I couldn’t help but

agree with them. Young people who saw her looked soulless. Although seeing the massive magic right after the start of battle, we lost our soul in another sense.”

Rahl laughed while talking about how epic it was. Even the knights lost themselves, so it was no wonder that younger adventurers were lost for words as well.

Also, Schnee has gained more fans without Shin’s knowledge.

If it was about a big guy with an aggressive appearance, people would fear him, but as it was about Schnee, strength was just one of her charms.

“Moreover, we can’t measure the value of the person by their strength. I have seen so many people up till now, someone can be a hero or bullshit depending on their ability and character. Understanding what kind of person they are, can’t be judged from their strengths or weaknesses. Besides I know that having power isn’t always a good thing.”

Rahl has probably had many experiences going by his age.

What he said was a cliché, but it carried weight at the same time.

“Do you know somebody like that person since you asked me about it Shin?”

“Yeah, something like that.”

“I see. If so, you should not be scared too much. I failed because of it.”

Rahl said mournfully which was unusual for his cheerful character.

“I will keep that in mind.”

“Yes, you should. Well, we’ll arrive at the gate soon.”

They parked the carriage carrying the monsters’ bodies at the side of the gate, then headed toward the guild to receive the reward.

In order to make the cleaning work smoother, guilds offered the job to the adventurers.

After Shin received the reward, he parted with Rahl who was meeting up with his friends, and looked around lightly.

Schnee and Tiera oversaw another workplace, but as their shifts were about

the same, they were planning on meeting up here.

Shin was drinking fruit juice to kill time at the corner of the bar in the guild when Eliza, the guild's receptionist, talked to him.

"Excuse me, Shin-sama. Do you have a moment?"

"Yes? Well, I'm good till my friends come. Is it okay to bring Yuzuha too?"

"Yes. Because in these past few days, I know Yuzuha wouldn't cause trouble."

The 'Flood' was over and Balmel returned to its peaceful state. Shin had no idea why he was called.

"I am sorry for asking you too much. Our staff will take care of your friends once they arrive here."

Shin followed Eliza who led the way.

They gathered attention but he decided not to mind about it now. As he was fighting in the front line as a Chosen One, Shin's name was widely known among a group of adventurers.

The place where Eliza led him was the room of the head of this guild. When they entered the room, they found the guild master, Baren, and the princess of Bayreuth, Rionne, waiting.

"I am sorry that we asked you to come so suddenly. A request designated for you has come, but we can't talk about it in public."

Shin could predict the contents as Rionne was standing next to Baren.

"...Is it perhaps, to be Rionne-sama's bodyguard?"

"Yes, that's right. By the way, you are close to Rionne-sama, aren't you? The content of the request is to guard Rionne-sama until Bayreuth."

There were no opportunities to see her after the party and since the 'Flood' was over at that time, he thought Rionne had left Balmel already. However, his expectations fell short.

"You helped me a lot since I was transferred to Kalkia. You will also receive a reward for that."

It sounds like she will give a reward to him for the other day as well.

At this point, there were a few things Rionne had to give to Shin, so the reward for guarding was included in it.

“Well... I am sorry but I can’t accept this offer.”

“Does that mean you refuse the request from the royal family?”

“According to the law of the guild, it depends on the adventurer’s decision whether they accept the offer or not, am I wrong?”

There was a designation system that let the chosen adventurer receive the request in guild.

But the adventurers who were called had a right whether to accept or not. Of course, there was no penalty from the guild when the adventurer refuses.

In the past, the designation request was partly compulsory. But there was an incident where somebody took advantage of it and trapped a certain adventurer. It was a malicious trap where somebody requested an adventurer and made an assassin hide at the requested destination to kill the adventurer as if they were attacked by a monster. But the incident came to light after the adventurer turned the tables on the assassin and reported to the guild.

It was found out that there were similar incidents in the past by investigation, and then it became that the adventurers could refuse the requests. However, when the adventurers were having trouble refusing the requests from the nobles and wealthy merchants, the guild was supposed to be a mediator.

“Can’t you?”

“I’ve said so, I have something to do.”

“Even though I am asking you?”

“Who taught you that upturned eyes and pose...”

“It doesn’t match with Rionne’s character,” said Shin in disgust.

Then Baren asked for confirmation.

“You can certainly refuse the offer, but is it really fine with you? Usually only the adventurers who belong to a high rank are called by the royal family.”

“I don’t mind. Actually, if I were to get too close to her carelessly, I would be

scared of others' jealousy. Besides, we are going to Kilmont for now. It's the opposite direction and I am already prepared for it."

"I wanted Shin to meet with my father though"

"No, I won't. I feel he would tell me to serve for his country, so I won't"

"Muu!"

"I won't change my mind even if you get sulky."

Shin was regarded as an upper class Chosen One from Bayreuth's top brass, but it didn't mean that everybody would welcome him.

Rionne was a royal family member and was surrounded by the nobles. Sometimes people from the privileged classes act to keep their position more than considering the national interests.

...Though it was a selfish idea of Shin, he wanted to go to Kilmont to meet Shibaid as soon as possible and start researching the sacred place Kalkia.

Besides, even if Shin refused guarding her, somebody will pick her up from Bayreuth or she could request for other adventurers. They would never let the princess go home alone. In addition, Shin honestly couldn't think that Rionne needed a guard.

"Well, how should I say this... it looks like you two are really close."

"Of course! It's Shin and me!"

"I am afraid of what other people might think..."

Shin repeated it while turning away from Baren's eyes who was putting a wry smile on his face.

"What a pity, but it can't be helped. I don't want to force this on you. But when you come to Bayreuth next time, you should come visit me."

"...I will try."

Considering Rionne's attitude, it seems like she was thinking if Shin accepted the offer, it would be lucky or something.

Shin was relieved that they didn't persistently press him. He had no intentions to treat her badly, but he has his priority.

“That’s all. Sorry for taking your time.”

“No problem. I was free at this time too. Then, please excuse me.”

He left with Eliza who was waiting for him at the corner of the room, they then left from the guild master’s room.

When Shin arrived at the hall, there was a crowd at the corner of the bar like he had seen before.

“Again...”

The center of the crowd was of course Schnee in disguise...In other words, Yuki and Tiera. He could sense the mood.

It happened often, so Shin kept his cool. He already heard the reason from Eliza about why so many people come around. Naturally, most of the adventurers were men. There were female adventurers, but there were very few who were beautiful, good figured, and capable like Schnee.

Even if there were that kind of women, they just stay with other women mostly, or they were employed by the nobles and there wouldn’t be any opportunity to get to know them.

Because of these reasons the adventurers were trying to invite Schnee and Tiera, whom often stay together, to join their party as well as the servants of the nobles, who were trying to invite them to the noble’s houses, were swarming around them.

“Today there are a lot more people around them.”

“Their name and appearance are well-known in Balmel. It can’t be helped.”

“So as I’m their male companion, the murderous intent and jealousy are focused on me, huh?”

“...It can’t be helped.”

Eliza as she was, had no way of responding.

“By the way, wasn’t there a plan to clear those people?”

“Yes, I informed the staff to be ready for it, but...”

Eliza looked around but there weren’t any staff even at the reception desk.

“It’s strange. There is a rule to have at least one person at the reception desk.”

“...Well, it seems like they tried to do their job though.”

With a sigh, Shin went towards the crowd. Though it was crowded with men, he could find another woman besides Schnee and Tiera.

The men who noticed Shin’s approach all showed negative feelings in their eyes. But because Shin had gotten used to it, he ignored those eyes and called out both of them.

“Hey Yuki! Tiera! It’s almost time to go!”

After a little pause, the crowd split. Tiera was behind Schnee, who has blond hair and red eyes, and a woman who wore the guild’s uniform was behind Tiera.

“I am sorry to keep you waiting.”

“No, I am the one who kept you waiting. I arrived here earlier, but just a little. I will talk about the details while walking. So who is this person?”

Some people were fascinated by Schnee’s smile toward Shin, and others were showing jealousy. Shin ignored those men and asked the woman who was standing behind Schnee and Tiera.

“Um, I-I am Fran, b-b-belong to the branch of the adventurer guild Balmel!!”

She was flustered and stuttered.

She was a petite lady and her height was around 150 centimeters. Her brown bobbed hair and big round eyes were charming.

She looked like a junior high school student, or maybe even looked like an elementary school student.

“Fran, where are the other staff? They shouldn’t leave a new staff member alone at the reception.”

“M-My senpai is dealing with the high ranked adventurer who came a while ago. Others are also busy, so I have been trying to do my best, but...”

“The size of the crowd was so big that she could not deal with them by

herself.”

“...Yes, that’s right.”

Fran agreed with Schnee’s words with sagging shoulders.

Surely, it was tough for new staff to deal with all those men around Schnee and Tiera.

If Shin were in the same position, he honestly wouldn’t want to get closer to that crowd.

Maybe the staff who have more experience would be able to handle it better, but it was still unavoidable.

“I am sorry. We caused trouble for you. Please accept my apology and if you have any requests, please tell me. I will help as much as I can.”

“I-I am sorry!”

“...Well, I think that’s okay, right, Yuki?”

“Yes, it was just bad timing and nothing happened to us, so please don’t worry about it.”

Schnee answered Shin while nodding.

She gave up halfway as people often come around her. That’s why she couldn’t bring herself to blame Fran.

“We appreciate your understanding.”

Still, Eliza and Fran have an apologetic look on their face.

Since it was their duty, it would affect their confidence if they accepted the responsibility and could not complete it. No matter how many times Schnee said it’s okay, they seemed to be ashamed. Shin and his companions left the guild saying “Don’t worry about it” to Eliza and Fran who bowed down.

“Sorry about that. If I had come to you immediately, we could have avoided that situation.”

“You had some business, didn’t you? It looked like you were called on.”

“Right. What happened?”

Somehow the two sensed something, so Shin explained about the request.

Schnee who listened to the story had a smile on her face and Tiera seemed to understand.

“It’s natural that they want to have Shin for their country. Rionne is a member of the royal family and although she doesn’t know about your background, she knows a little bit about your power, don’t you agree Shin?”

“A little. If I were in her position, I also would have thought to secure me. But what can I say, I understand it but it’s also different from my way of thinking.”

Though he said that, Shin kept a note in his mind that Rionne might be different from other royal family members. “If it weren’t for an unusual situation like this time, she would not favor me as much”, said Shin. Then Schnee said, “Do you really think so?”

“What do you mean, Schnee?”

“The way you think and your attitude are rare in this world Shin. The royal families are heavenly people to the commoners, but not to players. Considering Rionne-sama’s character, she would be attracted to the person who casually talks to her and has power that she can rely on. Shin meets both of them, so even though there weren’t any incidents like this time, it’s possible that Rionne-sama likes you.”

“Well, if it is not Rionne-sama, others might say you are rude!”

“Well, how should I say it... I think Rionne-sama’s thought-process is closer to that of the commoner’s, not the royal family’s.”

“I agree with that.”

According to Rionne, the education that she had was focused on being a soldier more than being a member of the royal family, so it might be natural that she was different from other royalty.

“However, I don’t intend to be engaged with Rionne, so she has no choice but to give up on me.”

“If you say you are actually a High Human, she would come to you though.”

“From her past statements, I can’t deny that.”

Shin thought that Rionne might forcefully come saying it was for the sake of friendship. If they could have a High Human on their side, the king would happily give the princess.

“At any rate, our current priority is meeting up with Shibaid and others. If I follow Rionne, I would have to meet with the king. I am sorry for Baren-san, but I have to leave the country matter to the guild.”

He was not sure how far the guild would go, but Shin who was a Chosen One was different from a commoner. So he decided to think that the guild would have to do their best to deal with such a matter.

Partly because he had talked to Rionne, he couldn't help but to wish that others won't ask him unreasonable demands anymore.

There was the letter of introduction from Tsuki no Hokora...When Shin thought about it, he realized that he didn't know much about the letter.

He had stored the letter in his Item Box and almost forgot about it until he used it in Balmel.

Because various events happened due to Shin showing the letter in Bayreuth, he hesitated to use it without thinking. Though it was a clue to meet with Schnee, he could meet with her without using it. Shin didn't know all the items in THE NEW GATE, and he also thought whether there was this kind of item. Anyhow, depending on the player, making the item that worked effectively under a certain condition was possible. Frankly speaking, without a strong name value like “Tsuki no Hokora”, it was just a shiny piece of paper.

“Hey Schnee, it's a bit late to ask you, but how do you make the letter of introduction?”

As far as Shin knew, the function that makes items that gave the effect like the letter of introduction didn't exist in Tsuki no Hokora.

So that means that it was an original item from Schnee.

“The letter of introduction? I use the paper that comes out from the manufacturing machine that was used in Tsuki no Hokora. Also alchemy is applied. It was the enchantment of the luminescence.”

“Was there such a strong durability for the paper that comes out from that machine? It shouldn’t be a special paper that can be used for enchantments though.”

“I noticed it a long time after Shin left, so I don’t know the details...Surely it was just paper in the game era, but its quality is the best one as this world changed, so I think that magical power dwelled in it. Of course, I already checked it, and it wasn’t a bad one.”

Manufacturing machine in Tsuki no Hokora. It was like a home that produced various kind of materials, or one of the facility for the guild. There were some machines that could create items such as raw materials and metals, in addition to the paper in Tsuki no Hokora.

But the only one currently working is the machine that makes papers. In the death game period, when Shin left Tsuki no Hokora for the last time, he closed the door to the room for the manufacturing machines.

The reason was that the machine for the paper was placed in a different room from other machines, and he just forgot it was there.

“Let’s check it.”

It was better to quickly leave for Kilmont, and meet with Shibaid, but it was also important to check out his own home and his guild house which he oversaw.

“In that case, that forest is quiet and doesn’t stand out.”

“That’s right. Shall we go?”

Part 2

At nightfall, Shin secretly left the town with Schnee, Tiera, and Yuzuha and headed for the forest he had cleared up before. Shin deployed and entered Tsuki no Hokora, where he then checked the manufacturing machines first.

Inside of the manufacturing machine room, the machines were organized into categories such as ore, ingredients, and materials that were obtained from monsters.

The manufacturing machines looked like boxes measuring 30 centimeters on each side. They were worth almost as much as 《Ancient》 grade weapons in this world.

Materials that couldn't be obtained or required great troubles to obtain could be produced without limitation, so long as time permitted. The 'machine' was especially amazing since this world was now reality and certain materials could no longer be farmed.

Generated items would be changed into cards that were stored in an Item Box within the machine.

“What is this...?”

Shin checked the ore and materials first.

When he opened the list inside of the Item Box, a considerable number of items were listed. It wasn't like 100 or 200. It varied depending on the type but even the smallest stacks exceeded 1000, and most of them were more than hundreds of thousands.

The Item Box should only be able to store 999 of the same type of item, but the maximum stack number must have changed.

“There's lots of items...Kuu”

“Indeed. There are lumps of orichalcum, mithril, adamantite and even refined Scarletite. The tusks and claws of Bahamut and even the liver of a Behemoth... Wow, the amount of 'Drop of Erathem' is amazing! It's like you could make as many 《Ancient》 grade weapons as you want.”

Nodding at Yuzuha, he scrolled down the item list.

Even rare items that were likely produced only twice a year in real time, a poor management system which Shin had complained about during the gaming era, were present in incredible numbers.

Though it was understandable that the items had accumulated for the past 500 years, Shin's pride as a gamer was hurt as he felt his efforts in mining were in vain.

"The ingredients also seem the same. Though, there is an astounding amount of the highest rank ingredients."

Schnee who checked the list of ingredients in one of the manufacturing machines was also surprised at its contents. It was so shocking that they could easily stay indoors for at least 100 years.

"These items are something I have never seen nor heard of. What are they?"

Due to her lack of knowledge, Tiera was surprised at the number not the item itself.

Since it was a rare opportunity, Shin moved a portion of the items into his own Item Box.

Shin was planning to inspect whether there were any differences between the items in his own Item Box and the items in the manufacturing machines.

"I'm going to forge for a bit. I'll see whether the materials are usable or not."

"Understood. I'll prepare dinner."

"Maybe I could make some simple recovery potions."

"Please do so."

After he passed over the basic alchemy set to Tiera, Shin headed to the smithing area with Yuzuha.

He started a fire in the furnace and took out the orichalcum ore card from the manufacturing machine.

"Hmm?"

When he was about to materialize the card, Shin noticed an aura coming from it.

He stared at what looked like a heat haze, then it became clear, like an image focusing in a camera.

“That’s magical power, isn’t it?”

“It’s sparkling!”

There was a light silver color similar to the aura from a magic sword.

For the sake of comparison, Shin took out the orichalcum ore card from his own Item Box and saw that it radiated a light purple. However, the color didn’t stay the same as it changed to a dark grey then a light blue.

He hadn’t noticed this when he upgraded the equipment of Shadow and the others, or when he repaired Girard’s equipment.

“Fumu. I don’t understand it. Should I strike it for now? Yuzuha, please stay back.”

“Kuu!”

He put aside the trivial things for a moment, and materialized the two cards.

At present, there was no difference except their aura’s colors. Though the amount of ore was somewhat different, there wasn’t a problem since it wasn’t fixed to begin with.

Shin put the orichalcum into the furnace and refined it. The refined orichalcum that had its impurities removed radiated a stronger aura.

Then, he placed it on the anvil and swung the hammer down.

The two swords, made with the same procedure, were both at medium 《Legend》 grade. They looked almost the same except for the aura that enveloped the swords.

When he compared the sharpness of the edges, the difference became clear.

The sword made of orichalcum from Shin’s Item box, covered in an aura of multiple colors, was sharper than the one made of orichalcum from the manufacturing machine, covered in an aura with a single color.

“Kuu? It’s different, though they’re similar?”

“Even if the materials are the same, the power is different, huh? Is it related to the magic color? ...Come to think of it, Tiera did say my magical power is strange or something like that.”

He remembered the time when he first met Tiera, she said she could feel multiple races’ magical powers.

“Is Shin’s magic power different from others’?”

“I wonder. Though I still can’t perfectly control my power, so I’m not sure.”

Shin moved to the main building where Tiera was, thinking that there might be some hint.

After Tiera had set up the alchemy equipment and materials on the table, she began making the recovery potions. Shin didn’t disturb her, as she seemed to be concentrating. After several minutes, she finished brewing the potions.

“Whew...”

“Did you finish it?”

“Hiiu!!??”

Shin chose to wait for Tiera to finish her work before speaking up.

But, since Tiera didn’t notice him, she was surprised and gave a small cry of alarm.

“Ah...I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to surprise you.”

“Don’t sneak up on me like that! I was so surprised.”

Tiera glared at him while putting her hand on her chest. Perhaps she felt shy as she was seen the moment that she was surprised. Her cheeks turned red.

Shin didn’t intend to hide his presence, but it seemed like he did so unconsciously.

“I’m really sorry. I wasn’t trying to distract you since you seemed to be focused.”

“*Sigh* Be careful next time. I nearly dropped the potion.”

When Shin bowed, Tiera's anger seemed to settle down.

"At any rate, I tried to make the recovery potion according to instructions using these materials. I don't have the appraisal skill, so I'm not sure of the difference. Can you check them?"

After Tiera calmed down, she handed the recovery potions over to Shin.

They looked the same, but when he saw the analysis, Shin found that the potion made of materials from his Item Box were more effective.

However, the one that used the materials from the manufacturing machine was twenty percent more effective than a conventional potion.

It seemed like using materials that possess magical power raised the effectiveness of the items made from them.

"I see. I was expecting an increased effect, but it's really amazing."

"Were you expecting it?"

Shin asked about the reason for what Tiera said after she heard the result of the appraisal.

"Well, it seems like Shin doesn't know this, but when an object stores magical power, it shares its owner's spirit and characteristics. It was said that was a condition of something like power without definition. I've only seen these objects a few times though. Since only Elves and Pixies can see this power, you may not understand it, Shin."

"Interesting...By the way, I wanted to ask you something."

"What is it?"

"Well, when we first met, you said various races' magical power or something after you looked at me, right? I wanted to ask about it."

"Eh? D-Did I say something like that?"

Tiera answered evasively. Her face that turned her eyes to the wrong direction expressed exactly someone who was trying to hide something.

"? ...Well, if you don't want to tell me, that's fine. I won't force you to tell me. I'll ask Schnee if there is anything that seems strange in her ingredients. You can

keep the potions.”

“Eh!? Wa, wait!!”

Everybody has something that they don’t want to share. Even though Shin was concerned about the magical power, somehow he could guess the reason.

Since he thought it was a bad idea to ask forcefully, Shin decided to go to Schnee’s place first, but surprisingly Tiera pulled him back.

“What’s the matter? You look so confused.”

“B-Because... aren’t you going to ask about it? Though I’m here with you, I’m clearly hiding something from you.”

“But you don’t want to tell me, right? Of course I can’t leave it alone if it’s about a life-threatening situation, or something similar. But I can somehow guess that it’s not like that, and I don’t want to forcefully ask you to tell me. When I look at you, I can just tell that there are some things you don’t want to tell me. So I think it’s not right to share everything just because we are together. In fact, I also have something that I haven’t shared with everybody.”

“I understand, but...”

“It’s fine with me to wait until you think you are ready to tell me. When the time comes then——”

Then Shin’s stomach rumbled “Grruuu”. It was so loud that they could hear it clearly.

“...I, I’ll also tell you what I haven’t shared with you?”

Because of the stomach rumbling, the serious mood vanished, but Shin said everything that he wanted to say.

“Shin, are you hungry?”

Right after that, Yuzuha, who was just observing, quietly said explosive words.

“Hey! I was saying something serious!”

“But you said ‘When the time comes then Gruuu.’”

“Nooo! Why did it happened in this timing?”

“...Pfff.”

Maybe that hit the spot. Tiera held her laughter in until her ears turned bright red.

Because she lowered her head, he couldn't see her face. However, he guessed that it wasn't as serious as before.

It was a pleasant situation for Shin as he wanted to change the atmosphere, but it couldn't be helped if he thought there might have been a better way.

“I'm sorry. Even though we're talking seriously, b-but, pfffahaha”

“Well, I made my point, but, it's fine I guess. Though you have something you can't tell me, don't worry about it. And don't tell anyone about my stomach rumbling! Never! Yuzuha, you too!”

After the parting remark, Shin went to the kitchen.

Tiera looked at his back with tears in her eyes. Shin didn't know her tears weren't only from laughing. “I am sorry.” What Tiera whispered didn't reach anyone.

When Shin entered the kitchen, there were already several dishes. He could smell them while he was talking to Tiera, so he couldn't help thinking what would happen if he had not smelled these dishes.

“Kuu~, smells good!”

“Yes, it does... what a great smell.”

“Shin? You look troubled. Did something happen?”

“No, nothing. Yeah, nothing happened. By the way, it smells delicious. How were the ingredients?”

“I didn't see any problems. The freshness was satisfactory too.”

Schnee answered while wiping a knife.

It seemed like she hadn't noticed any differences in the process of cooking.

Considering the swords and the recovery potions, the differences would

probably be seen in its flavor.

“The results of Tiera and my experiments showed that the ones from my Item Box were more effective. However, the quality of the things made using materials from the manufacturing machines were better than normal.”

“I see. I have just finished cleaning up, so we should test them. How’s Tiera doing?”

“Oh, she finished making the recovery potions, so I’ll bring her here.”

“You don’t need to.”

When Shin turned around to go to call Tiera, Tiera showed up.

Since she had a little time to calm herself down, her complexion returned to normal. Her eyes seemed bloodshot, but Shin just felt awkward wondering if she had been laughing till she cried.

“What?”

“Nothing. The dishes are ready, so let’s compare the tastes.”

They put all dishes on the table and sat down. Yuzuha was also in human form at this time.

Everyone said “Itadakimasu” together and then started tasting.

What Shin ate first was the dish made using ingredients from the manufacturing machine.

He put the foods he used to eat in reality, such as stuffed cabbage, pot-au-feu, pilaf, and so on, in his mouth.

“This is far better than a family restaurant.”

“This is better than what Master usually makes.”

“Kuu, delicious!”

Because these foods were something they often ate, they could tell how much better it was. It didn’t mean that the foods they had been eating were low quality, but still these were delicious enough to tell the difference.

Because there were other dishes to taste, they used all their willpower to stop

themselves from finishing the dish.

“Then, the next one.”

The next dishes were the made using the ingredients from Shin’s Item Box. Since it was for comparison, the menu and cooking processes were the same.

They cut the stuffed cabbage in two using chopsticks, then ate it.

“!?”

In that moment, Shin and Tiera stopped moving.

Their first thought was ‘Is this really a stuffed cabbage?’.

“What is this? To be frank, I can’t think of anything besides how delicious this is. But if I were asked the difference, I can’t explain it.”

“I agree. I don’t know what to say besides delicious.”

“Kuu, delicious, delicious~”

Yuzuha was the only one eating like normal. With dishes made of materials from either source, Yuzuha stuffed her mouth happily while smiling.

In a sense, this might be the correct reaction toward the dishes.

Shin had tried dishes using ingredients his Item Box the night he met Schnee again, but there wasn’t any magical power leaking from the cards then.

Was it because it was used with the regular ingredients? He wasn’t as shocked as with this stuffed cabbage.

“Anyway, we have to be cautious when using the items in my Item Box. I don’t think they were like this before though.”

“Yes. Even the items from the manufacturing machines are more than enough. Did you notice any differences in the items recently added to your Item Box?”

“No, I didn’t see any change among those items. But as times goes on, they might change, so I’ll check those to make sure.”

The number of the items in Shin’s Item Box was huge. It would be impossible to test everything, so he would have to choose a small number of items and

check them.

After they finished their meals, Shin and the others came to the teleportation device room that was located next to the manufacturing machines' room. They intended to check on the guild houses' conditions.

"As far as I can tell, none of the devices are broken."

"Yes. Just in case, I asked Raster to check it, but I heard that there were no problems."

Raster was the support character who served under Cain, a member of Rokuten who was the architect. Because Cain helped build Tsuki no Hokora, Raster, as his follower, did the maintenance.

If Raster said so, it would work without any problems.

"Well, let's open the option menu...Hmm?"

"Is anything wrong?"

Schnee approached Shin who voiced his doubt. Shin shifted the display sideway to show Schnee the selection screen for teleport destinations.

It displayed the names of the 1st through 6th guild houses. But if he tried to pick a destination, it made a muffled "Beep" sound.

This sound usually came out when one tried to use an item that was not available or choose a place that was impossible to transfer.

It seemed like they couldn't transfer to any guild houses at their present state.

"What does it mean?"

"The equipment here is working, so something might have happened at the other guild houses?"

"No, what I am concerned about is that I'm unable to choose Rashugum. I don't know about the others, but I can't imagine any problems in Rashugum, where Raster is doing maintenance."

"But, it's hard to determine the cause of the problem. Please wait a moment.

I will send a message to Raster.”

“Yes, please. I’ll fiddle a little too.”

Besides specifying a destination from the option menu, there were times when it was possible by using the terminal. For the time being, he decided to check which ones were working.

“There is no problem in Tsuki no Hokora. No error from the transferring devices. So, there might be some problems at the destinations or...”

While operating the terminal, Shin formed a hypothesis. If one had never been to the destination in this world, one wouldn’t be able to use the items, skills, and equipment related to teleporting.

Since he came to this world, he hadn’t been able to use message cards and lists as these were reset.

If the reason he could transfer to Tsuki no Hokora was because he had visited before, everything would make sense.

“If that’s the case, I have no choice but to go there.”

“If Shin’s hypothesis is correct, there’s no other way but to do that. Though Raster has been here, he can’t use the transferring devices.”

Schnee agreed with Shin. That was the only thing they could do now.

In the game era, the support characters including Schnee, didn’t have the crystal stones that granted teleportation ability. Therefore, Schnee hadn’t registered the teleportation points at Rashugum even though she had been there.

“Our conversation is based on the fact that it is natural to use teleportation. I’m scared as I’m getting used to it.”

“That’s how we are steeped in.”

Tiera had a distant look and Shin responded to her with a big smile and a thumb up.

“Stop it, I almost nodded.”

“Your body is honest.”

“Uu, I can’t deny it...”

Tiera felt that if she was not steeped in this situation, she would not be able to relax.

After that, they checked some more devices and items. As they got into it, they realized it was already late, so they decided to stay the night in Tsuki no Hokora.



“...Sigh”

While the moon was up high in the sky, Shin was sitting on the verandah at the back of Tsuki no Hokora. He held 『True Moon』, that had been broken from the battle with his support character, Girard.

“Well, what should I do... hmm?”

As he watched the moon, he sensed someone he knew very well coming closer.

“You can’t sleep?”

“Oh! Yeah, I was just thinking of repairing 『True Moon』.”

Shin stopped thinking for a moment as he was fascinated by Schnee in her nightwear, but he still managed to answer her somehow.

Shin lifted up 『True Moon』 to show Schnee as she naturally sat down next to him.

“This is from the battle with Girard, isn’t it? It looks the same as it was though.”

“I’ve thought of repairing it several times.. But, how do I say it, I feel like something is lacking. I could fix it right away, but my intuition as a blacksmith tells me not to... though, I don’t know if my intuition is reliable or not.”

Shin said to Schnee while putting a bitter smile on his face.

It was about time to fix it, so he tried out during his free time today, but it didn’t work out very well.

All materials were prepared and Shin’s skills weren’t lacking, since he was a

master blacksmith. Perhaps there was something else missing besides these.

“May I borrow it?”

“Hmm? Sure.”

When Shin handed over 『True Moon』, Schnee held it in front of her chest.



While Shin was wondering what she would do, he saw that 『True Moon』

gradually began glowing while held in Schnee's hands.

"Wow!!"

『True Moon』 emitted light as if it were soaking in the moonlight. Shin was wide-eyed with surprise because of the light, but after a while, it stopped emitting a light.

It lasted for only a moment, but Shin felt that it was much more longer than that.

"Here you go."

"Ah, y-yes. Hey Schnee, what was that?"

"I poured my magical power into 『True Moon』. I felt I should do it. I don't know why, but I hope it'll help you, even just a little bit, Shin."

"No, I have to thank you instead. I am sure that something missing was filled with this."

Shin said while looking at 『True Moon』.

Shin knew by intuition that what Schnee did wasn't anything wrong.

At the same time, he understood three more things.

"It's not complete yet, but I know what I should do. Thank you."

"I am glad to hear that."

Schnee looked very beautiful with a gentle smile on her face.

Shin gasped at her beautiful smile. Her beauty attracted people, but it made her untouchable. Her beauty was something that couldn't be described with words.

"Well, what will you do after this, Schnee?"

"If it is fine with you, I'd like to watch the moon with you."

"...Well, of course. "

"Then..."

"huh!"

Schnee answered to Shin, and leaned her body against him.

Shin felt a weight on his shoulder as Schnee rested her head while clinging to him.

“...Ah, Schnee-san? This is...”

“Please let me be like this for a moment.”

“...Okay.”

When Shin accepted it, the weight on his shoulder increased.

Maybe it was because Schnee leaned her whole body on Shin. The reason she didn't do so from the beginning was perhaps she was afraid of being denied or maybe she felt shy.

“.....”

They looked up moon in silence for a while.

In the moonlit night, two shadows fell on the verandah.

These two shadows cuddled together and remained together until they returned to their rooms.

Part 3

The following morning, Shin and the rest headed towards Kilmont. They took some time to say their farewells and give thanks to Hibineko and the others who fought in the battle of Balmel. That made them start later than the other adventurers and merchants. It also meant that their carriage ride was more spacious.

“It feels so slow now.”

Tiera muttered while looking out the window.

“It’d be inappropriate for us to go flying out of the city.”

Kagerou, as a horse, pulled the carriage just as fast as the other carriages on the road. Tiera felt like they were traveling even slower, especially after their rushed ride to Falnido.

“You know this is normal, right?”

“I feel like everything is different now after meeting Shin.”

Schnee’s words sank in, and Tiera didn’t know how to take them.

“Is that a bad thing?”

“It’s not normal.”

Tiera glanced over towards Shin, feeling a little dumbfounded. It was silly to think that a carriage going at such a ridiculous speed was normal. Shin nodded in agreement, holding tightly onto reins which was only decorative.

They were heading towards Kilmont. Shin and company’s journey to meet Shibaid had only just begun.

“I guess there isn’t much traffic. Maybe we can speed up just a little... wait? A message from Wilhelm!”

A message had arrived for Shin, amidst everyone’s convoluted thoughts.

Shin knew that Wilhelm wouldn’t send him a message over nothing. Something dire must have happened.

He immediately opened the message.

“What!?”

“Shin? What is it?”

Ignoring Schnee’s concerned voice, Shin quickly took out an item card and attached it to the message card.

He merely wrote “Use it,” and immediately sent his response to Wilhelm.

“Shin?”

“What’s wrong?”

“Hm?”

With Shin in a daze, Tiera and Yuzuha were also pressing him.

With his brows furrowed, Shin told them what Wilhelm’s message said.

—Rashia had been stabbed.



It happened on a beautiful day.

Sister Rashia had woken up, starting the day as usual; she made her bed, prayed, and went to wake the children. There was much work to be done in the church.

“I’m off now. Please look after yourselves.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

It was not unusual for a ceremonial occasion to be held in the church. Thoria was supposed to be at the church to make funeral arrangements for the recently deceased.

Rashia had nothing to worry about. It was just an ordinary day.

“I’m going to begin the treatment. Please relax.”

“Thank you as always.”

“Please, it’s nothing. It’s part of my duty to serve the community.”

“I can’t believe how much you’ve grown Rashia. I’m happy for the church that you’re here.”

“Yes. I owe much to Thoria, but I can only hope that I can repay my debts.”

Rashia smiled towards an elderly woman from the neighborhood.

She had gained considerable experience at the Wraith Plains and her healing ability also rose greatly. She was also quite skilled in giving medical attention to those in need. Sometimes, she was even able to cure those who had given up.

The issue with who would take over the responsibilities of the church was settled now. Everything was back to quiet. Or so she thought— —.

“May I come in?”

“...Father Bulk.”

The man stood at the entrance of the church. He and Rashia had argued heatedly over who would lead the church.

Father Bulk took a handkerchief to his oily face, wiping off the sweat and revealing a crooked smile.

“Hello my child. I beg your pardon, but we’ve got some matters of the church to discuss. Do you think you could excuse us?”

The words that came out of his mouth were polite, but the elderly woman was clearly left without a choice.

There was too much of a status difference between them; the father of the church and an elderly villager.

The woman left the church and closed the doors behind her. Rashia blurted out.

“What do you want?”

“Let’s start with ‘Hello,’ shall we? Of course, I’m here to continue our little chat from before.”

Father Bulk feigned shock. His entire demeanor was condescending. This made Rashia uneasy and bitter.

“I’m certain that I will be leading the church.”

“No, it’s too soon to call the shots. Besides, there hasn’t been a legitimate decree yet. Did you really think that you were in control? Well, that’s just hasty and careless.”

“...I’ve already received word from the other Fathers, that it’s not an issue. Of course, since there’s quite distance from headquarter, the official documents will be coming in any day now.”

“‘Any day now’? What is that, tomorrow? Or the next day? I don’t find it very reassuring that you don’t have these details all in order.”

His voice lingered in Rashia’s ears, giving her shivers.

What does he want? He’s far too confident.

“Father. Is that why you’re here? To tell me all of this?”

“Oh, heavens no child. This church will be mine eventually. I’ve merely come to see that things are still as they should be.”

“...I’m afraid I don’t understand what you mean. Why would you say such a thing?”

Father Bulk made it seem as if he knew something she did not.

“Your sheer arrogance. This is why we really need to stop letting things slide just because of hereditary reasons. You know absolutely nothing.”

This time, Father Bulk became slightly more aggressive.

“Answer me. I’ve obtained **【Purification】** so I should be the leader of this church according to the rule.”

“Please don’t raise your voice. Why don’t you show a little modesty? The Sisters in the headquarter are gentle you know?”

“!”

The conversation was going nowhere.

Rashia was glaring at Father Bulk, when suddenly the door opened.

“Am I late?”

“Yes you are, Eline! Because of your tardiness, I’ve been through quite an

ordeal. I encountered a golem during my trip, and..."

"Bulk-san, that's your fault. You are the one who said that you wanted to visit some ancient sites. I had my own matters to attend to, so please, do not yammer on about that anymore."

The man who stepped in wore a suit of armor.

It wasn't unusual to see someone with blonde hair blue eyes from Bayreuth. His hair that came slightly below his shoulders was neatly tied back. He smiled, and looked like a picturesque knight in shining armor.

However, Rashia saw him as anything but that. He was an intruder, for all she knew.

"Anyways. You know what to do, don't you?"

"Yes, the men outside filled me in. Is she the one we're taking?"

"No. We're taking the child of the beast. I understand the child's name is Mily, or something like that. I'm sure she's in the orphanage. Bring her to me."

"Yes, sir."

Father Bulk commanded with no hesitation.

The man named Eline was headed towards the orphanage.

"Wait! What are you going to do with Millie!!"

Rashia stood in his way, but Eline did not budge.

"Bulk-san. What should I do with her?"

"Do as you wish. The area is surrounded."

"Then"

It was a matter of seconds. Eline tilted his left hand, unsheathed his weapon and took the short sword.

The speed was clearly not the capability of a commoner. If this had worked, Rashia would have gone down in the blink of an eye.

"Kya!"

"Hm?"

Except, it didn't. A clear barrier generated between Rashia and the short sword. A spark could be seen where the forces met, and Rashia was thrown back.

The short sword fell to the ground with a clang.

"How interesting. You seem to have equipped a shield item of some sort. Even my sword couldn't stand against it. It'll be even more interesting to find out, if you made this item yourself, or if you received it as a gift."

"!!"

Eline looked intrigued, but Rashia could only stare back with fear.

She had no idea what had happened.

Rashia was at level 151. She was quite strong as a common woman. Her kinetic vision was far from average.

Yet, she could not have dodged Eline's attack on her own.

After fighting alongside Shin and Wilhelm, she had grown accustomed to sensing murderous intent. Everyone -no matter how strong-should be emitting some sort of will. It could be murderous or violent. Either way, it was a guide for Rashia to use when dodging and defending herself.

Yet here was this man, with neither murderous intent or animosity. To kill must be as natural as breathing for him. He showed no hesitation towards the act of killing. Here was true terror, in the form of a man.

"Won't you answer me?"

"N....no."

"Oh well. I guess I'll just have to find! Out!"

Before he had finished his thought, he drew his other sword and ran towards Rashia. Yet again, Rashia's barrier stood against his force.

However, unlike the last time with the short sword, sparks were flying more dramatically and the sword was struck deep in the air.

"It's much tougher than I had anticipated. What would happen if I hit repeatedly?"

Eline couldn't hide his excitement. He was thrilled to have found a worthy opponent. He drew his sword again and again.

With every strike, Rashia's barrier shrunk.

"Eline, stop horsing around."

"But sir, I think I'm close."

"Just use that other thing. Hurry up."

"You leave me no choice. I've already tested it on a monster. Let's see how you fare."

Eline turned his sword into a card. He reached in his pockets for a different one. It materialized into a 2 meter long giant knife.

A single edge had to be longer than 15 cemel. The blade shone bright red. The brim had the emblem of wings, and a giant fist sized jewel fit neatly.

The onyx jewel was a stark contrast to the blood-red blade.

"Isn't she a beauty? I'm afraid all I know is that her name is 『Exvaine』."

Eline looked proudly at his possession.

"It's more than just a pretty face. Just look at this!"

He seemed satisfied that Rashia couldn't take her eyes off of his weapon, as he grinned and thrust it upon her.

You could hear the swish of the blade cutting through the air as it left a red afterimage. It was almost a shriek as the sound of shattering glass pierced through the ears of those in the vicinity. The knife cut through the barrier like butter, slashing Rashia's cheek. The blade stopped at her neck.

Rashia peered over at the deadly tool. Should Eline gesture his hand even the slightest bit, her head would be chopped off. Blood dripped down her face, and Rashia sat there shaking.

"So. Do you feel like answering my question now?"

"....."

She put all of her might into not screaming. She had lost all words.

Eline looked smug. It wasn't a very pleasant expression. It was the face of a violent child. One that enjoyed picking off the legs and wings of a bug.

"No. Please. Leave us alone."

'I will probably die.' Rashia was filled with sorrow at the thought.

She stared into Eline's eyes. She knew that no matter what she had said, it was all up to his whim. That is why she felt resolute to not share any information.

"That's a pity. It's fine though. I'm here on a mission anyways."

Millie and the other children were indeed in the orphanage. No matter what happens, Rashia must warn them of the dangers. She was about 10 steps away from an item that would heed them.

Rashia was about to run for it, when the worst case scenario had unfolded. Luck was on Father Bulk's side.

"Shia-nee, I'm done cleaning."

It was none other than Millie, who had come into the church building. She was alone. She must have finished her chores before the other children.

"Well what do we have here. She seems to be Millie-san. How convenient that the target came to us. Is this because I behave well everyday? "

"Yes, it must be God smiling down on us. Eline, you know what to do."

"Of course, my lord."

Eline and Father Bulk shifted their attention to Millie. At that chance, Rashia attempted to run to the organ, to activate the item hidden between the keys.

However, Eline did not miss a beat.

"Are you going to do something? That's no good at all."

Eline stood between Rashia and the organ.

"Hurry up Eline."

"Please don't rush me, Father!" Eline blocked Rashia and inched towards Millie. It was then that a strong barrier burst between Millie and Eline.

Eline could sense that this force was much more powerful than that of Rashia. He swung down his precious 『Exvaine』.

Except it was different this time. 『Exvaine』 bounced off of the barrier with a jolt.

“What!?”

Eline’s eyes were slits of rage. He took his weapon and lashed out towards Millie. The barrier held up.

“Shit!”

“Ah!”

Eline put more might into his vicious attacks.

Millie was crouched to the ground, and only a little crack appeared in her barrier.

“...Well what do you know. My High Human weapon doesn’t seem to be doing its job.”

“!?”

“Eline!”

“Oops. Just a slip of the tongue.”

Rashia could not hide her surprise. A High Human weapon-one forged by the likes of God. It wasn’t just that though. It was the fact that the little Millie even stood a chance. The item from Shin seemed like a simple necklace. It was truly a God-given gift.

“This is a waste of time. Let’s try this.”

“Agh!?”

Eline took the 『Exvaine』 and destroyed Rashia’s barrier. She was thrown to the ground as the blade was placed right at Rashia’s neck.

“No!!”

“Millie, Millie, Millie. If you don’t want her to die, please discard your barrier item.”

“No! Millie don’t! Gah!”

Eline shut Rashia up. She could no longer produce any words.

“S-Shia-nee...”

Millie didn’t know what to do. She stood helplessly, uttering Rashia’s name.

“You don’t seem to believe me. Then, how about this?”

Eline briefly released Rashia from the holds of 『Exvaine』, and effortlessly slid the red blade into Rashia’s right rib area.

“Ah....”

Rashia didn’t know what had happened, until the blood started coming out of her mouth.

“Shia-nee!!”

Millie ran towards her.

However, her barrier stopped her, because it knew how dangerous Eline was.

“Look what you’ve done Millie. You can stop all of this right now, you know?”

“Ah...no... Don’...t...”

The pain was excruciating, but Rashia didn’t want Millie in the wrong hands. All that came out of her mouth though were shallow breaths and sounds.

“No! Release Shia-nee!!”

“All you have to do is unequip your barrier item. The more you resist, the more pain she will be in....like this.”

His tone was gentle, as Eline chanted spells into the 『Exvaine』 still inside Rashia.

The blade turned red-hot.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

The burning sensation made Rashia cry out.

Her scream was too much for Millie.

“Stop! Stop it...”

“Look. All you have to do is take off your item. Put it on the ground.”

“.....”

Tears dripping down her chin, Millie placed her necklace on the floor. The moment her hand and the necklace weren't touching, the barrier was released.

“That just took far too long. Off we go. Come.”

Father Bulk shook his head.

“Please. Please help S-Shia-nee...”

“If you come quietly, she won't die. If you even let out a peep, who knows what will happen to your precious sister.”

“But...”

“This is why I hate children. Eline.”

“Yes, Father.”

Eline hit Millie's gut. She fell noiselessly. They had knocked her unconscious.

“We're done here. Let's go.”

“Shouldn't we clean up?”

“Leave it. But don't leave any traces.”

“As you wish.”

Bulk carried off Millie, while Eline activated his clearing skills. He took 『Exvaine』 out of Rashia.

“!?”

She was in so much pain that all she could do was lay there quivering.

Eline looked up towards the beautiful stained glass.

“...By the way. Another question: an adventurer comes here often, carrying a magic spear. What class is this man's weapon in?”

Eline was thinking of Wilhelm of course. He looked over at Rashia.

There was no response. This was only natural. Even if she could, she had no will to respond to him. Her wounds were deep and painful.

“Ah. My apologies. I really ought to have asked beforehand. What a pity. Until next time.”

Eline lowered his gaze.

Father Bulk had already left with his men.

—Except, another presence had filled the room.

“What a lucky day indeed.”

“Whose blood is that on your sword?”

Wilhelm’s voice was cold.

His hand squeezed 『Venom』 even tighter.

“I mean. I was having a friendly conversation with the sister. It really didn’t pan out the way I wanted it to though. By the way, how did you get here? I thought I had activated my clearing skill here.”

“What did you do to her?”

“Why do people never answer my questions?”

“You’re the one who’s got questions to answer.”

“My my. So hostile. Fine. I stabbed her. She doesn’t have very long to...!”

Wilhelm charged before Eline was finished.

『Venom』 had released a bright red light into the air.

It was a single shot with all his might. But Eline took his 『Exvaine』 and cut the blaze. The two weapons’ forces caused some large sparks.

“What did I ever do to you?”

“A whole lot!!”

Part 4

Eline dodged the repeated attacks.

Wilhelm was an upper class Chosen One. It seemed impossible, but it was as if Eline knew what his next moves were. Eline's face remained calm and composed.



“I believe your spear is 《Legend》 grade, possibly 《Mythology》 grade. I’d love

to have it in my collection.”

“Shut up!!”

Wilhelm’s attacks became more heated. He didn’t skip a beat with his repeated strikes. You’d think that one hit would be able to pulverize a king class Skull Face.

Yet it was no match against Eline’s 『Exvaine』, or Eline himself. The fighter and the weapon that Wilhelm faced were the real deal.

“You’re as good as I’d heard. I wish that I had a little more speed on me. That’s the one weakness when it comes to equipping 『Exvaine』.”

“Why, you little...!!”

It was frustrating how Eline wasn’t fully invested in the combat.

Wilhelm had to switch tactics. Rather than waste energy on the repeated blows, he had to take a single shot. He stepped back to squeeze more power into his hands that held 『Venom』. However, this caused him to stop moving momentarily.

Eline did not miss this chance.

He went from defense mode to attack mode, thrusting 『Exvaine』.

“Gah!!”

Wilhelm brought 『Venom』 in front of him to take the red blade on.

The sheer mass of it took Wilhelm by surprise. He had not anticipated its weight, having seen Eline lift it so easily. Regardless of what Eline had said about his own speed, he was faster and more agile than Wilhelm.

Wilhelm took some damage.

He was blown back and slammed against the wall. He could feel the air being forced out of his lungs, as he let out a yelp.

『Venom』 had saved Wilhelm by intercepting the thrust of his savage opponent. Still, the damage was sufficient to make Wilhelm drop 『Venom』.

『Venom』 lay there, with a crack in the center after clashing with the mighty 『Exvaine』.

“Oh dear. After looking around, I thought I’d finally found something that I liked. Now it’s damaged goods. I should have known it with a strong opponent like you.”

Eline looked down at the item and shook his head after heaving a sigh.

Maybe he was preoccupied with the weapon, but he didn’t seem to have a care in the world for Wilhelm, who was pushing the rubble off of himself.

“Grr.”

“Oh. You’re fine the way you were. This spear is no good to me.”

“Why...are you here?”

“My client was looking for someone.”

“Looking for...?”

“Yes. But we found the child. Oh, was this off record? My bad. It’s fine though, my role here is done.”

Eline answered Wilhelm cheerfully.

Wilhelm wondered if there was something wrong with the man standing there.

“I have to go now or I could get into trouble. I’d be happy if you could get your spear fixed, by the way.”

“Why don’t you tell me where you’re going too.”

“Sure. We’re headed to the church headquarter. Please come if you want. My name is Eline Sperizer. You should remember that.”

Then Eline turned and left.

No one could ever forget his grin of pure evil.



“F-FUck!”

Eline disappeared, and Wilhelm groaned as he clutched his left abdomen in pain.

He knew that he had cracked a few ribs. On top of that, the fight had taken a

tremendous toll on his body.

Wilhelm had fought quite a few battles until now, and he was in shock. He had only taken one hit, yet, he was in considerable agony.

Perhaps Eline was that skilled of a fighter, or his weapon was truly that potent. Regardless, that weapon was not normal.

“Rashia...”

He forced himself to step foot in the church.

Thoria should not be here today. Then it had to be Rashia who faced Eline.

“!?”

He could smell the damp iron of blood. It was an eerie feeling for the scent to be wafting inside a house of God.

Wilhelm looked about frantically, before his eyes rested on Rashia on the floor, her back in a pool of blood.

This was enough to make him forget his own wounds.

“Rashia!! No, Rashia!! Wake up!!”

“Wi...”

Rashia was barely conscious, as she feebly called his name.

“Please! Take this!!”

He took out a card from his Item Box.

It was a class 5 Potion – the highest-class antidote that Wilhelm had ever possessed. This should do the trick, even for wound like hers.

“No! Why?!”

He had given the potion to her. Yet, the wound was not healing itself.

Wilhelm had not known. There was a restriction depending on the potion class. A class 5 Potion was only as effective as the healing abilities of the person in need of healing. Only at a class 4 Potion or higher could an item heal a wound and enhance a person’s vitality.

That level of recovery item was not available in any of the nearby markets. It

was rare to even see a class 5 Potion; the recovery item Wilhelm had.

“Damn it!!”

Wilhelm could see that it was of no use. He immediately reached for the message card in his Item Box. There wasn’t enough time to spare – not even to write to another for help.

He wrote to Shin that Rashia was stabbed.

She had very little time left in this world.

Wilhelm couldn’t help her. All he could do was pray to God that he’d get a response, and to try to stop the bleeding.

“Wil...”

“I asked Shin for help. Just hold out a little longer.”

Rashia didn’t respond. She squeezed his hand and could barely get the words out.

“I’m...sorry...”

“Why.”

“I...could...n’t...save...Mi...llie”

I’m sorry. I couldn’t save Millie.

She was losing consciousness as she repeated this over and over.

Wilhelm bit his lips.

He shouldn’t have lost his composure. He should have focused. He knew what he was up against. It didn’t help at all that he was hot in the head.

And he was even more helpless now.

“I”

A message appeared in front of Wilhelm. All that was written was “Use it.” Several item cards were also attached.

Every card had the same image. Wilhelm took one in his hand.

A long, thin glass jar appeared with a clear gold liquid inside.

Wilhelm had no idea what it was, but there was no time. He trusted Shin, and gave it to Rashia.

“Mm...ah...”

The results were astonishing.

The bleeding had stopped and the wound was closing in on itself. Her pale skin regained color. Her face had been the picture of agony. Now it was calm and soothed.

No one would have believed that she had been dying only a second ago. The only proof of the event was her torn clothes and the pool of drying blood.

“Eh? What...I..”

“Are you alright?”

Rashia was fully recovered. She seemed dazed, as she looked around.

“How did I...!? Oh Wil! Where’s Millie!? Where is she!”

She frantically questioned Wilhelm. Even if the stab wound was gone, it didn’t mean that she had recovered her stamina. She couldn’t muster any strength in her arms.

“She was gone by the time I got here.”

Rashia was losing her mind, and Wilhelm could only tell her the truth.

He was familiar with the presence of every orphan in the church. He could not feel that of Millie anywhere nearby.

“No...Millie...”

“Stop crying and tell me what happened.”

Wilhelm was losing his patience, and Rashia looked up towards him.

“She can’t be dead. We have to get her back! Tell me!”

“...I’m sorry. ...she’ll be alright, right?”

“Of course, they said they’re headed back to the church headquarter. I doubt they’ll get right to the killing. I also told Shin.”

She nodded, as tears fell down her cheeks.

Millie was taken. But Wilhelm was right. Millie was still alive.

Neither Rashia nor Wilhelm knew Father Bulk's motives. It didn't matter anyways.

Millie was a friend. She was family.

If she needed help, they would help her.

"Wilhelm!"

A loud shout was heard from the steps of the church.

Wilhelm had managed to help Rashia sit in a chair. He turned to the source of the voice.

"About time."

It was Shin. He had Yuzuha on his shoulders. Schnee and Tiera followed behind.

Shin also held 『Venom』 in his hand.

"I saw your message and sent you some items. Is Rashia...what is that blood?"

He was bewildered by the large, dark red spot by the alter. It had to be at least a mel in diameter.

He had only read the word 'stabbed'. He had not anticipated that much blood loss from the message alone.

"You made it sound like she was just a little hurt. What in the world happened?"

Shin looked to see that Rashia was okay. Then he asked Wilhelm.

"You have to ask her for the details. All I know is this."

"What?"

"Millie was taken and Rashia was stabbed by an upper class Chosen One. He had an unusual weapon too."

"Is that why 『Venom』 is like this?"

Shin held up 『Venom』, with a chip in it. The item's durability was reduced by a third.

“It was just one hit.”

“One hit?”

“One strike did this.”

“...I see. That means that this is no simple kidnapping.”

Shin thought about it. The weapon that was used against Wilhelm must be at least 《Mythology》 grade. It could also be 《Ancient》. Otherwise, 『Venom』 wouldn't have become like this.

“Wil. Did you fight the blonde swordsman with the red sword?”

Rashia had been listening to the conversation.

“Yes. I know you've only just gotten up, but tell us what happened.”

“Yes.”

Rashia tried her hardest to tell them without getting emotional.

“I see. Then Millie shouldn't be in immediate danger. Father Bulk didn't care about this church at all. He was after Millie the whole time.”

“They must be after Millie's gift.”

They agreed.

Millie was a 'Hoshiyomi'. She could predict the future. (T/N: Hoshiyomi or Star Reader)

“I know you already talked about this. This 'Eline'...are you sure he called his weapon 『Exvaine』, and are you sure he said it was a 'High Human' weapon?”

Shin was more concerned with this than Millie after hearing Rashia finish telling them what had happened.

“Yes. The bracelet that I had received from you held him off until he used the red sword against me and the bracelet shattered. I believe Millie's item only had a crack in it towards the end, but...”

“.....”

Shin repeated her words in his mind. If he was right about his hunch, then Rashia's item couldn't have bought them any time at all.

Even Millie's item would have broken eventually.

"What is it?"

"No, it's nothing. Don't worry about Millie. Rashia, you need to rest now."

Shin brushed off Rashia's question, but she knew something was wrong.

It wasn't possible for Rashia to understand, because she didn't know he was a High Human.

Rashia looked dejected, but Wilhelm tried to reassure her.

"We'll take over from now on. You have the other children here to protect. Tell Thoria to also be careful."

"...Yes."

"It really wasn't your fault. You were up against some scary things. How could you have gone up against an opponent that even I couldn't handle?"

Rashia had leveled up, but she was far from an upper class Chosen One. Even if she had fought normally, she couldn't even have posed a threat against her foes.

Perhaps there was some saving grace to her leveling up though. Because of that, her blood loss was minimized. It wasn't all hopeless.

If Rashia had died, Millie would have been devastated.

"You need to get better. For Millie."

Shin who also joined the persuasion somehow managed to get Rashia to return to the orphanage.

Part 5

“What is it? Do you know about the weapon that guy used?”

Wilhelm asked after they had cleaned up the bloody mess.

He didn't bother to hide his anger anymore.

Perhaps something snapped after Rashia had left the room.

“Calm down Wilhelm...I thought I had an idea of what we were up against, but now it's certain. What do you think Schnee?”

“The odds are stacked. I think we're both on the same page.”

Schnee seemed to be thinking the same thing. While Shin didn't spell it out, she agreed with him.

“What is it then?!”

“Yeah, it's hard for us when you're both in the know and we're not.”

Wilhelm was impatient. Tiera also glared at Shin, for leaving her out.

“Sorry. 『Exvaine』 used to belong to a friend of mine. It's actual name is 『Red Crystal Sword Exvaine』. It's ancient grade...and it's a sword that I forged myself.”

Shin sighed. If what Rashia heard was right, that a High Human made the weapon, then that must be the case.

What made Shin even more sure was how he had never sold it to other players.

“Wilhelm, I believe that you struggled due to one of the sword's abilities.” Shin began to explain.

One. It increases damage against humans. Two. The blade can decrease magic damage against it.

While it doesn't have very many abilities as far as a high-class weapon goes, originally it was meant to be a last resort weapon. Since 『Exvaine』 itself has tremendous damage potential, Shin had figured that it didn't require any more

abilities.

“Well of course I didn’t stand a chance. It was forged by the ‘Dark Blacksmith’.”

He must have remembered the battle earlier. Wilhelm furrowed his brow.

“I see. Eh? I thought the weapons Shin forged can’t be used by people who aren’t the intended user?”

Tiera blurted out after thinking about what Shin had said about Schnee’s 『Blue Moon』. While the circumstances were slightly different, she had the right idea.

“That’s true. 『Exvaine』 was handed to my friend Filma. Only she should be able to use it. Even if she were to give it away willingly, I doubt that she would be the kind of person that’d attack a church. Schnee, when was the last time you spoke to Filma?”

Filma is one of Shin’s support characters.

“We haven’t spoken since the cataclysm. That should be some 450 years or so.”

“...and you didn’t think to tell me or look for her after all that time?”

Shin was aghast at how calm Schnee was.

“Well, we live such long lives... and when we’re at the top of our respective races, time is just...our sense of time is so different and... Other than looking for Shin, I had assumed that Filma was the type that wanted to live peacefully and live alone. I’m terribly sorry, we never were heavily in touch either, and...”

It’s one thing if it’s an important character like Girard or Shibaid. For other characters though, particularly those that were isolated and not in a party, it was a different matter.

Of course, if Filma had come across a clue about Shin, she would have contacted Schnee.

Filma was an upper-class lord, aka a High Lord. Since Schnee and Filma were similar beings with long lives, not hearing from each other for centuries was not unusual.

“Shin, I know I said this before, but for High Elves like master, 500 years is nothing. There are High Elves who nap for that long.”

Tiera was the one that came to help Schnee who was under scrutiny. Tiera was quite young as an elf, so her sense of the surroundings – or the lack thereof – was not as extreme as Schnee’s.

“I’m terribly sorry...”

“No. I’m at fault too.”

When your lifetime lasts for thousands of years, there’s no point keeping track of events. While there are those who live a very purposeful and meaningful 500 years, most do not.

Either way, Shin has only been around for 20 years. He couldn’t possibly fathom that sort of mentality.

“Well, let’s leave it at that. Do you know where Filma was headed last then?”

“Yes. She was headed to the north. At least I think so. It’s been such a long time though. Again, I’m sorry.”

“No, don’t be. It’s impressive that you even remember that detail.”

Shin thought to himself – ‘I bet I wouldn’t have.’

“North though, huh. We don’t have a decent map, so it’s hard to say where.”

“I have a map.”

Schnee reached into her Item Box and pulled out a map from her inventory. She placed it on the stool.

You could see how vast the ocean was in the middle of the continent. This always gave an illusion that there were two continents. According to Schnee, the north was called Est and the south was called Kern. Shin and his party were in Bayreuth. It was close to the southern end of Kern.

“I’ve never actually seen a map of our continent that’s so precise.”

“I’ve seen maps at the market, but never this good.”

Wilhelm also couldn’t hide his surprise. Shin also recalled the map he had bought in a shop.

“When you sell accurate maps, other countries can use it to their advantage. It’s difficult to make these too. This one was created by looking down from the Sky Castle.”

“I can see how looking down would allow such accuracy.”

Shin nodded. Using a guild house castle in such a way almost seemed like cheating.

“Does this mean that we have to go even further north in Est?”

“We might even end up in the north of Kern. Some truly believe that Est and Kern are two separate entities. Back when Filma had mentioned her journey, there was no such thing as Kern or Est.”

People started calling the areas by those names almost 400 years ago.

The map was made after Filma’s disappearance. It’s hard to tell how Filma understood the continental divide.

“So. Why did that bastard have your friend’s sword?”

“I don’t know. There’s no way to know unless we ask Filma or the sword’s current owner. We can’t let it be this way for long though.”

Shin’s attitude had sharply changed over the course of this discussion. His tone was more aggressive.

He clenched hard at the stool that the map was laid upon. You could hear a faint crushing noise coming from within his hand. Wilhelm was more obvious with his emotions, but Shin was boiling up inside, although he appeared calm.

According to Rashia’s story, it was unlikely that Father Bulk would kill Millie instantly.

That didn’t mean that Millie was safe though. In the worst-case scenario, Millie would be put through unbearable pain and suffering in order to make her cooperate.

What’s more, Eline was clearly abnormal. It pissed off Shin beyond anything, that someone could have the nerve to equip another person’s weapon.

Shin wasn’t sure that he could let a person breathe, if they had taken

another's weapon by virtue of murder.

"Shin..."

"Please. Please calm down."

Tiera gently touched Shin's left arm. Her voice quivered, and Schnee placed her hand over Shin's right hand.

Yuzuha could also feel the tension in the air. She said nothing, and rubbed Shin's cheek slowly.

"I'm not the only one upset then."

"...Yeah."

Shin tried to breathe in deeply in order to slow his nerves.

"Sorry...we have to talk about how to get Millie back. Wilhelm, when you fought Eline, did he say anything about where they were headed?"

Shin apologized and thanked the three, then asked Wilhelm.

"They're going to the Church headquarter. He told me to bring back 『Venom』 after fixing it. That bastard."

Wilhelm's bad mood worsened.

"Which means, that even if we can't catch up with them, an encounter is unavoidable at the Church."

"It's not possible to catch up."

Wilhelm shut Shin down.

"What do you mean? I think it's entirely possible at our journey speed."

"Eline disappeared after our battle. He didn't just disappear out of sight. I think...he 'teleported'."

Wilhelm had actually witnessed Eline fade away. He would have recognized a magic skill 【Hiding】. It was nothing of the sort.

"【Teleportation】...really?"

"I think so. It didn't feel like he wanted to hide himself."

Shin mulled it over, as Schnee interrupted.

“It must be the difference in the magical current.”

“Magical current?”

Shin glanced over at Schnee over a concept he’d never heard of.

“【Teleportation】 and 【Hiding】 rely on different magical currents. Wilhelm knows what 【Hiding】 feels like in the surrounding area. It must have been an unfamiliar feeling.”

“I had no idea. How does it feel different?”

“It depends on the person. There are those who are sensitive to magical currents and others who can’t sense it too.”

It was a different setting from the game. It must be similar to the concept of the arts – something that only really exists in this universe alone.

“Then we have to head directly to the Church headquarter. Where is it?”

“Around here.”

Schnee pointed at the map with her thin finger. It was in the center of Est.

This meant that they’d have to cross through Kern and stop somewhere in the middle of Est.

“This is going to take some time.”

“Perhaps we can reach out to Vizzy. We could borrow a dragon. That would dramatically decrease our travel time.”

“Yes. Please do that.”

Vizzy was a summoner and tamer, as well as a supporting character of Cashmere. (T/N: Changed Busy to Vizzy) Rumor had it that there were several dragons being trained at the castle. It could be their chance to save time.

The last message sent to Raster had no reply. They could also check in on that front.

“Maybe he’s so busy that he just forgot?”

“Maybe.”

Shin knew Raster well enough. He could picture that. Raster had that personality of often forgetting his environment when focused too much on a single task.

In the real world, someone like him would be called a ‘mechanic nerd’.

“I knew this already but...he really is crazy isn’t he?”

“Just don’t think about anything too hard.”

Riding a dragon was the kind of thought that a player would have. People who lived in this universe would never consider it as a transportation means.

Aside from a few warriors in the Kilmont Sky Dragoon, it was a rare skill for anyone to possess. Riding a dragon was tremendously difficult.

Wilhelm knew that Shin was an abnormal being.

Still, as someone native, these weren’t instinctive or natural thoughts. Tiera looked over at Wilhelm, dumbfounded, as she once used to be because of her culture shock from Shin.

“Our destination is set. Who knows what’ll happen, but we have to prepare now. We have to get Millie back.”

“No need to say that twice.”

Wilhelm headed towards Rashia to update her on their next moves.

In the meantime, Schnee and Tiera went to go find food. Shin took the broken 『Venom』 and headed outside of the capital.

“Alright then.”

He was in the middle of a field, not too far from civilization, and made Tsuki no Hokora materialize. He had placed a hiding spell on it, to keep it out of people’s sight.

The furnace was already roaring. The necessary metals to enhance 『Venom』 were prepared.

“Let’s see...which one...”

Shin looked over 『Venom』.

Enhancing 『Venom』 was different from the kinds of actions to take with Schnee's weapon, for instance. 『Venom』 required a higher status from its user. Certain conditions needed to be met for the spear to grow stronger.

While the conditions weren't exactly clear, Shin knew that Wilhelm and 『Venom』 together satisfied any combination of terms.

『Venom』 was interesting, in that it had two possible paths – 'holy' or 'demonic'. It was a surprise how it'd turn out.

Shin instructed Yuzuha to step aside and got to work.

Shin took the refined orichalcum and mithril ingot and placed it close by. He threw 『Venom』 into the fire.

Even ancient grade metal stood no chance in this fire. 『Venom』 melted within seconds, becoming a metal ingot.

Shin thrust his hammer down.

“!!!!”

With each heavy hammering, 『Venom』's magic was being swerved left and right by Shin's overpowering magic. The entire workshop was full of sparks.

When rebuilding a weapon from the ground up, all of the magic in a weapon needed to be exhausted.

It all depended on the blacksmith, how much magic could be drained and how much could be poured back in.

The ingot that was once 『Venom』 would make any normal person fall with a single touch. Weapons that were heavily used were even more difficult to mold.

“!”

After being struck for a few dozen times, the ingot began to change shape. Its red hue was fading as a silver gleam started to become more prominent.

Shin smiled at the sight. The silver meant that the spear would be holy.

“Well, that's good news.”

He chuckled, and began to put more power into his arms.

A high pitched banging of metal to metal echoed throughout the shrine. The ingot was turning brighter and brighter, and Shin's hammer was thrusting heavier and heavier.

With the last hammer in, a final blow of force rippled from the metal to the surrounding area.

Any normal blacksmith would have had his arm explode from the might.

It was but a breeze to a seasoned Shin, as he looked deeply into the ingot.

All of its original magic was gone, as it started to emit a stronger radiance.

“Good.”

Shin was satisfied with his work, and reached over for the orichalcum and mithril. He placed them over the ingot and continued to hammer down.

A different note could be heard with each bang. At first the metals made more of a grunting noise, but as they meshed into one, the tone became a clear clang and ringing clatter.

Shin was also more patient, more intentional with each thrust. The ingot was resistant at first and you could almost hear it. Eventually, it made no noise. It shook but seemed resigned and accepting its own fate.

“!”

Shin let out a sigh with the final blow.

He lifted his hammer and looked down to see a single spear.

The entire spear, up until the tip of the blade, shimmered silver.

A small cross shaved clear crystal was placed between the spearhead, embellished with a red marking here and there. This must be the remains of 『Venom』.

Shin took the spear in hand and began to appraise.

——— “Holy spear 『Beinot』” Total score SS”

——— “All bonus conditions met. Warrior equipped will be given the title ‘Smiling Guardian’.”

Looking at the minute details, Shin’s eyes stopped.

The weapon in his hand should have been an upper mythology grade weapon. In fact, it had upgraded to a lower ancient grade weapon.

He expected as much as far as the bonuses would go, but...

“I see. So this method also upgrades the weapon class.”

Schnee’s 『Blue Moon』 and Shibaid’s 『Placid Moon』, Wolfgang’s 『Crushing Moon』 were all at their highest classes. There was no way to upgrade beyond higher ancient.

Plus, 『Swift Fang』 was only welded for an ability upgrade. There was no way that it could also class upgrade.

“Now it’ll be a fair match with 『Exvaine』.”

Comparing weapons alone, 『Beinot』 was superior.

Who knows how the battle will unfold, but Wilhelm and 『Beinot』 should be able to meet eye to eye with Eline and 『Exvaine』.

Shin quickly turned 『Beinot』 into a card and returned to the capital.

Schnee was already done with her errands. Everyone was back at the church orphanage.

“Vizzy got back to me. The capital will draw too much attention. We have to meet somewhere a little more remote.”

“How long will we have to wait?”

“About an hour.”

“Then we can head there and wait.”

Vizzy had things to do too. Even if Shin was the same rank with Vizzy’s master, Cashmere, he couldn’t get upset.

Besides, riding a dragon would reduce their overall travel time by more than

an hour.

Wilhelm was the last one to join them. Shin and the party left the capital.

They went out for some 20 minutes to the middle of a field with nothing in the way. They would wait for Vizzy there, and they had already checked that no one would bother them.

Wilhelm had already received the 『Beinot』 card.

“...There.”

Shin looked over. In the clouds, a small shadow appeared.

He counted 5. They waited a bit longer as the shadows became clearer.

“Hey. Shin. The red one in the front... that’s an elder red dragon.”

“Yes. But it doesn’t look full-grown.”

“That’s really not the point.”

Shin thought that he was remarking on how small the dragon is.

The elder red dragons that Wilhelm said were upper class monsters in the dragon family. In comparison to normal red dragons, they had considerably higher battle specs.

They grew to be about 20 mels, but the dragon in the front looked to be half of that.

There were two dragons on each side of the red dragon, all with elder titles: a blue dragon and green dragon to its left and a white dragon and black dragon to its right.

They must also see Shin and his party.

They gradually decreased in altitude, landing some 10 mels away from them.

A woman wearing a robe swooped down from the elder red dragon.



“Hi~ long time no see~. I didn’t think you’d really come back~.”

A woman walked towards Shin, speaking slowly.

She was Vizzy Laurette, a tamer under Cashmere.

Her semi-long golden hair had a slight tint of pink in them, and she looked into Shin's face with trademark High Pixie clear blue eyes. She couldn't be taller than 150 centimeters.

She appeared to be a beautiful little girl.

"You still talk like that?"

"Nothing's changed really."

One of Vizzy's settings was to talk slowly.

According to Schnee, her personality had not digressed one bit.

"I heard that you needed some dragons~, so I brought you~ there babies~. They're small but~ very good at flying~."

"Thanks."

Vizzy smiled, unlike her counterpart supporting character Berett, who was shy and reserved. Shin's memory did not fail him.

They didn't have time to chit-chat, so each character began to maneuver a dragon.

Vizzy rode on her elder red, as Schnee took the blue, Tiera and Kagerou took the green, Shin and Yuzuha took the black and Wilhelm took the white dragon. Kagerou hid in Tiera's shadow, while Yuzuha dug deeper into Shin's jacket, peeking out just the face.

With Vizzy leading, Shin and Schnee took her flanks. Wilhelm and Tiera were behind Shin and Schnee, respectively.

While they were all novices at riding dragons except for Shin and Schnee, each dragon understood words clearly. It was not possible for the dragons to fly in the wrong direction.

Wilhelm and Tiera were reluctant, and placed all of their faith in their dragons.

"It's high...and it's cold..."

Tiera, who had never had any experience with even the idea of flying, was shocked by the height and the ambient temperature.

Magic only helped a little in terms of the wind or the cold air. She wasn't equipping very much either, and shivered.

Kagerou didn't seem to be bothered by the temperature, and peered anxiously at Tiera's face.

"Now I understand why Vizzy wears a robe... Hm?"

A message card appeared in front of Tiera.

She opened it to see a fur robe card.

"USE IT!"

Shin shouted back at her. It was hard to hear with the wind in her ears, but she waved back at him.

She moved slowly in order not to lose her balance, as a warm, thick, green outer garment appeared. She managed to pull it over herself despite the wind getting in her way.

"Wow..."

It was no ordinary outer garment. All of the cold discomfort vanished, and the icy wind was transformed into softness.

Shin and Schnee didn't seem bothered by the cold either.

Tiera glanced over at Wilhelm, who had already taken the initiative to use his own cloak.

Tiera had heard from Shin earlier, that they were meeting Shibaid at the dragon empire Kilmont. She recalled the power and aura of the High Dragnil.

"I don't belong here."

Every person that the party had encountered until now has been abnormally strong and powerful. Tiera understood her place in the world, and felt discouraged.

"Gruu."

“I know, I know. We have to save Millie. I have to stop thinking about myself.”

Tiera pat Kagerou on the head, and took in a deep breath to encourage herself.

She had tamed Kagerou after all, and they had bonded in a way that they both knew exactly how the other felt. This was not an easy feat, even for extremely advanced trainers. Tiera didn't know that though.

Chapter 2

Part 1

The party cut through the wind and continued to fly.

It had been a few hours since they left Bayreuth. They took breaks and continued their journey, making it past the Melt mountains before sunset. They had to go around the mountains, which took longer than if they had flown directly over them. It was inevitable, since the dragons were not full grown and the party did not want to anger the Melt mountains' guardian, the Mist Garuda.

The elder dragons that Vizzy brought had yet to reach adulthood.

She had intended to bring adult elder dragons, but it was breeding season. It was not possible to remove them from Rashugum.

That was why she had brought the younger ones, who weren't ready for breeding yet.

Aside from their sizes, they weren't that different from the adults. However, their smaller stature impacted their flying abilities.

They weren't as fast as the adults, nor could they fly very high.

If the elder dragons were adults, it would have been possible to fly over the Melt mountains easily.

There was a variation in the pack's colors, because there weren't enough green elder dragons – the fastest ones. Aside from that, having a set of dragons with different specialties was better for an emergency.

"We should set camp here tonight."

"Just in case, I'll set up a 【Barrier】 and 【Wall】."

"Right. I'll pitch a tent."

Shin took out a tent for camping from his Item Box.

It wasn't a personal-sized tent, but for a party or a group. Since the tent comes out fully assembled, there's no need for extra work.

Still, some players enjoy assembling tents during game play.

The tent was large enough for a party of 6, the party limit, to the extent that they could all huddle up and sleep together. However, in this case the tent was divided into two sections. Men and Women.

There was simple bedding provided inside, with adequate temperature control. Obviously magic was involved.

"...it's from Berett."

A message arrived from Berett, as Shin set up camp. He had asked for more information about the church from the Golden Company that Berett managed.

Shin looked over the information.

The firm had a branch in the city of Sigurd, where the church's headquarter was based. Berett had ordered his workers to spy on the church's movements. So far nothing was out of the ordinary.

The church had gained support from several different regions, after being involved in revival movements post – "Dusk of the Majesty".

There were many religions across Elnia, like those who worshipped indigenous gods and heroes. Still, church followers made up the majority of the population.

The Pope was at the top, with several cardinals and priests below him, dispatched across Elnia and its many smaller countries. Due to the volume of followers and the expansion of the church organization, Sigurd alone felt like its own city state.

Of course, other countries did not approve of this way.

That was why the church's knights acted like a standing army, clearing out the monsters in the area as a way of keeping balance with the surrounding countries. Rumor has it, that there was even a special military force composed of only Chosen Ones.

Some individuals also possessed their own Chosen Ones.

Perhaps Bulk and Eline's relationship was just another form of that.

"I'm sure that they're already there. Who knows what they're doing."

It was hard for Shin to decide whether Millie's abduction was Bulk acting out rashly, or the will of the church.

He felt like it was probably the former, but when he also considered Millie's abilities, it was entirely likely that the church's upper echelon had their own personal agenda.

Berett had already been notified that a child with special abilities had been abducted by a father of the church. It would take some time though for the details to become clear.

They were up against the church though. It would be irresponsible to drag in those who were not involved to begin with.

Was Bulk alone? Were there others? It was necessary to make it clear.

Regardless of who was responsible – whether it was just Bulk or a few others – it had to be stopped. And it had to be stopped at all costs.

"It's impossible to know how Millie's doing, or how much the church really knows."

"The inside of the church has more intense security than castles around here. Besides, on this continent, the church definitely has the most Chosen Ones. Even if we have friends in the Golden Company, it's not going to be easy."

If it were just a numbers game, the adventure guild had an advantage. However, the church had more Chosen Ones under its command that were free to do as they pleased.

This force was quite potent, especially since the extent of each individual's abilities were unknown. The church could easily take over any of the countries in the vicinity.

"If all of the church is in on it, it means that we have to take everyone down... that's annoying. Should we take them down all in one sweep?"

“There shouldn’t be too many of them. Perhaps that would be easier for us to maneuver.”

Shin was talking to himself, and Schnee responded while cooking.

This was if the church was in on it, or if the upper echelon of the church had been a part of it. If this were the case though, the church would have to go down.

“Wait, wait, wait! Shin, I mean you guys, are starting to sound a little crazy!”

Tiera had to intervene.

Of course Tiera was upset about Millie.

However, it was worrisome hearing Shin and Schnee practically declaring war on the entire church.

But of course, it wasn’t as if Shin and Schnee were going to attack the church right now, at this instant. Still, it was nothing to joke about.

“Well, I’m sure that it’d be easy for the two of you.”

Unlike Tiera, Wilhelm couldn’t hide the astonishment in the tone of his voice.

Of course he was still bitter, but time had cooled down his temper. In comparison to before they had taken off, he had controlled his emotions much more.

“You too Wilhelm-san, please refrain from saying absurd things...”

“It can’t be helped. If we’re getting Millie back, the end result will be the same for anyone who gets in the way.”

Wilhelm glared towards Sigurd.

Shin agreed.

The only two that he knew would be a handful, were Father Bulk and his loyal pet Eline. Aside from those two, Shin and company did not know; what other war potentials they had, why they were after Millie, and why they possessed Exvaine.

One thing was for certain, and that was Shin and his party’s purpose.

They had to get Millie back. That was it.

The enemy could be the whole church, or part of the church. It didn't matter. They knew what they had to do, and they had the strength to do it.

Shin heaved a sigh like he was letting out all of the heat in his body. He loosened his shoulders.

"...It's not like we need to make decisions right now. We should eat. Sorry Tiera."

He hadn't lost his cool, but he was aware that he was more aggressive than usual.

He apologized to a concerned-looking Tiera and tried to focus on something else.

"But when master and Shin say such things, it's never to be taken lightly. Besides, dinner is served. Master, how did you do that?"

Schnee had never stopped working throughout the conversation.

Shin looked over at what Tiera was talking about. The table was set and the food was ready.

"Oh, this is nothing. Vizzy! Dinner's ready."

Schnee called on Vizzy who was tending to the elder dragons.

Vizzy fed the 5 different colored elder dragons, and Shin and his party couldn't help her.

The dragons each bit into their own pile of meat, that would have come from at least one cattle.

"Sorry for the wait~. Wow~. What a feast~. It doesn't feel like we're camping out~."

Vizzy walked towards Shin and the party, and smiled at the meal.

"Aw Schnee~ this is impressive. I'm glad that you're finally able to show off after all that practice while Shin was gone~."

She had known about Schnee leveling up at cooking.

“Vizzy, did you see Schnee often during that time?”

“Yes~. We cooked~ we’d knit too~. By the way~ did she give it to you yet~?”

“Give what?”

“What do you mea~n!”

Vizzy was cut off abruptly.

Schnee had stopped her from finishing her thought by blocking her mouth.

It was out of the blue, and Vizzy tried to get out of Schnee’s hold. after all, she works for Cashmere in the Rokuten. She’s much more adept than most upper class Chosen Ones.

Schnee however had been born and raised for combat. Vizzy’s resistance was useless, given the class difference.

“Mmmmm! Mmmmmm! Mmmm....” Vizzy was growing weaker. She was out of breath.

“Um...Schnee?”

“Yes?”

“I don’t know what Vizzy was about to say, but can you let her go now? She’s starting to look a little limp.”

Vizzy didn’t look ‘a little limp’. The moment Schnee let go of her, she gasped for air.

“Ah, haaaa, Schnee that was heartless~.”

“You really should keep your mouth shut.”

“Really~? But you worked so hard— Okayyy~. I won’t say anything anymore~.”

Schnee was raising her right arm with a gritty smile on her face, and Vizzy raised both hands as a gesture of surrender. Schnee was smiling, except she wasn’t.

Not only did this exchange ease the tension, but it left Shin aghast.

Perhaps Vizzy understood what was at stake, and she was trying to lighten the

mood in her own way...perhaps...

“I don’t get it, but let’s eat.”

Once they were finished eating, they prepared for the journey ahead and went to bed. No one was on guard duty. They had set up both 【Barrier】 and 【Wall】 spells, and no one stood a chance against this party.

At the rate that they traveled, it was possible for Shibaid to join them and for the party to arrive in Sigurd by the end of tomorrow.

Contact had been made with Berett already. If any new information were obtained through the Golden Company in Sigurd, it’d be relayed to Shin promptly. While he doubted that anything new would come up overnight, he still had the investigation continue.



The dawn came and the party was heading toward Kilmont.

They had left early in the morning, so before noon, they were a field away from the royal capital of Kilmont.

“(I can see the capital. We can get off our ride soon. How about you?)”

“(I’m ready. I’ll leave the capital now. Where should we meet?)”

Shin and Shibaid were communicating via Mind Chat, and had a meeting place set. They would head back to Kilmont after getting Millie back.

The elder dragons landed a few kilometers away from Kilmont.

In the direction from Kilmont, a shadow was approaching.

“Someone’s coming.”

Tiera noticed the presence, and she tried to see more closely.

“It’s Shibaid. I got in touch with him beforehand.”

Shin told his party not to worry. They waited.

Within 5 minutes, the shadow emerged.

It was Shin’s support character no. 4, Shibaid Etraku, covered in black scales and kicking up the dirt as he trekked to meet Shin.

His luggage must be in an Item Box. He wasn't as fast as Shin or Schnee, but he sped towards them at well past the speed of an upper class Chosen One.

He wore protective gear which was different to the full body armor he originally wore. Only parts of his body such as the hands, feet and waist were protected with armor.

"Am I late?"

"No, we flew. It's no surprise that we couldn't meet at the same time. Sorry that we hurried you."

"No need to apologize. I could never stay still, hearing that those with a holy occupation would bring harm to a small child."

Shibaid let out a fiery breath. In contrast to Vizzy, he scowled and showed his disdain clearly.

Shibaid showed more enthusiasm than Shin and the party. It could be the mix of his personality and his occupation – a similar field – as a holy knight.

"Now that we've met~. We should leave~. Oh, Shibaid is heavy~, so Schnee should ride with Shin~. Shibaid should~ride the dragon that Schnee's riding~."

For some reason Vizzy gave a thumb's up while giving out orders.

"I get it. Sorry Schnee."

"...It's not a problem."

"Okay."

There was nothing to disagree with, so Shin accepted it.

Shibaid was heavy. It made sense to switch riders.

If there was any confusion, it was the fact that Schnee should ride with Tiera, since they were the two lightest characters.

"...Excuse me."

"I'm sure you'll be fine, but you should grab on tight."

Schnee wrapped her arms around Shin's waist, and held on tightly. Shin made sure that they were secure, and ordered his elder dragon to rise.

If it weren't for the dire situation, the ride should have been enjoyable. Unfortunately, that was not the case.

The 5 dragons leapt into the air. Shin and his party was now headed straight for Sigurd.



Meanwhile, the church had no idea that the world's most powerful ability holders were on their tail. Father Bulk had returned, and he was headed to one location.

Eline followed behind him carrying Millie.

The two were walking along a block that was not known to the public. Only powerful men within the church knew of its existence, such as a cardinal or an even higher status.

It was an undisclosed location within the guild house Palmirack, used as a safe house or an experiment room.

The building itself was sturdy and the walls and floors gave off heat.

Doors would open on their own just from sensing a presence.

Magic was abundant, authenticating individuals across several species.

Spells were active in these chambers that were impossible to recast from before the "Dusk of the Majesty," and the leaders of the church held their offices and slept in these halls.

A portion of the equipment in Palmirack was functional, and in a way that people could utilize it.

Father Bulk was walking through corridors that were divided into even smaller sections, where several clearances passes were necessary. Unlike the other areas with several rooms, they stopped at one room the size of an entire area. Beautiful decorations adorned the room where Father Bulk stopped.

It was the room of the 'Holy Woman'.

"Pardon us."

Father Bulk opened the door without knocking.

For a personal room, it appeared very sparse. One look and you'd think that it was a prayer room.

It was about 25 mels by 40 mels. The ceiling was 10 mels high. The room was enormous.

The floor in the center was a step higher than the rest of the room, giving off an even greater impression that this was a room for prayer.

Except that there was a bed there. A thin cloth draped from above, surrounding this bed.

You could see the shadow of a petite woman.

"Sorry, did we disturb you? How are you my dearest Saint?"

"...Your sarcasm is ill taken. Stop it."

Bulk bowed elaborately, and this was only making the Holy Woman more disgusted.

Most people would have fallen in love with such a soothing voice, but the disdain was palpable.

"Well, well. It seems that I am truly hated. I figured you were lonely, so I brought you your own kind."

"My own? ...! No!"

The Holy Woman held her breath as she processed Bulk's words.

Of course, she knew that he didn't mean her own species, when he had said her 'own kind'.

As a holy man, Father Bulk has swayed far from the righteous path. But he would never bring an outsider to a Holy Woman's room, just because they're the 'same species'.

Which meant one thing with regards to her special title.

"You guess it right."

The Saint's expression became grim as Father Bulk's words sank in.

"Eline."

“Yes sir.”

Eline responded promptly.

He calmly stepped forward towards the Saint and placed Millie on the floor, lifting her from his shoulders.

“Where did you take her from?”

“She was being kept at some church. They knew how special she is though, so it was a bit of a struggle.”

Father Bulk spoke as if it were a matter of fact.

However, the Saint knew that he was lying.

“You’re in the same boat. Please be kind to her. You know how it goes – unless she can control her powers, she will have horrid nightmares right? Besides, maybe if all goes well she can be your replacement.”

“You monster!”

The word replacement triggered something in the Saint.

Of course, she wanted out. But that didn’t mean that she would sacrifice a small child for her own sake.

“If you do nothing, we’d be forced to educate her. Who knows what will happen?”

“...Fine. I’ll take her.”

The Saint had to bite her tongue to stop herself from all the profanities she wanted to spit at Father Bulk.

“Thank you. I’ll be going now. Please hurry so that she’s useful soon.”

Father Bulk thanked her half heartedly and left the Saint’s room.

Eline followed Bulk, leaving behind Millie and the Saint.

“‘Useful’!?”

The Holy Woman squeezed her fist, fuming at the way Bulk had handled Millie like some sort of tool.

She stood from the edge of the bed where she was sitting, and lifted the thin

cloth to inch closer towards the unconscious Millie.

She was no longer hidden by the cloth, and her physicality became more present.

She was beautiful – as beautiful as you'd imagine any saint.

Her marble skin, her silky white hair, her clear blue eyes.

The face staring down at Millie was as beautiful as a doll, while radiating the warmth that a doll could not.

This made the black collar around her neck stand out even more.

She was perhaps 16 years old. Maybe it was too soon to call her a 'woman,' but she was beyond the maturity of a little girl.

She held the sleeping Millie into her arm. Millie's eyes opened, after feeling a warm body pressing against hers.

"Mmmm...?"

"Are you awake?"

Her voice was so close, she realized that she was being held.

It might have been due to her beastly instincts – Millie twisted herself out of the Holy Woman's embrace. She looked around the room and realized that she was no longer at the church.

"Where am I?"

"You are in the church of the fortress city Sigurd. This is a room that only Saints can be in."

"This is a church too? Saints?"

"Yes. Saints. Those that have been approved by the church to aid in the works of miracles. However, I'm a Saint only in name."

Millie looked around everywhere, trying to find an escape route. The Holy Woman was calm.

She was so calm that it made Millie relax a bit.

"My name is Hermie Schultz. And you are?"

“...Millie.”

“Millie. Aren’t you hurt? I understand that you were brought here against your will.”

“!? Shia...Oh no! Shia’s going to die!”

Hermie’s words remind Millie of the circumstances by which she was brought here. The last thing she remembers is Rashia in a pool of her own blood.

“Calm down. You can’t do anything right now.”

“But...they were after me. Shia got hurt because I was...”

Millie had heard Bulk speak, and she had pieced it together that she was to blame for Rashia’s injuries.

Rashia had been there for her when Millie had no family. She had smiled at her.

Millie couldn’t stop thinking about Rashia’s face, contorted in pain and sinking into a pool of blood.

“Was she special to you?”

“...Yes.”

“Then think about her very strongly.”

As Hermie said that, she held Millie. Hermie’s warmth made Millie forget her fears for a second.

Millie closed her eyes tightly, and saw the image of Rashia, smiling and patting Millie’s head.

“...Yes. You don’t have to worry. Your special person is safe.”

“What?”

Hermie patted Millie’s head, trying to comfort her.

When Millie looked up, she couldn’t help but mistake Hermie for Rashia.

“I know you might not believe me, but your special someone is very safe. Yes...she’s been helped by those with strong capabilities.”

“...Wil-nii and Shin-nii...”

Upon hearing Hermie's words, Millie immediately thought of Wilhelm and Shin.

Millie's chest was bursting with relief.

Those two could save Rashia, Millie sincerely believed.

"Millie-chan? ...My, you must trust those people very much."

Millie had fallen asleep again. She had loosened up after being comforted. Hermie carried Millie to the bed, and stared at a point in the wall.

It may have been a coincidence. Or she knew. She was staring in the direction that Shin and his party were coming from.

She patted Millie's head and heaved a sigh.

Her eyes cast doubt and fear.

"If she trusts them, they must not be bad people."

Hermie knew that Rashia was safe, because of her title of 'Star Reader'.

While under normal circumstances, 'Star Readers' could only see very little of the future and randomly, Hermie had trained to target and specify what she wants to know.

As a result, Hermie had seen a woman being treated for her injuries. She had linked her senses with that of Millie, so that she knew that the woman was Rashia. There were also two men there-Wilhelm and Shin.

Hermie understood that Millie poured all of her faith into these two figures.

Unlike Millie, Hermie only harbored fear towards these two strangers.

The reason being that, both Wilhelm and Shin housed many species within themselves.

An abnormal, unique kind of strength. Hermie had been subjected to and known so many strong men, that she was not quick to trust any anymore.

She was particularly frightened of Shin.

"Is that really even a person?"

She blurted out the question that no one could answer. Her words were

absorbed into the memories of the wall. That was just how much power Hermie had gauged within Shin. With one glance towards Shin, Hermie had almost lost her consciousness.

From observing Eline, who could even make light of upper class Chosen Ones' strength, she was able to grasp an understanding of Shin's mighty strength.

"Maybe they can..."

It was frightening. But an overwhelming sense of wind of change compelled her.

They will definitely come to take Millie back.

Then, something else will happen. Hermie knew.

She didn't have to read the stars. It was an intuition – something even more unreliable. But she felt more sure about it.

As she scratched at the collar around her neck, Hermie prayed.



"We're here."

Shin and his party landed on solid ground after hours of flying.

Their gazes were towards something far away – the fortress city of Sigurd. With their abilities, they should be inside the city compounds within an hour.

"Should I wait here~?"

"I don't know. If we were to look into the church and also look for Millie, how much time would that take...?"

Since their 'map' abilities had been reduced to initial stage levels, it's hard for Shin to get a grasp of what Palmirack is like on the inside.

It would be best to have options available, but it'd be cruel to have her wait forever.

While Vizzy works for Cashmere as a member of the Rokuten, that didn't mean that she had to follow Shin's orders. Unlike Schnee and Shibaid, there's some inconsistencies with her loyalty.

“I want to finish them off here. That might mean that we’ll need you. I don’t want it to take that long, but I don’t know when I’ll be needing you. Is that alright?”

“That’s fine~. It’s not like there’s much to do in Rashugum anyways~. Besides~, I don’t think I can keep my nose out of this one~.”

She might have a different master, but Vizzy’s still good at heart. That’s why she must have disagreements with Father Bulk and the church.

The other issue was that Eline could probably 【Teleport】 outside of the church too. It was necessary to secure an exit plan just in case.

“I see. I’m sorry, but wait for us here.”

They left Vizzy behind to care for the dragons, while Shin and the party headed towards Sigurd.

Kagerou pulled on the wagon, and they zipped past the field. In the middle of the journey, the wagon slowed down a little to blend in with the other wagons lined up heading towards the city.

A giant fortress wall surrounded Sigurd. The city surrounded Palmirack and built itself around it.

Due to the geography, Palmirack was built on a slightly higher elevation than the surrounding buildings. It was considered to be an icon of the city.

“This is a lively city.”

“No one’s stupid enough to cause trouble at the foot of the church. I’m sure it’s considered one of the safest places in the continent.”

“It’s also in the center of Est. People from all sorts of background gather from various places. If it’s a busy place with little crime, of course it’ll turn out lively.”

Wilhelm and Schnee discussed the city, while Shin covered his face with his cloak and stared at Palmirack from beneath his hood.

Palmirack was within Shin’s radar, but he couldn’t see inside.

With his introductory map abilities, it was not possible to see the insides of Palmirack from the outside.

The Rokuten's guild houses were always protected against internal scanner skills. That kind of defense mechanism could have inspired something here too.

"At the very least, we should head to the gold trade's branch. It's only been a day, but maybe they have some new information."

"Right. Either way we need an info."

They asked for directions and headed towards the Golden Company. It was expected, but the firm was quite famous within Sigurd. The familiar gold sign from Balmel could also be found here.

They called on the staff, showed them the seal and paperwork included in Berett's message card, and were welcomed inside. They left their wagon outside, and headed into the building.

Once they were led into the branch's head office, one young elf waited for them.

"I was expecting you."

The youth bowed his head politely and introduced himself as Ertol Maik. Supposedly he worked directly for Berett.

"I've been instructed by Berett-sama. I hear that you want more information about the church."

"Yes, it can be anything you know."

"Let me begin then."

It was not disclosed that Shin was a High Human.

According to Ertol, a saint called the "Soothsaying Holy Woman" was sick and being treated by the church. While it might not be a direct cause, the upper echelon of the church was quite active here.

Furthermore, within the church confines there was an area that only those appointed could walk freely. Security was quite extreme, so it was impossible to see the insides. It was a safe bet that anything hidden would be within this exclusive area.

"There's quite a lot of misinformation floating about regarding the church.

Many outsiders have attempted to infiltrate it, so the rumor mill must be generated by those who work for the church. We've had a branch here for quite some time now, but the church is still a great mystery..."

Anything fishy regarding the church could basically be traced back to a drunk blabbering on about it, or another, even less credible source.

"Do you know anything about who's going to take over the Bayreuth churches?"

"No, we have no information on that. I'm terribly sorry, but I'm afraid that this is it."

There were probably 10, maybe even 20 upper class Chosen Ones working with the church. Even if you wanted to break in, several upper class Chosen Ones guarded the church at different locations. They needed to be careful.

It was tricky to attack this fortress.

Despite the Golden Company that had been built by the "Golden Merchant" Reed, it wasn't as if it housed only upper class Chosen Ones. It's a matter of what's more valuable: quantity or quality.

(We're on our own, huh?)

There was only so much action you could take in stealth as an upper class Chosen Ones.

However, that wasn't necessarily the case for Shin or his party. If Shin and Schnee in particular were to move stealthily, very few could catch them in this universe.

"I understand. We'll be on our own then."

"Again, I'm terribly sorry for my inadequacies."

"No. Everything you're saying alludes to how this is a difficult task, even if we had time. With so many upper class Chosen Ones guarding, it's not simple."

There was no point in blaming Ertol over this matter. What little information he provided was useful. Shin continued to ask more general questions about the church.

They would require further assistance from the Golden Company. For now, they headed towards the inn.

The party looked for an inn that would also take their wagon. They walked around the city for 20 or so minutes and found a promising one.

“Welcome! Welcome to the Silver Desert!”

They were certainly enthusiastic.

Since Sigurd is a city where travelers come and go, many of the inns were restaurants on the first floor and rooms on the second.

The one that Shin and the party stepped into fit the stereotype. Waitresses wearing frilly uniforms bustled in between busy tables.

Of the many waitresses, one with semi-long hair approached Shin and the party.

“Welcome. Will you be dining or spending the night?”

“We’ll be staying. We also have a wagon in the front.”

“I’ll have someone tend to it. How many are in your party?”

“Five. We also have a few contract beasts. Is that alright?”

“Several of our guests are travelers with contract beasts. However, there’ll be a separate fee for them. Is that alright?”

They agreed, and took a room. The room was one big one for the whole party.

They held a brief meeting in the room and left the inn.

“Alright. Like we planned, we’ll be back before the sun sets. If anything happens, send a message card.”

Shin, Schnee and Yuzuha went to see the church. Tiera, Kagerou and Shibaid went around the church to get more information. Wilhelm was on his own, doing his own bid.

“Let’s go Schnee.”

“Yes.”

Shin, Schnee and Yuzuha disappeared into a crowd.

“Tiera, shall we then?”

“S...sure.”

Shibaid headed in the opposite direction from Shin. However, his unique appearance was well-known. He needed to change the color of his scales to red, and wear a fake horn.

Tiera was a bit nervous, following Shibaid. Kagerou was as usual, hidden inside Tiera’s shadows.

“I should be off then.”

Wilhelm didn’t even see the four of them off and went solo. He was cautious as to not walk too fast, and dipped into an alleyway.

Part 2

Shin and Schnee decided to go in head on.

Palmirack was a guild house that emulated a temple. Supposedly several travelers gathered there as a destination to train.

The facilities were still around to do that, and regardless of being old or young, male or female, people came. Travelers and merchants also came to gossip, so the training grounds were always bustling.

“I don’t think it looks that different from before.”

“I agree.”

Even though the number of people there was different, it was similar to how Shin remembered the place. The main difference was that there was someone collecting money from those who wanted to enter the training ground.

“But the map hasn’t updated itself.”

“In order to know the interior, we’d have to sneak in.”

Shin had assumed that the map would change once they were closer to Palmirack. The map didn’t budge. They were still able to ‘map out’ the area though, so it was possible to explore.

While they wanted to barge in, Palmirack was a Rokuten guild house. You couldn’t tell how functional its facilities were, and it was not prudent to try to break-in in broad daylight.

Even Shin didn’t know all that the building was capable of.

On top of that, Palmirack was Cain’s base – he had several architecture-related bonuses. Of the 6 guild houses, it was supposedly the most dangerous one. Shin had to be careful.

Shin, Schnee, and Yuzuha pretended to admire the building like tourists, as they circled and marked on the map the places that looked easy to get in through.

“Hm?”

“What is it?”

“There’s a high-level person there. She might be a high-ranking priest.”

From straight ahead where Shin and Schnee were, a priest that looked different from the others headed towards them.

It was a woman, with light green hair and brown eyes. Given her beautiful physical appearance and the thin pointy ears just barely visible through her long hair, one could assume that she was an elf. Her movements were graceful and at level 206, she was different from the average priest.

“Hello.”

“Oh. Hello.”

The elf priest approached Shin, unlike the other priests who ignored them.

“Are you sightseeing?”

“Yes. This is our first time in Sigurd. We had been talking about stopping by here.”

“That’s wonderful. My name is Lilishila. If you have any questions, please feel free to talk to me or any of the other priests.”

“I’m Shin. This is Yuki and Yuzuha. Thank you for your kind words. But, why are you talking to us? We’re surrounded by other tourists.”

“That’s because you are with a High Elf.”

Lilishila’s words surprise Shin.

There’s no way to tell the difference between an elf and a High Elf just from looking. Yet, Lilishila had correctly assumed that Schnee was a High Elf.

“I’m sorry if I alarmed you. I’m able to tell the difference between an elf and a High Elf. It’s hard to explain – it’s quite instinctive.”

“I see. I couldn’t tell you the difference between those two, so I had thought that there might be some kind of distinction.”

It’s quite an impressive skill.

He asked Schnee via Mind Chat, but even Schnee says that telling the

difference just from looking is incredibly difficult. It's not as if you could tell the difference based on status or level, or aura.

"I have yet to meet anyone else who can do this."

Though elves were said to be quite sensitive, perhaps her sensitivities are unique.

"If there's anywhere you haven't seen yet, I'd love to be your guide."

"Are you sure? Aren't we in your way of work?"

"I'd say that it's part of the job description to show the church to those who haven't seen it before. Besides, I love conversing with those who visit here."

Shin would have preferred to see around on their own, but he considered the idea of gaining new insight by talking to a priest.

He asks about the church's history and other things, and ventures onto other topics of interest.

"Lilishila, if you don't mind me asking, are you perhaps trained in the martial arts?"

"Yes. In case the civilians need protection. That's also part of the job description. However, the church also has their own guards. Why do you ask?"

"I also have some training. I could tell that you don't make any unnecessary movements."

"I see. But of course, it's expected of those who had fought alongside the Balmel guards."

"...did you know about us?"

Shin was taken aback and stopped.

"Yes. I'm terribly sorry. Truth be told, I approached the two of you because you are you."

Lilishila bowed down. She didn't seem to be dangerous.

"News travels fast."

"But of course, it is known that if a Chosen One can communicate through

Mind Chat, distance is not an issue. Balmel is one of the important cities that protects the Sacred Land. We too, make efforts in order to gain new knowledge. Besides, as an adventurer who fought together with Princess Rionne to defend Balmel, Shin-sama is quite well-known. Regardless of being able to hear through Mind Chat, it would have reached my ears eventually.”

Schnee nodded proudly.

They had made some efforts to hide their faces when entering Sigurd, but they weren’t using【Hiding】per se. Perhaps someone had seen them?

“I see. So then. What is your purpose? I don’t want to waste your time if you’re trying to convert us.”

Of course, that wasn’t the case, but it had to be said.

“No not at all. But of course, I would welcome you into the church with all of my heart. This is a different matter. It’s really not appropriate here. I’d love to welcome you to my chambers.”

“Alright.”

Shin decided that they’d get more useful information if they followed Lilishila, rather than saying no.

This was the kind of action that could only be afforded by those with unbelievable status and skills. He knew that no matter what they’d be able to get out of a sticky situation. After all, Palmirack was just a ‘very strong building’ that could easily be destroyed, if necessary.

Schnee didn’t argue either. She trailed one step behind Shin.

Behind Lilishila, they stepped through several doors and climbed down several flights of stairs. They were eventually at a corridor full of doors.

“Living quarters.”

“It seems that the priests sleep here.”

While walking, Shin verifies lights and all of the utility functions were functioning.

Lilishila opened one of two doors that were side by side, and invited the two

in.

It was a large space. The size of a 2DK apartment.

The kitchen was quite expansive, and this space was built with one bathroom and two smaller rooms.

Shin and Schnee sat down after being asked to sit.

Lilishila brought out tea.

“Here.”

He took a sip after saying “Thanks.”

It must have been harp tea. It had a soothing taste and scent.

“What did you want to talk about?”

“I wanted to discuss a certain priest belonging to the church. I believe that when the ‘Flood’ in Balmel occurred, a Chosen One of the church was separated. You must know of this by now.”

Shin was reminded of what Rionne had told him.

“That’s right, if I’m not mistaken, he left to escort someone. I also understand that the church overall frowns upon this matter.”

“Absolutely. That should never be the case to begin with. But of course, we also had not anticipated such acts of barbarity.”

It became clear that the incident at Balmel was beyond the imagination of Lilishila and the church as well.

“Do you know who’s the mastermind?”

“Yes. I understand that he’s trying to place the blame on the others, but the person behind it all is Father Bulk Elbach. He’s a member of the church here.”

Lilishila answers Schnee’s question. But it was not as though Bulk had given the orders directly. He seemed to have prepared an escape route for himself.

“Bulk...I’m sorry to interrupt you. Isn’t this Father also involved at Bayreuth’s church?”

Shin was connecting the dots.

“Yes. I understand that Father Bulk’s quite involved in a church in Bayreuth. Not just that, I believe that it’s a church for commoners, and not the elite. Why, do you know something?”

“No. I just wanted to make sure of something... I’ll explain later. Please continue.”

“Sure. Shin-sama. Yuki-sama. I have a favor to ask of you. I need your help in capturing Bulk. I can reward you with anything within my capability.”

“Is this a personal request?”

“Under normal circumstances, I would be asking as a member of the church. However, there’s a reason that I cannot do that.”

Shin had assumed at first that she was asking on behalf of the church. He was wrong. This must have also been a reason they were invited to her private quarters.

Schnee nodded.

“I’m sure that you have very good reasons. However, what will you do if we said no? There’s also a chance that we will give you away.”

“If that’s the case, then I must ask you to stay in here for some time.”

As Lilishila said that, knights in armor came around Shin. There were three of them, armed, and ready for combat.

He knew they were there, yet it was disheartening to know that this was why.

“That’s quite violent.”

“I’m terribly sorry. Ruining my name is a risk that I must take.”

It seemed that there was trouble within the church as well. Shin could sense a certain desperation in Lilishila.

“Let us tell you our side of the story. This is about Father Bulk, and the church in Bayreuth.”

“...Please continue.”

Lilishila’s expression hardened at the mention of Father Bulk.

“It’s quite simple. Father Bulk has kidnapped an orphan that the church was sheltering. One of the sisters got in his way and he had almost fatally wounded her. If she weren’t treated on time, she would not be alive.”

“!?”

Lilishila didn’t know what she was expecting, but even this exceeded her wildest imagination.

The knights in the back were also stunned.

“It seems like you didn’t know. Not much time had past between the orphan’s kidnapping and now. She should be here; I should be frank. We are here to retrieve her. If you doubt us, then go find out the truth on your own.”

“No... but wait, I have to ask.”

“What is it?”

“The orphan...does she have some sort of special title?”

“Why?”

Few knew about Millie as a ‘Star Reader’. Yet, Lilishila acted as if she knew about it.

“We want to take Father Bulk down because we are also trying to save someone. She also holds a special title.”

“Lilishila-sama! That’s too much information!”

The knights raised their voices.

Shin must not be an appropriate audience for this kind of confidential information.

“Please. Don’t worry. We have no qualms with you. We both want something from Father Bulk.”

“Yes. If you’d be so kind. Please, lower your swords everyone.”

Hearing Lilishila’s words, the knights put their swords away.

While not all of them look pleased, they seem to have relaxed at least a little after hearing Shin’s story.

“Either way, even if you need our help so desperately, isn’t this a bit extreme?”

“I know. But we’re running out of time. We need to save her, or her life is in grave danger.”

“Her life?”

Given Father Bulk’s past performances, it didn’t seem too far-fetched. She wouldn’t say anymore, but it felt like a big advantage for Shin and his party to have an insider in the church.

“Few people know this, but he is also a member of the Shiten(4 gods/4th god) cult. No. I suppose his heart is truly aligned to their cause. He uses his status as a church member and has secretly been wreaking havoc. Soon, he will participate in a ritual, in which the ones we want to protect will be sacrificed. We have no choice but to take matters into our own hands. That is why we are calling on you.”

Father Bulk seemed to be participating in far worse deeds, behind a secret dark society.

Shin wasn’t too surprised. Even in the real world, there were those who believed in satanic rituals. But the thought of a living sacrifice definitely made him furrow his brows.

“A sacrifice seems especially violent. But what is this Shiten cult exactly?”

It was an unfamiliar word, and had a certain menacing ring to it.

“The Shiten cult is a cult that worships High Humans – those that once ruled this continent.”

“High Humans, you say?”

Shiten is written out as ‘those that exist on this plain’.

“The Shiten are not bad on their own. There are six factions of High Humans. They merely train day and night, and sometimes they reveal the magic that they’ve been able to create for the public.”

According to Lilishila, the 6 factions of high humans were inspired by the actual high humans’ second names – Dark, Golden, White, Red, Blue and Silver.

People trained in the arts of the faction that they were most likely to thrive in.

To be specific, there were those that worshipped the 'Dark Blacksmith,' who trained in forging swords and others who practiced alchemy or magic, just as the 'Red Alchemist' would have, and so on and so forth.

By training themselves in these ancient rituals, the Shiten would try to revitalize the lost arts and become the top of their faction on the continent.

"The problem is that in the past 100 or so years, a seventh faction has been invented. They have become indoctrinated, so that they truly and faithfully believe, that in order to become a High Human they must shed more blood. Perhaps the records of the High Humans' battles and sagas inspired them. Therefore, all over the continent, there have been violent deeds done and horrible, vicious attacks."

The 7th High Human faction was allegedly called the "summit faction".

Even if the goal was to achieve something and be at the top, what they were doing was terrorism.

The fact that he was being worshipped was disconcerting enough. The idea that there were those acting violently in his name made Shin seethe.

"The other factions deny any part of the 7th faction's activities. Yet they associate themselves as part of the Shiten, since they are a branch of it. The world views them all the same."

It's hard to get rid of any negative image. People seem to mix them up all the time.

"I think I understand. You had mentioned a living sacrifice earlier. How does that play in?"

"I don't know enough about the details. However, the seventh faction takes those with special titles and abilities, then completes a sacrificial ritual. The more rare and unique the ability is, the more that these Shiten followers' status rank increase."

"But this is the status within a cult. Is it really worth it to give up the advantages of being a part of the church?"

The Church was quite influential on this continent. If word of this got out, Father Bulk would lose everything.

He had gone through all the trouble to become a Father of the church. What could be so important, as to give it all up?

“We really don’t know enough. However, if we wait any longer to find out, it could be too late.”

“Perhaps. Then enough chit-chat. We don’t care what happens to Bulk anyways.”

Shin didn’t care about the ritual. The takeaway point was how there were more people in need of their help.

The moment Father Bulk was involved, it was likely that Millie would also be sacrificed next to Lilishila’s companion. Shin couldn’t let that happen either.

“We need to discuss our plan to save them. I need to understand how ‘alive’ Palmirack’s functions are.”

“It’s functions? This is no secret that I’m allowed to share with outsiders. However, this is a rare occasion. Still, its functions are mostly dysfunctional as of now.”

“Really?”

“Some of its item creation functions are still in place, as well as detoxification and recovery, equivalence of class 5. There’s also a barrier to protect the building from surrounding monsters.”

If Lilishila’s information was reliable, then Shin’s concerns were included.

The important sites had some security measures in place, but it wasn’t fortified. That, and upper class Chosen Ones acted as security.

“I see. This is helpful – thank you. Just to be sure though – aren’t there functions that only higher priests would know of?”

“I’m actually a Cardinal, believe it or not. The Pope is above me. There are no others.”

He knew that she was a higher priest, but a Cardinal was unforeseen. There

weren't that many cardinals either.

"I mean. If you're a Cardinal, can't you easily dismiss a mere Father?"

"It's not that easy. Bulk seems to have an item on hand that makes it difficult to refuse him. He's placed this on our companion – the Holy Woman."

Shin was taken aback. Such an item shouldn't exist in the game era.

"Please, Lilishila-sama, are you sure that it's okay to share this with these commoners?"

"I must. Otherwise they would be in grave danger. Shin-sama, please be careful. It's a black collar, with gold writing on it. Once it's been placed on you, even if you don't want to, you will do as you've been told. It could even kill you."

Lilishila ignored her knights and continued.

An item that ignores the will of the person wearing it. It seemed so surreal hearing of it, until he was reminded of a certain event from the game.

"Is it... the 'Crying Marionette'?"

"Shin-sama? What is it?"

He was recalling the event from the fifth update, with the 'Crying Marionette'.

There was a moment, when an NPC was forced to become an enemy. The NPC was wearing a black collar.

The players found this turn of events to be quite unfavorable. It seemed unfair that even support characters could turn their backs on you because of a collar.

Shin had also remembered how several of his allies became his sworn enemies.

"I get it now. I can't believe that item's still around. What a joke."

To return an NPC back to its conscious state from a zombie requires a special item. Since it's a limited item, Shin did not possess it in his Item Box.

(So this means that that title is finally going to come in handy).

He was referring, of course, to the title of “Liberator” from back when he had won against the ‘Origin’.

Everything happens for a reason after all.

Part 3

Meanwhile, apart from Shin, Schnee and Lilishila...

Shibaid and Tiera were touring the inside of Sigurd.

However, it wasn't as if they were simply walking about.

"As expected, there are a few Chosen Ones stationed in the major spots of the city."

"Is that so?"

"At first glance you might not spot them, but one or two of the guards on duty are clearly above average in terms of their movements. Look at the two coming in front of us. Can you see the guy on the right?"

"Yes...Um. Mitos Click. Level 201... you mean him?"

Tiera checked over the guards as she was told.

She could only analyze as far as the guard's name and level.

The fact that she couldn't see further than 'occupation' was a clear sign that his status was superior. But it was hard for Tiera to tell if that was because of the difference in levels, or the fact that he was Chosen One.

"...what a surprise. You can actually see that?"

"Huh? Oh, yes. I wasn't able to see his occupation though. Was I wrong?"

Shibaid could not hide his surprise at Tiera's observations.

"No. You're not wrong. No offense, it's not that I looked down on you but it's a shocker that you, Tiera-dono, can tell a Chosen One's strengths despite your level difference. I'm sorry if I offended you at all."

"Eh!? No, there's no need to. I am weak when you compare me to everyone surrounding me."

Tiera stopped Shibaid from apologizing.

Tiera was aware that she was less capable than others. From Shibaid's point of view Tiera and the Chosen One coming from the front were similar in

capability.

As Shibaid had said, how she was able to discern the Chosen One's name and level, even Tiera didn't know.

"Should we continue wandering the city then?"

"Yes. I think it'd be wise to have Sigurd mapped out. Once that's over, even if they were to escape from Palmirack to the inner city, we can easily follow them."

Given the current situation, the only way that someone could escape Shin and Schnee were if that person teleported or flew. Just in case though, it was necessary to map out Sigurd to understand its nooks and crannies. Since a support character's map could be shared with their master, with Shin inside Palmirack and Shibaid mapping the city, they could cover all of Sigurd.

"How far along are we?"

"I'd say about 10% of the mapping is done. It takes quite some effort when you're up against a city this big."

"Is 'mapping' considered to be a skill?"

"No, I wouldn't call it that. It's hard to explain though, let me see. I can see a slightly transparent map in my periphery, but I'd have to show it for you to understand."

For Tiera, who doesn't understand game elements, it's difficult to even imagine the map. It's an otherworldly experience to try to picture something you've never seen.

"If I could do it too, perhaps we could split into two and the task would be done quicker."

"That's alright. Aside from filling up the map, information gathering is also our objective."

Even if Shin and the Golden Company were the main focus of this plot, Tiera and Shibaid still had roles as information gatherers.

Besides, with the two characters' low stealth abilities they would easily give Shin and Schnee away. That's why it was better for them to be in public.

“Shibaid-san. Where are we now?”

“It seems this city has a complicated layout. I’m sure it’s a defense strategy for if this city were ever under siege.”

Turning a corner was enough to bring a pedestrian into a totally new neighborhood. The stores were drastically different, and so were the people. Tiera was losing sight of herself.

Although Tiera’s directional senses is on the better side, Sigurd really tested her abilities.

She questioned how the locals from Sigurd were able to get back to their homes.

“They designed this city quite well.”

“Do you think so?”

For Tiera, it was so confusing that she assumed the architect was a mad man. Or mad woman.

“It might be hard for you to see, but there are several secret corridors here and there. I haven’t gotten to all of them yet, and I have a good hunch that they all connect to Palmirack. I know that Shin had mentioned how all churches have secret passageways. This goes above and beyond that though.”

Shibaid’s map was also accounting for the routes that you couldn’t see from outside. If they’re really all connected to the church, then there are several escape routes.

“Does that mean that it’s easier to attack and defend the city?”

“Yes. It’s also possible to wage wars and immediately safely return, before the enemy has a chance to respond. The layout of this city is so complex, it would also be difficult to plan your next move. I’m sure that’s why Sigurd is considered to be such a stronghold. Guerrilla tactics would not work against the city’s army and the Chosen Ones.”

According to Shibaid, the city that was seemingly built on top of another had multiple layers of defense strategies.

The most disconcerting for Tiera was – how many attacks did this city endure

for these kinds of security measure to come into play.

“Who can blame them. Following the ‘Dusk of the Majesty’, riots got so bad they needed at least this to feel safe. Not to mention, they’re right on the border with other countries that are constantly trying to expand. I’m sure the majority of this city’s population is made up of war refugees, war veterans, and those who were forced to flee their homes.”

“I get it now. This city also tries to keep its residents safe.”

“It’s a roundabout way though.”

Shibaid’s sights focused on something far away, as he recalled the battles after the ‘Dusk of the Majesty’.

Shibaid himself was somewhat responsible for rounding up the neighboring Dragnil. He didn’t know about the specifics of the churches here, but he could imagine that it must have been a similar ordeal.

Kilmont had also thrived after taking in refugees.

“As someone a bit sheltered, I can’t really relate to the disputes between men. When it comes to the scourges between monsters of course, I have experienced that in Balmel.”

“I’m sure that today their biggest concerns are thieves. I hope that another big war doesn’t happen for a while. It’s nothing like the battles between monsters.”

Shibaid had the air of someone who had seen it all.

Tiera had once killed a thief. Based on Shibaid’s mood, she assumed that it couldn’t compare to what he had gone through.

“Well this is just depressing.”

“No. I’m glad I heard it.”

Shibaid had the weight of someone who had survived and seen war firsthand.

It certainly was depressing. But there’s nothing funny or hopeful about war to begin with.

“...were there really that many refugees?”

“No. But they weren’t a rare sight. And there were those that came here for silly reasons.”

Shibaid answered Tiera’s abrupt question indifferently.

“I’ve heard of someone moving to avoid a curse.”

“!? Errr, what curse was it...”

“This person had been cursed to attract high level monsters. There are very few of them. I’ve yet to meet anyone like that person since the ‘Dusk of the Majesty’.”

Tiera was fast learning that there was someone else out there like her, with the ‘cursed kid’ title. She recalled her own experiences, and thought about how difficult that person’s life must have also been. Shibaid didn’t seem to be taking this matter seriously enough.

“What happened to them?”

“Oh? We asked the said person to cooperate with us to level up our own soldiers. We’re very grateful.”

“...What?”

Tiera might have already heard this one.

The conversation was audibly shifting.

“Yes. It’s a difficult status to stomach. But depending on your outlook, it can be quite useful. In return for trying to find the cure, we had this person aid us in bringing monsters. Leveling up back then was a more efficient process. The soldiers were screaming with joy.”

No. They were screaming because they were screaming.

That was Tiera’s initial reaction.

He was Shin’s follower after all. She should have known that he’d think differently and go against present common sense.

Still, it was a relief to hear that the cursed person was treated humanely. It could have gone either way.

“I knew that you and my master come from the same path.”

“No. Not nearly as much as Schnee honestly.”

Shibaid was quick to deny, after his thoughts ran to Schnee’s intense training regimens.

But from Tiera’s standing point, Shibaid was just like Schnee for forcing people to beat high level monsters.

(Is everyone near Shin like this?)

When she thought about the other characters she hasn’t met yet, she started to harbor deeper concerns.

“Alright. Playtime is over. Tiera-dono I’m sorry, but on the next corner let’s make a right.”

“Is it time already?”

They lowered their voices.

Tiera instantly understood what he meant.

Tiera was quite sensitive to others looking at her. It didn’t take her long to realize that after leaving the inn, someone started following them.

“Tiera-dono, I think you’re the specific target here. Can you think of any reason why?”

“No. This is my first time in Sigurd so I can’t really think of anyone after me here. I don’t even know that many people anyways.”

Until recently, Tiera had been holed up in Tsuki no Hokora. On top of that, she was always in disguise, so she really couldn’t think of why anyone would come after her.

After she finished saying “I don’t even know what many people...”, she felt a bit lonely.

“Through listening, it seems they are in the immediate vicinity too.”

“I think there are...4 of them?”

“No, 6, Tiera-dono. There are 2 who are keeping their cover quite well. I think

that the 4 are the main muscle. The 2 are more like backup if things didn't go as planned."

"I can't tell. Is it a skill?"

"No. To be honest, my detection skills are not that great. I couldn't possibly compete with Shin or Schnee on that front. However, I am able to detect a presence. They're doing a good job maintaining cover, but it is extremely difficult to hide murderous intent."

Shibaid is able to grasp the number of people in a party based on presence, not skill. Once you've gained enough experience as a soldier, this was a logical forward step.

Tiera still didn't understand the amount of presence that one could have.

"Given the number of people and their presences, I don't believe that they're simple thieves."

"Yes. Not to mention how they seem to have singled me out."

While they couldn't jump to conclusions that the assailants will lead to Millie, it didn't hurt to find out directly from the culprits as to why they were targeted.

Any bit of information could help at this stage. If they were from the city's underbelly, they could potentially obtain information from them.

The two pretended that they didn't notice anything, and nonchalantly turned the corner.

They had come across an alleyway no wider than 2 mels.

4 figures emerged from behind, as if they were waiting for the two to stumble in. Tiera turned to realize that 2 others were coming from the front.

They seemed to have climbed the wall and circled around on the roof. They were much more agile than the average man.

"We should wait and see first."

"Yes."

The alley was dark despite it being the middle of the day. The wall was just the right height and placed at such an angle, that it would be hard to see what's

happening in the alley.

The truth was, the road was so bright that it'd be difficult to see into the dark alleyway.

Tiera and Shibaid were walking slowly, as they were being attacked from the front and back by two figures on each side. Yet, they could not be seen.

"? Whoa!"

Because a suspicious object was coming towards Tiera she squinted her eyes, a throwing knife was coming her way.

However, Tiera had known that there was malicious intent ahead of them, and so in response to the knife that produced a chime as it cut through the air, she wielded a short sword in her right hand.

Without hesitation, Tiera relied on her short sword and sent the throwing knife flying elsewhere.

"Tsk."

Tiera having heard the assailant was dissatisfied, also heard another sound, similar to sand crushed underneath one's feet. With that, beyond Tiera she could glimpse a slight fog of distorted reality.

"!!"

She did not miss a beat.

She took in a deep breath, and returning the favor she threw a knife of her own. She had it ready beneath her left hand, all while she brought the dagger in her right hand to about half way up her body.

The knife that Shin had made for her was made out of steel and quite sharp. The knife went straight into the direction where there had been a bit of a mirage. A small thump could be heard as the knife struck something.

"Ugh!"

The thump was the quietest noise in comparison to what would follow. You could hear a man groaning in pain and fall to the ground, causing dirt to fly up. What came into sharper focus was a man, lying on the ground with his hands on

his leg. The thigh of his pants were a deep crimson red, where the knife had gone through. What was even more of a sight to behold was the other man lying in the background, with Shin's knife to his back. It seemed that the knife had gone straight through the thigh!

But, that didn't stop the oncoming attack.

A mirage appeared to be coming closer towards Tiera.

"Shh!"

"!"

A short sword appeared out of thin air.

Tiera looked closely at the blade of the sword. She had determined where the swordsman was and had also deciphered that he must be right handed.

In that split second, Tiera managed to draw her short sword and split the swordsman's sword in half.

"!"

It was audibly clear that the only one left out of the four was taken aback.

Tiera took a step towards this man. And with that step, powerful magic was flowing through her body. Tiera's body hastened, from the power of her magic. She understood where her opponent stood in relation to his allies, stepped into his zone, and struck him with her left hand, which had also been strengthened by magic.

She struck quicker than he could defend, penetrated his armor until his bare skin felt the thrust, and the man fell to the ground.

"Gah."



The man drew short breaths as he lost consciousness. His hand had covered

where he was wounded – which was in the middle of his gut. It was a critical hit.

“Phew.”

Tiera made sure that no one was awake, as she went around to check on the others who had fallen. Tiera tried calming herself down, as she let her arms loose.

You could look at Tiera and see that all her stats were average. Yet the damages that she inflicted didn't seem possible from her slender arms. However, she had managed to combine her magic into improving her bodily performances – this was a technique that combined the assets of the defensive martial arts 'operation' and applied the foundations of 'activity' and 'alchemy'.

While it wouldn't dramatically improve one's stats, it was enough to place emphasis on specific body parts – such as the hand. This improved close combat too – something elves were notoriously weaker at.

Schnee had been teaching Tiera, just in case.

“What is that.”

Tiera turned to see the two other attackers, their heads caught in Shibaid's arms. She had not cared for the two in the back, because even she had known about them. So Tiera had assumed that Shibaid would handle it. Still, it was a sight to behold and certainly one that raised a lot of questions.

The attackers were struggling until Shibaid put a little more strength into his arms. They eventually ran out of air and lost consciousness. It really was a surreal scene to witness, with two grown men dangling from his arms.

Tiera tried to go towards Shibaid, but immediately jumped back instead.

“...that was a close one.”

A thin blade had zoomed past her head.

She had been able to understand that there were others in the vicinity. But had it not been for the fact that she had already warmed up with the other attackers, and how she had been informed of those in the distance, it's possible Tiera would have been killed at that moment.

Tiera and Shibaid had both agreed that if they encountered any enemies that

were beyond Tiera's skill levels, then Shibaid would take over. Shibaid would probably have been able to do something for Tiera just a second ago, had she not been the first to take a lead.

Still, Tiera didn't want to be the damsel in distress.

She turned towards where the blade had come from. She could not find the blade's owner. Given how there weren't any mirages either, their cover skills far exceeded that of the others from the pack.

(They're coming for me. But I can't see from where!)

She knew that she would be under attack. Yet, she was totally at a loss at how to predict their move.

She tried to snap out of it, as she began to move when suddenly, a red arm went whooshing past Tiera's head.

"!?"

It was Shibaid's arm. And in his arm was another person, who was struggling to breathe.

"Fumu, that's a good reaction."

"...Yes."

Tiera felt calmer once she confirmed that the attacker had lost consciousness.

She turned around and realized that another man was dangling from Shibaid's other arm.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to draw it out."

"No, it's fine. I'm used to it."

"Really? I thought that this was an opponent you would have considered 'more powerful than you'."

"I said I'm used to it."

She tried to smile.

Shibaid didn't bother asking "what" she was used to and "why". He had his soft spots. He probably figured as much, after hearing so much about Schnee

from Tiera herself.

“These men can take a break and nap. It’s far too crowded here to question them.”

With that, Shibaid cast magic onto the men and put them into a deeper slumber.

It felt like they had already been damaged enough, that they wouldn’t be able to wake up for a while. Still, it was better to be safe rather than sorry so Tiera didn’t say anything.

Shibaid took out a 2 mels long wooden box from his item box. He unequipped all of the men, tied their arms and feet together and threw them into the box. When he held onto the wood box on his shoulder, Shibaid also looked like a carrier, on his way to a delivery.

In fact, many of the carriers they had passed carried luggage in a similar manner, so Shibaid would not stand out.

“...so that’s how we’ll carry them.”

Tiera had wondered how they would be able to carry 6 men. While they handled the men rather roughly, it really didn’t make sense to show them any other courtesy.

“Let’s go now. Shin seems to have found a clue. He says that he’ll be back shortly.”

“I was really hopeful that he would go on and get Millie back in one go.”

“I mean, think about where we are. This is the base for High Humans. Even he would be cautious.”

“Is it really that big of a deal?”

She only knew one base, and it didn’t give her an appreciation of the bigger picture.

Tsuki no Hokora was protected by a “wall” and “barrier”. Even Tsuki no Hokora was built out of the finest materials, had very little else going for it. There was no special defense mechanism in place.

“Palmirack is definitely a different case. They’ve built the kind of fortress that could withstand a party of upper class Chosen Ones’ adventurers, and not only that, but annihilate all of us if need be.”

“Haha... right...”

She tried her best to cough out a laugh.

It was one thing to try to lure people into the center and trap them.

He was right though – it was a one of a kind fortress.

“Why would they build a city around it then...”

“Perhaps it is not fully functional. I think that it’s built in a way that the whole area can blow up from the center out.”

“I mean. High Humans are just insane, really.”

Tiera mumbled, but she meant it in terms of Shin having no common sense.

She wanted to believe that even he was ‘out there’ amongst High Humans.

Otherwise, she would go crazy too.

(Listening to him talk, I had almost normalized the whole situation. No, I need to keep reminding myself that this is a little bit nutty. Although it may be too late for me...) Maybe it’s both a good thing and a bad thing that Tiera didn’t know how she had stopped ‘acting and thinking’ like a normal person for a long, long time now.

Every day, people change and every person is allowed to change.



(Still. Why were they after me?)

Tiera could not stop thinking about the attackers in the box, while they walked back towards the inn.

Tiera became well-known in Balmel. She was known at this point not only by soldiers and adventurers, but common people as well.

But she shouldn’t know anyone in Sigurd.

While she was in the storefront of Tsuki no Hokora, adventurers had told

Tiera how there are some thieves who kidnap beautiful people. Perhaps that would be the case, if they also had the gall to attack a person accompanied by a powerful Dragnil.

If Tiera were a simple target, then they would have come for her when she was alone.

“We’re here.”

“Oh sorry, I’ll open the door.”

Tiera went ahead towards the door and opened it. She had assumed that it would be a tad difficult, what with carrying a 2 mels wide wooden box on your shoulders and all.

“Welcome back.”

“I’m sorry for all our commotion. We’ll head straight up.”

Shibaid had caused quite a stir walking through the front with the box. Tiera went straight up to the waitress, who was immune to being phased by Shibaid, chatted enthusiastically and led Shibaid in.

It was hard not to step aside for a beautiful girl like Tiera. All of the adventurers coming from the front would move gracefully.

“We wait for Shin now.”

Shibaid took a seat after putting the wooden box into a corner of the room.

“Are you going to leave the box like that?”

“It shouldn’t be a problem. They couldn’t even put a dent in the box.”

It looks like an ordinary box, but go figure. There’s some magic in its material.

Tiera knew as much. She could sense the magic reeking out of it. In fact, it gave her the same sensation that the tree of life that grew in the middle of the garden where she had lived before.

(No. It can’t be.)

The tree of life was vital to elves and high elves. Since the ‘Dusk of the

Majesty', these trees had become fewer and fewer in numbers. Even taking a single branch from the tree of life could be an act of war against elves.

Yet, even someone whose master was Shin, would be hard to stomach, if they had cut down a tree of life for materials.

"What...is that box made of?"

"Oh, that? It's from some of the leftovers when Tsuki no Hokora was being built. I believe it's from the trunk of the tree of life."

"....."

It was the impossible.

It's not to the level of orichalcum, but the tree of life has the same amount of strength, and can even be used as a cure against curses and alchemy.

"H-How did you come across such a box?"

Even asking the question is terrifying. She didn't know what to do if the truth was that the materials were extracted in an unpleasant way.

"I grew it. Before the 'Dusk of the Majesty', I grew it at the base that Hecate-dono guarded – she was one of Shin's allies."

Shibaid looked nostalgic.

Hecate's base was the '5th Daze Garden Romenun'. It was the site that Shin had once mentioned how Berett couldn't go near.

"Growing...a tree of life."

In contrast to the calm Shibaid, Tiera felt as if she was being tricked, and was growing livid.

Only the head of the High Elves, or their sires, knew how to grow the tree of life. It was not common knowledge.

Hearing Shibaid spread lies like 'growing the tree of life to build a building,' was really upsetting. For elves in general, the tree of life was a symbol of their faith. The tree of life was also a part of the ritual for elves when their magic was mature. They were highly valued by elves, and even the leaves of the tree of life were treated with respect.

There were also moments when the tree of life would serve useful purposes when equipped, such as for medicine. Other races outside of elves also regarded the tree of life with a moderate amount of interest – although never as much as the elves.

“It’s difficult to do these days.”

“Well of course. To even consider growing it is obscene.”

Shibaid grinned. Shibaid must have found it hilarious, because it was part of his story. But for an outsider like Tiera, it was impossibly foolish.

“I think that that’s something that would improve if Shin stayed around.”

“I can’t deny that....”

As one of the Rokuten, it wouldn’t be surprising if he knew the tricks.

“Even that has to wait until the current matter is settled. Shin and Schnee are here. Wilhelm-dono hasn’t responded yet, which is disconcerting, but for now we should exchange information.”

Shibaid went towards the entrance of the room, feeling Shin and Schnee.

Eventually, Shin and Schnee arrived, with Yuzuha on Shin’s shoulder.

“...where’s Wilhelm?”

Shin looked around the room and asked.

“No. He hasn’t responded either.”

Shibaid was quick to send a message to Wilhelm after contacting Shin. It had been a few hours, and still no response.

“...could he be talking right now?”

“Perhaps. Messages aren’t immediate like telepathy.”

If he were in the middle of a conversation, he might not be able to open his messages.

It was impossible to find out or wait, so they decided to go ahead and share information.

“Lilishila says that the assailants may be involved in some way with the

present situation.”

Shin added that bit after repeating everything Lilishila had told him.

He had also shared Shibaid’s message with Lilishila upon receiving. Lilishila had been the one who had made the connection.

“It’s still alarming how they were only after Tiera. It’s another thing if they’re after Shin, but they came straight for us.”

Shin nodded.

It hasn’t been long since Shibaid joined the party.

Perhaps they can’t tell that it is Shibaid, but regardless, if a new member joined the party, you would be more cautious before launching aggressive combat against them.

Even if they had known that it was him, who would just attack without a better plan?

“I don’t know what their motives are. It’s possible that Wilhelm was also attacked.”

“That’s possible. I doubt that he would lose easily, but I don’t know what would happen if say, there were a hostage situation of some sort.”

Schnee agrees with Shin.

“The elf that Shin met also knew that Shin was in Sigurd. Therefore, it’s fair to assume that they know Wilhelm-dono is here too. We’re losing time – we need to head immediately to the church, and you need to get more information out of those attackers.”

“Yes. We should head out now.”

Shibaid carried the box and followed as the rest of the party headed for Palmirack.

They were concerned about Wilhelm as well, but if they are not responding then there’s nothing more you can do.

Normally, even if they are at a place that hasn’t been fully mapped, they should be able to seek out and feel the presence of certain individuals. Even

that was difficult here because of Palmirack.



Perhaps it was because they had already attacked and failed. The route to Palmirack was quiet and peaceful. Once they arrived, a knight that was waiting invited them inside. They're brought into the living quarters. This knight was one of the three that had accompanied Lilishila. He must be a member of her guard.

They continued to walk by other priests who would give frightened looks at the wooden box. They said nothing because of the church guard that walked alongside them. Perhaps they assumed that there was some official business.

The other 2 guards waited outside of the room.

"Lady Lilishila is waiting."

And with that, one of the guards opened the door.

The 3 had already been briefed by Lilishila.

Perhaps they trusted Shin because of Lilishila's faith in him. They did not look ill by the slightest, with Shibaid and Tiera also in the party.

"Thank you for your wait. These two are Shibaid and Tiera."

Shin introduces them.

Shibaid had actually said his real name, but he looked too different from the 'real Shibaid'. They assumed that he was one of Shibaid's fans, or someone with the same exact name – nonetheless he was assumed to be a different person.

"And what's that?"

"All in all there are 6 of them. There are 4 that are above average, and 2 that are Chosen Ones."

"Sure. I have a room secured. Follow me."

She nodded, and led the party towards the back of the room. Then, she made a secret maneuver which opened up the floor to a secret passageway.

(Cain loved stuff like this.)

Shin reminisced fondly, looking down at the stairs that emerged.

“The rest of you, please wait.”

“No, I should go too. I don’t plan on getting your hands dirty, if I’m involved.”

“This won’t be pleasant.”

“I am used to it.”

Lilishila looked closely into Shin’s eyes, after hearing him say that he was ‘used to it’.

“...Alright. The rest of you, please wait. Rick, please.”

“Yes my lady.”

She hesitated, but agreed to letting Shin accompany her. Lilishila called on one of her guards, and they went down the stairs.

“I won’t be gone long. They might have something up their sleeves – be on guard.”

There was no point in all of them going down. Schnee was told to wait.

“Shin...”

“It’s fine. Don’t worry.”

Schnee looked deeply concerned, and Shin calmed her down.

Perhaps she recalls the moment that Shin had become unrecognizable, and she didn’t want to experience that again.

“Yuki. He says it’s fine. Then it’s fine.”

“...Yes.”

Shibaid chimed in, and Schnee (Yuki) took a step back. With that, Shin turned towards Lilishila.

Shin and Shibaid continued after Lilishila down the stairs. In a few minutes, there were no more stairs to climb down, and a door about 3 mels wide was visible.

Lilishila opened the door easily.

There was nothing in the room.

However, Shin could sense the presence of several, unforgivable traps that were placed all over the room. These traps, courtesy of Cain, were meant to kill.

It seemed that Lilishila and the church had been using this room as a torture chamber. It was also meant to be a room that would deter thieves from stealing. It was a trap room at its finest.

During the game era, no one ever made it this far. Shin had never seen the traps go off.

If the functions of this room were not disabled, they would have met a terrible fate.

“Here is?”

It didn't hurt to play coy. Shin asks Lilishila.

“We found this by accident one day when we were cleaning the room directly above it. I don't know why it exists.”

“Didn't the person who occupied the room before you explain?”

“Nothing. It's useful, because this room doesn't allow any noise to leak. We generally hold our secret meetings here.”

Shin responded to Lilishila, saying “I see.”

He looked around at the room – the traps in the room only went off once. It didn't seem though as if the person who had come into the room before had been the unfortunate sacrifice.

“Please let them out.”

“Sure.”

They made sure that the doors were closed, and opened the wooden box. Shibaid turned the box over, as 6 grown men fell out one by one.

It didn't seem that they were able to wake up, because of the spell cast on them.

“Restrain them.”

One by one, Rick carried the men over and assembled them into a line. He put a cloth over their eyes, and made it hard for them to resist.

Everything was ready.

“Shall we begin.”

She nodded at what Shin said, and they used their skills to wake the men up.

A few seconds passed, and one of the men woke with a groan.

“What...what’s happening!?”

He realized what kind of a situation he’d woken up in, and started to show dismay.

“Be quiet.”

Lilishila orders the man to be silent. He stopped immediately.

“What do you plan to do with us?”

The man asked.

“Answer my questions honestly. If you are able to answer truthfully, we will not take your lives away.”

Lilishila spoke and with every word, the room was filled with more weight.

The man wailed back,

“Do you know who our masters are?”

“No. So, will you answer our questions?”

“.....No. We’d be killed anyways if we do.”

The man thought about it, but chose to refuse. He was more frightened of the people he knew than Lilishila.

“That’s unfortunate. You would have saved us a lot of time.”

Lilishila’s expression had not changed much. She raised her arm, and Rick came forward.

“What?! What are you doing!”

The man could hear a footstep approaching him. He stepped back farther and farther, but Rick grabbed the man’s face and activated his magic.

“!”

The man raised a yelp, but fell back silent.

Shin analyzed the situation and saw a 【Sleep I】 display. It seemed that Rick had deployed some version of 【Sleep】. Normally it should have put one to sleep, but minor adjustments had been made, seeing how the man’s eyes were open beneath the eye mask.

Rick made sure that the man was asleep, and switched places with Lilishila.

Lilishila raised her hand in front of the man’s face.

“Ugh...gah...”

She was giving him a hallucination.

“Who am I?”

“G-Gilth, Barrot....”

“Did I order you?”

“Ye...s...”

“What was the purpose?”

“Grab the...elf....kill...the...company.”

The man continued to answer faithfully, albeit a bit stuttered.

【Sleep】 and 【Hallucination】 as a combo had made the man believe that Lilishila was his boss.

(I learned something new.)

Shin and Shibaid watched silently, as Lilishila continued her questioning.

She was able to extract plenty more information.

The 4 men who attacked Tiera were part of the guild “Corrupt Gift,” an underworld society that had managed to gain middle-class status. He had not

known about the other two Chosen Ones – they were a separate thing.

They were told to bring back the black haired elf.

It was Tiera alright. There are not that many black-haired elves.

They knew that Tiera might be accompanied. They were told to kill whoever was in the way, but did not know that it would be a strong warrior.

They did not know who had requested the hit.

They didn't know about Wilhelm either.

"I don't think it's possible to gain anymore."

Lilishila broke the skill and stopped her intense lines of questioning. She stood. For questions that the man did not know the answer, he remained silent. This meant that the latter half of the interrogation had a lot of awkward silences.

They put the man back to sleep.

"I'm sure it's a similar deal with the other two."

"Did the name of the guild ring a bell for you?"

"No, but it did confirm some of my speculations."

Lilishila had known that the "Corrupt Gift" were associated with the Shiten. It was a guild that thrived on human trafficking, and rumor had it that a lot of the sacrifices that the Shiten made were people procured by the guild.

"Let's try another then."

They wake up another man.

He did not seem confused, and things went rather smoothly.

"Please answer our questions. If you answer faithfully, then we will promise you your safety."

"How kind of you," the man snickered.

Rick's brows furrowed at the sight, but Lilishila ignored it.

“Will you comply?”

“...”

The man had said nothing. Perhaps that was enough of an answer.

Rick approached the man, just as he had done earlier.

“Hehe.”

The man let out a jeering cackle.

Shin could feel his blood draining.

The number 5 appeared above the man’s head.

“!? Shibaid!!”

“Yes sir!”

Even before Shin had raised his voice, Shibaid had carried Lilishila and Rick away.

Shibaid had also felt the instinctual threat of the deranged man.

They had deployed their skills as to be able to switch places immediately. They took the lid made of the tree of life and hid behind it like a shield.

Immediately, an explosion could be heard beyond their little hideout.

“!?”

The explosion was quite powerful, and the wind caused by it blew Shin’s hair back.

There were large hunks of flesh and blood all over the room.

“What in the world.”

“He set himself off.”

Shibaid removed the lid, and saw that all 6 of their assailants had been blown into smithereens.

There were legs and feet, parts of torsos, organs, large remainders of what used to be a head... You could barely make out the two Chosen Ones. Some of the pieces that more or less carelessly remained intact were the other 4 men.

“Damn it.”

While releasing his hold on Lilishila and Rick, Shin swore at himself.

The self explosion skill was not used often in the game. Few players would even bother trying to acquire it. Shin of course was one of the few, but he had never used it to this day.

Ever since it became a death game, the skill's very existence was erased from memory. The 5 that showed before the man, was the final countdown after he had initiated self destruction. The maximum amount of time that a person has after they've decided to self destruct is 60 seconds. The shortest time otherwise should be 10 seconds. At 5 seconds, the remaining time appears over a character's head.

They had just made it, but if it had just been Lilishila handling the matter, they would have all been taken down.

“This is terrible.”

“I'm sure it's to keep themselves safe. I can't believe that they even had an insurance plan like this ready.”

Shin scowled at the smell.

Shibaid was right. They must have had some sort of order in place, in case any of the members got caught and were to slip. In a way it was very standard practice for those from the underworld to not care for human life, and especially not for their own.

“But this is excessive.”

“We now know that the Shiten are involved.”

Lilishila showed resentment. Rick bit down bitterly at his lower lip.

“...We can't really do anything. Shall we go back up?”

“Is it alright to leave it like this?”

“Yes. The dead bodies tend to disappear over time.”

While playing the game, characters are usually sent back to where the player started. In this world, however, it seems they are used as a source of energy to

maintain the facility. It went without saying that nobody wondered how Lilishila knew such things.

Shin opened the doors and the party went up the stairs.

Once they returned to the room, Lilishila was the first one to enter. Schnee's eyes stopped short.

"You're very early. What is the matter."

"We got duped."

They explained the self destruction of the attacker, and everyone's facial expression was much more grave.

"What do you mean, self destruct?"

"It stops information from leaking, and they probably wanted to take us down with them."

Players typically use this skill for when they are trying to make a last stand as they have very little HP left. It's also useful as a distraction against a large crowd. The death penalty on a player is a far greater toll however, and characters that self destruct will gain nothing, even after a boss or a guild battle ends.

No one dreams of some day self destructing, to put it bluntly.

"When you do it, you die right?"

"Yes. It places others surrounding you at great risk as well."

"What use is that?"

Tiera was stunned. She couldn't relate to her attackers one bit.

It was absurd that anyone would even consider acquiring a skill, knowing that using it would kill you.

Even back when it was just a game, very rarely did players learn this skill.

"That's how these guilds operate. And I think that's all the reason that I have to share."

There were several other, sickening events that were caused by these underground guilds, like assassinations and keeping a secret society thriving. But those were ill suited answers for Tiera.

Shin didn't have a good response.

"Self destruction. I don't believe that it's a difficult skill to acquire. I'm sure it's within their means, the society that we are up against, to teach each of their followers that skill."

"I see it happen in fiction often enough. Those that are affected have nothing to protect them."

Shin tries to change the subject to lighten the mood.

"This is pointless. Yuki and I are going to look through the church. Lady Lilishila, please act as naturally as you possibly can."

"Shouldn't I help you with anything though?"

"No. If you or your guards do anything out of the ordinary Lady Lilishila, it will be obvious and cause the church to be suspicious. It'd be best for you to do as you always would. I'm painfully aware that we may be too late."

Shin and Schnee are already recognizable. Shibaid carrying in the box was also a sight. It was obvious they were making a move.

Since they lost their source of more information, Shin had to do something to get better traction.

The guards were concerned if they were really able to get in without their help, but Shin was able to persuade them with his superior hiding skills, once he disappeared out of their sights and reappeared behind them.

He had merely moved very quickly, but they assumed that it was a skill. Had Shin really wanted to, he could have truly disappeared. Showing off however was not necessary.

Other than Shin and Schnee, Tiera would go back to the inn and Shibaid would protect Lilishila.

It seemed a bit risky to let Tiera go off on her own. However, Yuzuha and Kagerou would also be with her.

Had Shibaid not been there, Kagerou would have also been able to help Tiera earlier.

From now on, an attacker would always be knocked out, then stuffed into the wooden box, and carried discreetly by Kagerou.

In case the enemies were to make any sudden movements, Shibaid had to stay inside Palmirack. That was a given.

He's also a holy knight by profession – this meant that he was a much better defender.

Even with no equipment, he was able to draw out rare class swords. By merely equipping the backup armor and weapons that Shin provided, Shibaid could take over all of Palmirack with relative ease.

They seemed prepared enough.

“The sun will set soon. We will act on our plan once it's dark. Shibaid is here too, but please try not to leave your abode.”

“I'm sorry that we cannot be of more use.”

It's precisely the fact that they are involved in the church, that prevents them from further action. They told Lilishila not to worry, as Shin and Schnee ventured into the church.

Chapter 3

Part 1

This happened before Shin and the others met with Lilishila.

Wilhelm was in a certain store in Sigurd.

The store was small, barely lit, and reeked of tobacco.

Magical items of unknown usage lay forgotten on the badly arranged shelves.

“Found you at last.”

Wilhelm was slightly irritated. The informant he counted on had moved; finding the new location took longer than expected.

“Now now, don’t give me that after showing up without an appointment.”

The man who owned the store shrugged after hearing Wilhelm’s words.

In a place like Sigurd, with a high flow of traffic, it was not odd for an informant like him to frequently change locations.

“It stinks here.”

“That’s what you say before even greeting me? This incense was made in Hinomoto, you know?”

Muttering about Wilhelm’s lack of understanding for Wabi-Sabi (The beauty of transience and imperfection), the bearded owner blew smoke from his pipe.

What a pity for the incense.

“Jai. I’m sorry but I have no time to enjoy stuff like that. Save it for after our business is done.”

“That’s scary. You’re even more aggressive than usual...what happened?”

The man, Jai Tret, felt that Wilhelm was different than normal. His aloof expression changed completely when he posed the question.

He too hails from the same orphanage, and left to adventure 5 years before Wilhelm.

Now he's an active informant based in Sigurd.

"They kidnapped Millie. Bulk from the Church is the main culprit."

"!?...You're sure of that?"

Wilhelm explained the situation in detail to the stunned Jai. After he heard everything, Jai was rubbing his chin, deep in thought.

"Eline, huh. If he got involved, it means they're really playing for keeps."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Among the apprentices raised within the Church, Eline's the strongest. Using him is testament of how big this thing is."

Jai then added that when Eline moves the resulting damage is always massive, although it never reaches the public.

"Eline comes from some small village, but he has had extreme physical abilities ever since he was a brat, apparently. Bulk heard about it and took him in...and here we are."

When the Church ministers personally requested to take him in, Eline's parents happily entrusted him to them.

In exchange for a large sum of gold.

"Misguided knowledge about the Chosen Ones, that was."

Eline, a Chosen One, possessed physical abilities far beyond his age; the village treated him as a cursed child. Being smarter than other children became a burden to him.

"I couldn't care less about that bastard's story. What the hell does that change? You think I'm going to shed a tear or something?"

"Yeah, here's what I'm getting at. Bulk took Eline back with him, and poured all his enthusiasm in educating him. Thanks to that, his intelligence spiked in a weird direction...now he can't be handled anymore."

"Nothing I didn't know of yet."

They had met and crossed swords already. Wilhelm already knew that he wasn't sane.

"Just hear me out. I heard this information from one of my personal connections...our guy seems to possess a certain title."

"What title?"

"Yeah, you're going to be surprised. Eline was born with the title of "Hero", they say."

"Whaaat?"

Wilhelm couldn't grasp the meaning of Jai's words right away.

"We've known each other for a long time, but I never thought you'd be the type to spout jokes like that."

"Don't be like that now. I did think it was a bad joke the first time I heard it too."

No one aware of Eline's true nature would ever imagine using such a word to describe him.

The only thing about him that'd fit the definition would be his appearance.

"So it's not a joke?"

"I have information that backs it up. That title is supposed to have the effect of strengthening your body."

"You're sure of that?"

"Yeah. He is unbelievably strong, that's true. That might be the reason why he tends to talk too much. Someone heard him let that slip out of his mouth. That someone has already been taken care of, though...only a few informants know of this."

"And you're one of those few then. Is that really true? Sounds fishy to me."

"Shut up. It's a fact that just knowing this stuff gets you erased!"

It seemed like Jai wanted to imply he's too strong for that to happen to him.

"This piece of information alone is worth 100 Jul gold coins! I'm only talking

about it because it's you."

"More like because Millie's involved, right?"

Jai had once escaped a mortal situation thanks to Millie's predictions.

Despite looking as suspicious as possible, he was someone who always did the right thing in such situations.

"Who cares about why. There's more important stuff to deal with right now. What you said removed all my doubts. Since Millie has been kidnapped, the Holy Woman's definitely involved in this."

"The Holy Woman?...There are 3 women with that name now, aren't there. Considering Millie's abilities, it's about 'Prediction'?"

Wilhelm was aware of three of those Holy Women: the "Sooth-Saying Holy Woman", the "Purifying Holy Woman" and the "Healing Holy Woman".

Considering Millie's 'Star Reader' ability, the "Soothsaying Holy Woman" is likely to be the connection.

"Bingo. They say that lately, the Soothsaying Holy Woman is feeling under the weather. Actually, it's because Bulk's manipulating her though."

"He can control a Holy Woman!?"

"I heard this from another source, but apparently in a certain cave you can find an item that grants control over whoever's equipped with it. It was found with other cursed gear and entrusted to the church to remove the curse, but they swapped it with a dud...and now Bulk's been using it."

Jai explained that a B-rank adventurers' party found it inside a yet to be cleared dungeon.

"Stay on your toes. If you end up having that thing attached, even you might not be able to fight it. They say that even some upper class Chosen Ones fell under its influence."

Jai's serious expression as he spoke this last warning was one Wilhelm had never seen before.

"...I've heard enough. But there's something I just don't get."

Wilhelm had received important information, but there was one thing he could not understand.

“What’s that now?”

“How do you know all this inside information? You just said yourself that the church erases anyone in possession of troublesome information, right?”

Jai was not a Chosen One, unlike Wilhelm. No matter how good he was at hiding, he could not stay safe forever.

“That’s because the Church isn’t a paragon of unwavering loyalty either. Even ignoring the Millie business, Bulk has his fair share of failures. There are people opposing him. Eline too, he might be an upper class Chosen One, but because of Bulk he’s a useless Church Knight. They’d be happy to be rid of Bulk. And one more thing, the adventurer who found the manipulation item is one of my best clients.”

Jai explained how he had a solid source of information for the manipulation item as well.

Wilhelm could not know at this point, but that information had come from Lilishila. She had disclosed it to the informants she could trust.

Yet not even Lilishila knew about the “Hero” title, mainly because the source of the information had been erased.

“I see. So your connections prove useful...sometimes.”

“You could have spared me that last word, damn you.”

“Who are these people opposing Bulk, anyway?”

“Fine, ignore me. They’re the Holy Woman’s personal guards, people indebted to her. Some of them are high-ranked too, so they know how Bulk’s been handling her. If killing Bulk could dispel the item’s effects, rest assured that he’d be six feet under by now.”

Not knowing how to dispel the effect of the manipulation item, they can’t make any moves. Capturing Bulk and interrogating or torturing him could be one way, but who knows what could happen to the Holy Woman.

Bulk dies and the Holy Woman goes with him...would not be a happy ending.

Jai also added that it'd be hard to subdue him, having Eline as guard.

"The Holy Woman's being held hostage, pretty much. Some people have no choice but to obey Bulk's orders."

"Can they be useful to him, though?"

"If you don't want the Holy Woman to be hurt...that's all he needs to say."

"Tch, disgusting bastard."

Wilhelm clicked his tongue while making a distorted grimace. Jai was feeling the same as well.

"Wilhelm, what are you planning to do now?"

"I'm going back to the inn first. They've never been more supportive, you see. The ones who went to the Church might even be back, with Millie in tow."

Thinking that it wouldn't be impossible for Shin to pull it off made Wilhelm grin. Seeing Wilhelm like that caused a puzzled reaction in Jai.

"Who'd think I'd ever see you talking of someone with a face like that. Is it a Chosen One?"

"Nope, but a monster through and through. I'm warning you though, don't start getting curious."

"Must be something else for you to say that. I'd love to ask you to introduce us, but I'll stop for now."

Jai understood that Wilhelm wasn't joking and nodded strongly, albeit a bit comically.

Curiosity killed the cat, as they say. Informants are sensitive to information that should be left alone. Though there are times when they get closer all the same.

"Maybe there's nothing to worry with a guy like that on your side, but let me tell you one more thing. If you plan to mess with Bulk, other than Eline there's one more person you have to pay attention to."

"The upper class Chosen Ones are being manipulated, right? But you're telling me it's only one more guy?"

Eline is obviously dangerous, but the upper class Chosen Ones are also a threat themselves. Based on Bulk's personality, Wilhelm struggled to imagine that he'd only had Eline and one more person at his beck and call.

"There are other upper class Chosen Ones, that's true. But this guy, like Eline, has abilities far higher than the others. The name's Konig Bolt, he's one of the top swordsmen of the Church. He's being manipulated by that item though. If you can get rid of that somehow, you can avoid having to fight him."

Apparently he was one of Holy Woman's personal guards. He had probably been targeted because of his skills.

Jai adds that he even owns legendary-class equipment.

"This is all I can tell you. You better make good use of it."

"You bet I will. I will definitely rescue Millie. And while I'm at it I will settle the score with that twisted bastard."

"Haha, good to hear that...counting on you."

The last words Jai added were filled with his frustration for not being able to go help her himself.



Wilhelm visited another few stores, then headed back to the inn.

It had taken him considerable time to find Jai's store, so when he looked up at the sky the sun was already descending.

"....."

Wilhelm walked on towards the inn, in complete silence. On the way he bought skewered meat from a street stall.

He proceeded at a relaxed pace, tasting the perfectly cooked meat in his mouth.

Yet his feet were not heading towards the inn.

"You've been following me for a while now. What do you want?"

Wilhelm stepped into a deserted alley and interrogated the empty space before him.

“.....”

No answer to be heard, Wilhelm's eyes focused. He pointed the skewer he had in his hand towards the alley's darkness and shot it.

Wilhelm's muscular strength shot the skewer through the darkness just like a powerful bow would have, sending it piercing the air towards its target.

“!!!”

An instant before the skewer disappeared into the darkness, something emerged from it. Along with a sound of the wall being struck, the scenery of the dark alley appeared to distort slightly before Wilhelm's eyes.

The distortion lands on the ground and turned into a person clad in a brown coat.

“You are Wilhelm Avis?”

“What if I am?”

“A certain person wants to meet you. Allow me to accompany you.”

Wilhelm couldn't identify the person's expression or racial characteristics because of the hood. But the voice sounded like a man's.

“You really expect me to just follow you quietly?”

“We'll take you by force...is something we're not strong enough to say. My apologies for following you. But refusing me will ultimately bring disadvantage to your side.”

“What?”

Wilhelm furrowed his brow after hearing the man's words.

“The person wanting to meet you is someone that detests people that abduct children.”

“...so not a servant of some pig-faced priest, huh.”

“If you visited Jai, you should already know. We are not so docile as to just obey without a word.”

Wilhelm remembered what Jai said about the opposing faction. Judging from

his words, it was probably this man who passed the information to Jai.

“There’s someone I want to contact first though.”

“Apologies, but I can’t allow that.”

“You need as many allies as you can, don’t you? I can at least guarantee that there’s no risk of betrayal.”

“It would inconvenience us for your comrades to be near. We could contact you like this just because you moved on your own.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“This is the only way to avoid being found out. That’s all I can say for now.”

These people would be inconvenienced by Shin and the others’ presence, which may cause something to happen. At this point in time, Wilhelm did not have enough information to deduce what the reason could be.

Following the man would likely mean not making it back at the time set with Shin and the others. This caused Wilhelm to reflect in silence for a while.

(What will they do after failing to make contact with me?)

Wilhelm’s absence wouldn’t cause a serious loss in fighting power. Just Shin, Schnee and Shibaid would be more than enough.

Tiera herself possessed less fighting power than these three, but her partner Kagerou was more powerful.

If something happened to Wilhelm now, from the timing they would surely think the Church was involved.

(They would go after Bulk. If they go to the Church, there’s a high chance we’ll bump into each other.)

Considering Shin’s party’s abilities, they could very well rescue Millie without Bulk knowing.

Directing their attention to Wilhelm instead of Shin’s party would be good too.

In addition, even if he was manipulated, Wilhelm could not imagine Shin’s party would be defeated.

“...where is this person that wants to meet me?”

“The Church’s Headquarters. I will be your guide.”

“Lead the way.”

As Wilhelm consented, the man moved to a corner of the alley and searched the ground. After a few seconds, his hands stopped moving, holding what looked like a handle-shaped object.

The man tightened his grip on the object and the ground swelled up, revealing a pathway leading underground.

“This way.”

Wilhelm followed the man down the underground passage. The 3 meters wide tunnel they entered continued in both directions.

No light illuminated the dark corridor; when the man closed the entrance, utter darkness filled the surroundings. Only when the man lit the lantern he was holding could they see several meters in front.

The man proceeded without hesitation through the barely lit tunnel. He turned left at a crossroad, right at the next T-intersection.

Wilhelm could not fully understand how the complicated network of paths was connected.

The succession of similar-looking paths coupled with the obstructing darkness would disrupt the sense of direction of any intruder.

Even with Wilhelm’s sharp senses, he lost track of how much time had passed since they entered.

If he lost sight of the man, it would be very difficult to find his way out alone.

Just as Wilhelm thought so, the man stopped in his tracks.

The path that looked like it would continue forever had approached its end.

“It’s here.”

The man shone his lantern on a certain spot on the wall and pushed it. This caused the wall to slide and reveal a stairway large enough for one adult man to pass through.

As Wilhelm proceeded to follow the man up the steps, he had already pushed the ceiling open and was checking the surroundings of the exit.

What the underground tunnel led to was a tiny room. The two men exited it and found themselves in a corridor lined with gorgeous decorations.

“We’re inside the Church?”

Wilhelm had no recollection of the place, but the scenery outside the windows allowed him to estimate his current whereabouts.

It appeared they were inside one of the buildings at the edge of the Church compound.

“There are paths leading to the Church strewn throughout this city. Although very few know that this is the entrance.”

“Just memorizing your way through it is pretty impressive.”

“After 30 years of exploration, I know it like the back of my hand. But enough idle talk, let us head to the person awaiting us.”

Despite being inside the Church, there were few people in the surroundings. Wilhelm’s detection ability barely perceived any human presence around them.

As the two descended several stairs, proceeding as not to meet anyone else, they finally reached a corridor with doors on the left and right sides.

Wilhelm was wondering what the doors concealed, but as the man proceeded straight without paying the slightest attention to the doors, Wilhelm gave up on his mental investigation.

If it’s unrelated to Millie’s rescue, then there’s no point in knowing.

He had received messages from Shin’s party while moving, but chose not to open them in front of the man.

After proceeding further down the corridor the two came upon a door clearly different than the others.

The lavishly decorated door, which occupied a whole section as a room, was also where the corridor came to an end.

“Wait here.”

After saying so, the man knocked on the door with a peculiar rhythm, and the door opened by itself.

It stopped after a few seconds, leaving an opening large enough for one adult person to pass through.

The man then stepped through the opening and Wilhelm followed after him.

The room inside was quite large, its floor rising higher in the back. It looked just like an altar, and Wilhelm was baffled and impressed at the same time that anyone would live in a room like that.

“Milady Hermie. I have brought sir Wilhelm.”

“Well done.”

The man had walked up to the canopy and reported Wilhelm’s arrival, which prompted an answer from a crystalline voice beyond the heavy curtains.

After a little while, the owner of the voice emerged from behind the curtains and showed herself.

“Pleased to make your acquaintance. My name is Hermie Schultz.”

“So you’re the ‘Soothsaying Holy Woman’?”

“I am often addressed thus, yes. However, such a pseudonym has barely any meaning at present.”

Hermie’s expression clouded. Wilhelm’s eyes turned to the collar around her neck.

Wilhelm assumed that the eerie-looking thing was the manipulation item that Jai had mentioned.

“What did you call me for?”

“To return Millie.”

With these words, Hermie opened the canopy’s curtains wide, revealing a king-size bed and Millie sitting on it.

“Will!!!”

Millie had known Wilhelm had arrived from his voice, and as Hermie opened

the curtains she jumped up and ran to him.

Her eyes brimming with tears, Millie grabbed onto Wilhelm.



Wilhelm held her gently as not to hurt her.

“Will-nii, is Shia-nee...is Shia-nee okay!?!”

“Don’t you worry, she’s as lively as they come.”

Those words spread great relief in Millie’s heart.

She had heard from Hermie that Rashia was safe, but she could not erase all doubts until hearing the same from someone she trusted.

“What’s happening here, though? You were supposed to have been abducted by that Bulk bastard.”

Why was Millie in a place like that? Wilhelm inquired Hermie while patting the little girl’s head.

“This girl and I share the same ability. Bulk ordered me to teach her how to control it.”

Teach her how to control it. That alone wouldn’t be a problem.

However, Bulk would never give her back just like that.

“Bulk plans to offer her as sacrifice. I suppose he only thinks of her ability as a way to raise her worth as sacrifice.”

Hermie did not know what effect that could have on the ritual. She did not want to know either.

If things continued on as they were, both her and Millie would not be able to escape Bulk’s grasp.

Having realized that, Hermie took the risky decision of ordering one of her men to bring Wilhelm there, in order to save Millie.

“Sacrifice?”

Wilhelm was surprised to hear a word so foreign to him. He knew of the existence of the Summit Faction, but he thought they were terrorists that attacked without discrimination.

After Hermie explained about the Summit Faction and their activities, faint blue veins could be seen emerging on Wilhelm’s forehead.

“What insane bastards. But I still don’t understand why you called for me. You should have known that I’m not the only one coming to save Millie, right?”

Wilhelm swallowed his anger and interrogated Hermie again. Why call him specifically, when calling Shin or Schnee would have resolved everything faster?

“I am aware that there are others trying to save Millie. But my ability allowed me to see only you and the female elf. And about her, all I could see was very rough and uncertain. Once, I saw you saving a woman called Rashia, and there was a black-haired man with you...but I only saw him that time. My power has its limits, after all.”

Hermie thus confessed her inability to see Shin, Schnee or Shibaid.

Wilhelm knew how outside the norm those three were, so he did not find such a reason hard to accept. Difference in level and status, quality of weapons and armor, superiority of species...there were too many possible reasons.

“I see. Thinking about those guys, it’s not strange that I’m the only one you could see. Enough about them though.”

That was all Wilhelm could say at that point.

He too was similar to them as for being outside the norm, but compared to Shin and the others he still paled.

“Back to the topic, what do you plan to do now? Even if Millie’s safe, you’ll still be sacrificed, won’t you?”

Thinking that it wasn’t something to talk about then and there, Wilhelm returned to the topic at hand.

“I...I cannot escape.”

Hermie spoke while shifting her gaze to the ground. Resignation was palpable in her words.

Looking at the source for that feeling, Wilhelm spoke.

“The item that forces obedience upon those who equip it, huh.”

“You knew?”

“I heard from an informant. Looks like it’s that collar?”

“Exactly. I have only received orders that prevent me from doing certain actions now, so I can move freely to a point...but if I receive the order, I can do

the cruelest things without hesitation.”

Hermie’s pupils trembled while she talked, her fingers brushing against the collar. Wilhelm could not know what horrible things she had been forced to do until now.

But judging from Hermie’s pained expression, it couldn’t have been anything pleasant.

“Are you conscious after you receive an order?”

“I am...vaguely conscious. I suppose I could say it feels like being in a dream.”

Hermie explained how she wasn’t fully conscious. Wilhelm thought that if she was, her emotional state now would be much worse.

“...I can’t do anything about that thing around your neck. Sorry, but I’m going back with Millie.”

“Will-nii!?”

“That is fine. That is not why I had you come here, after all.”

Wilhelm’s words made Millie raise her voice in disbelief. She was about to appeal to Wilhelm to save her, but then her eyes met Wilhelm’s expression of suppressed regret.

Hermie understood his feelings and nodded after hearing his words. The smile appearing on her lips was born from being genuinely happy that Millie would be safe.

While feeling Millie’s gaze, Wilhelm knew he was feeling irritated. There was something he didn’t like about Hermie’s expression.

“What’s up with that face?”

“Eh?”

The sudden question changed Hermie’s expression from smiling to confused.

Hermie thought that her release of the kidnapped Millie could have been considered suspicious by Wilhelm.

She had expected the possibility of being asked if she was being manipulated and was just trying to make them lower their guard.

Fortunately that didn't happen: Wilhelm agreed to take Millie back without hesitation.

Maybe because she had found some solace in that, Hermie could not understand Wilhelm's words immediately.

"It's the face of someone who doesn't care about themselves."

"...if that's what you think, could you please hear my request?"

As she understood Wilhelm's words, a thought formed within Hermie.

Maybe she would be able to accomplish the other objective for calling Wilhelm there.

"What?"

"Please, kill me."

"Lady Hermie!?"

"Hermie-nee!?"

Hermie's words were followed by shocked exclamations from the guide and Millie.

The real purpose of the man who brought Wilhelm to take Millie back was saving Hermie.

Hearing the same Hermie ask Wilhelm to kill her would obviously cause him to raise his voice.

"Are you serious?"

"Even if I keep on living like this, I would just cause problems for many people. If I die and Millie disappears from here, Bulk's plot will fail too. Because of this collar, I cannot do it with my own hands, so...I beg of you."

"That cannot happen!! Do you want the earnest efforts of all those trying to save you to be in vain!?"

"It will be too late if things continue like this."

Hermie's eyes were resolute as she stated so.

"What have you seen?"

“I h...gwah!”

Hermie was about to start talking, when her face twisted into a grimace of pain. Through her fingers tightly holding her neck, Wilhelm noticed the words etched on the collar’s light up.

“My...apologies. The collar prevents me from saying any more. But if things go on like this...the Elnia continent will fall in ruin.”

“...the Demon, huh?”

Wilhelm guessed what Hermie meant to say through her fragmented words.

He was gathering information on Bulk his own way too; his information sources were not limited to Jai.

Among the pieces of information Wilhelm had collected, there were connections between Bulk and the Demon, albeit not confirmed.

“It is a very powerful one as well. If you understand me, please...”

“Sorry, but I can’t do that.”

Wilhelm cut off Hermie’s words while patting Millie’s head, who was silently looking up at him.

(I’m not usually one to rely on others, but...)

Wilhelm was a seasoned warrior too. The thing that Hermie talked about, something which could destroy the whole continent...he had felt, ever so slightly, traces of it ever since he arrived in Sigurd.

It wasn’t within Sigurd itself, but not too far from it, something of unknown nature was beginning to move.

From that supposedly dangerous thing, however, Wilhelm could not feel any deathly presence.

The reason was that until hearing Hermie’s words, he did not perceive that sense of irritation as something concrete.

But now he understood the reason. He felt that something even larger than the menace Hermie spoke about was blocking it.

There was only one thing he could think of.

“Even if I don’t kill you here, that enemy or whatever isn’t going to accomplish anything, you know.”

“How can you be so sure!? That is not something mere humans can compare to!”

Instigated by Wilhelm’s lack of sense of danger, Hermie loudly let out her feelings.

She could not express it in words, but Hermie had seen it through her ‘Star Reader’ ability. The massive shadow emerging from the ritual site, and the destruction in its wake.

Hermie knew that even if she pleaded to the people trying to help her – such as the man who guided Wilhelm – to kill her, they would never consent.

She had Wilhelm come not only to entrust Millie to him, but also to ask him to kill her.

“If it was only me in Sigurd, it would have worked, maybe.”

The lack of worry in Wilhelm’s words clouded Hermie’s expression further.

There was a definite difference between Wilhelm and Hermie’s reactions to the coming danger.

The cause for this difference was one simple thing. Knowing a certain person or not.

Who could ever predict it?

That the race talked about in myths was now here in this city?

Who could ever predict it?

That he and his comrades were already on the move?

Part 2

“I’d be very interested in hearing more about that.”

The direct reaction to Wilhelm’s words came from someone who wasn’t supposed to be there.

“Hey there, good job in finding out that I was here.”

Wilhelm cast a sharp glance at Eline. He had appeared with a timing that was too perfect.

The spot Eline appeared from had no entrances or exits. Wilhelm had guessed that Eline had hidden himself or there could have been a secret passage.

Wilhelm at first found it suspicious that Eline had not staged an ambush, but concluded that considering Eline’s personality and abilities, it wouldn’t be strange for him to not do something like that.

“I had Lady Holy Woman there predict it. She probably doesn’t remember though.”

Eline revealed the whole truth about his presence, with the same grin he had the last time they met in the church.

His words surprised the source of the prediction, Hermie, the most.

“That can’t be! I couldn’t have predicted him coming here, I...!”

“You did. But, you were told to forget about it. I was surprised to hear that you had seen Wilhelm in this city, though. Together with a rare creature like a black-haired elf too. Bayreuth is quite far from here though, was it her ability that let you travel such a distance in this short time?”

The manipulation item could even modify memories.

Eline’s words and Hermie’s expression convinced Wilhelm that it was the truth.

At the same time, the anger he had suppressed welled up within him.

Wilhelm could not forgive him for wounding Rashia and kidnapping Millie; on

top of that, after witnessing how he toyed with Hermie, who was even ready to sacrifice herself, it would have been impossible not to be furious.

“You think I’m going to tell you?”

Wilhelm’s words implied the absurdity of such a question.

Wilhelm told Millie to stand back and materialized 『Beinot』 from his item cards. His eyes did not leave Eline for a second.

The rage burning within Wilhelm was about to rip through his body and erupt.

“Oh, I don’t really care either way. What is that spear, though? It is truly beautiful!”

“I couldn’t care less about your damn opinion.”

“It is truly regretful not being able to share this emotion. I am in a good mood right now, so I will let it go. I am really glad that you brought me such a spear. Who would think that you’d have an even greater spear than the one from last time? You should have wielded it earlier. Holding back is something really cruel to do.”

Unlike Wilhelm, Eline’s whole body expressed how good his mood was.

His eyes were fixed on 『Beinot』, which Wilhelm was wielding. His expression was that of a child who had found a brand new toy.

“I’m going to pay you back for last time, here and now.”

“Haha, rather than paying me back, you should worry about having more to pay instead.”

Eline’s hand was already gripping 『Exvaine』. His jovial expression did not hide the same contempt he had during his first bout against Wilhelm.

His stance showed that after seeing 『Beinot』, Eline had understood that things wouldn’t go like last time.

Wilhelm too, however, was different from last time. The weapon he was wielding was different, but more than that, his whole body was perfectly focused, without the slightest strain: his fighting stance showed no openings.

The distance between the two contenders was roughly 10 mels. After making

sure that the guide had made Hermie step back, Wilhelm pointed the tip of his spear towards Eline.

“Shaa!” (T/N: Literally “Shii”. Something like a war cry.)

Wilhelm took the first step.

Wilhelm, whose speed was boosted by the support magic “Ki Manipulation* – Kassen (Living Lightning)”, started his offensive against Eline. (T/N: Also translated as Spirit Manipulation)

Eline’s weapon might have been a High Human creation, but the range of attack for a great sword and a spear are very different. 『Beinot』 had encroached on Eline’s attack range.

“I will not go down so easily.”

Eline held his 『Exvaine』 on the trajectory of Wilhelm’s thrust.

While a sword’s middle part could be said to be its weak point, 『Exvaine』’s abnormally high firmness managed to repel 『Beinot』’s strike.

『Venom』 would have caused him to suffer damage from this clash, but now Wilhelm was wielding 『Beinot』, the masterpiece Shin had crafted based on 『Venom』.

Being the same grade as 『Exvaine』, there was no decisive difference in performance between the two weapons.

If a difference arose, it would be because of the user’s skill and the weapon’s attributes.

After repelling Wilhelm’s strike, Eline’s 『Exvaine』 parried 『Beinot』’s tip, which had changed its target to his feet.

His body slid naturally, without opposing the force thrusting forward.

Eline then moved one step forward, faster than Wilhelm could pull back 『Beinot』.

After parrying one blow, Eline drew closer to Wilhelm, using 『Exvaine』 as a shield.

The distance between the two grew smaller and smaller.

Wilhelm, however, would not make the mistake of entering into 『Exvaine』's attack range.

One step before Eline's attack range. Just before stepping inside it, Wilhelm changed the pattern of his attacks.

The methods of attack with the spear are the thrust, focused on one point, and the sweep, boasting a range far superior to other conventional weapons.

The multiple thrusts that had been repeated until that point vanished in an instant, turning into a platinum circle, which attacked Eline the next second.

“Quite impressive!”

After blocking the resulting blow, far heavier than the previous thrusts, Eline found himself forced to increase the distance.

Looking at his feet would show burning tracks caused by his shoes grinding against the floor.

The damage sustained was not much, but it was proof that it wasn't a blow that he could lightly parry on the spot.

“Very good. It appears I can get serious too.”

Eline, once again, stepped forward with the intention of closing the distance that had formed previously. His speed was clearly different compared to the movements up until a while ago.

Eline too had reinforced his physical abilities with “Ki Manipulation”, as Wilhelm had done.

Now the thrusts slicing through the air were not just parried, but knocked aside directly from the front by Eline's blade. Because their basic stats were different, with the skill's physical boost Eline's STR was greater.

Letting his sword arm's power take control, Eline was swinging the 2-mels long 『Exvaine』 as if it was a long sword.

A crimson arc is drawn in the air and 『Beinot』's silver flash is repelled.

Few weapons in the world could manage to withstand the attacks of Wilhelm's 『Beinot』.

If Eline's weapon had been a legend-grade at most, it could have been possible to push through thanks to the difference in weapon type.

Eline's weapon, however, had a surprisingly high performance.

Even under Wilhelm's frontal thrusts, it managed to parry all blows without even the slightest grinding sound.

Eline's skills were undoubtedly top-notch. He could perfectly defend himself against the spear's continuous strikes with a weapon as unwieldy as the great sword.

"Tch, looks like the Hero title isn't just for show."

"Oh my, you knew? To challenge me despite knowing about that...you must have a death wish."

Eline responded thus to the words muttered by Wilhelm.

"I heard it increases your status, but I'll be damned if you aren't the least worthy of such a title."

The Title and character did not match.

The character might not be Eline's fault entirely, but even so, a less fitting match would be difficult to find, or so Wilhelm thought.

"If you envy me, you should just say so. I am a Chosen One. For me to possess a special title like that could be said to be inevitable."

"Hah, save the dream talk for when you sleep"

The two contenders' blades collided and made sparks fly.

Even while taunting him, Eline had entered within range to attack Wilhelm. With the enemy so close, even Wilhelm could not continue his flurry of thrusts.

"What's wrong? Did you think you were stronger simply because you have a new weapon? This duel will end just as the last one did!"

As if in response to Wilhelm's earlier sweep, Eline suddenly changed 『Exvaine』's trajectory, which he had been swinging vertically until then.

The swing, originally aimed at Wilhelm's head, changed directions towards his abdomen, with a sharp angle that a weapon as massive as a great sword

shouldn't be capable of.

The strike, performed by drawing a sideways V in the air, was the sword art "Aerial Slash".

『Exvaine』's deep red light bared its fangs, attempting to cleave Wilhelm apart.

Before such a blade, ordinary armor would be tantamount to nothing.

That is the reason why it should be stopped not with armor, but with another weapon.

Wilhelm, who attempted to parry the overhead blow with 『Beinot』's handle, swiftly lowered his left arm and matched his spear's tip with 『Exvaine』.

As 『Exvaine』 and 『Beinot』 clashed, a larger spark burst in the air.

"Gah..."

"My, I suppose it will not go just like last time, then."

The heavy blow forced his soles to grind against the floor, but unlike their previous bout, this time Wilhelm did not suffer large damage of unknown origins.

Wilhelm was safe because of the temporary physical boost provided by a skill and 『Beinot』's sturdiness.

Wilhelm had heard from Shin about 『Exvaine』's abilities. The damage of unknown nature that Wilhelm had suffered during their previous fight too was due to them.

"Looks like what he said was really the truth."

Wilhelm whispered so after confirming that there was nothing abnormal with his body.

He did not doubt Shin's words, but he needed to see with his own eyes before finally accepting the truth.

Seeing Wilhelm withstanding his blow, Eline's smiling expression seemed to hide his intentions.

"For some reason, it seems like you know about my weapon. Since it is a High

Human creation, I am not deeply familiar with its abilities yet. It appears there is more I need to ask you.”

“No need to worry. You won’t have any use of it either way.”

After saying so, Wilhelm’s mouth formed a grin.

Maybe because he was irritated by that attitude, the smile Eline was wearing on his lips changed in nature.

“That is fine, extracting information is not one of my duties after all. I shall grant you the opportunity of witnessing my true strength. I trust you will make this enjoyable.”

His words had barely left his lips when Eline’s body was enveloped in golden light.

His shining figure was indeed reminiscing of a character from a heroic myth.

“...too bad he’s like that inside.”

Eline was wrapped in blinding light. Knowing about his character, however, prevented Wilhelm from feeling even a shred of divinity in such a view.

The waves of power emitted by Eline were definitely growing stronger. However, despite their difference in status growing even larger, Wilhelm’s attitude did not change.

“You guys!! Stay back so you don’t get involved in this!!”

After warning Hermie and the others, Wilhelm brandished 『Beinot』 in a fighting stance.

Without wasting time, 『Exvaine』 drew closer.

While not being as wide as a spear’s, a great sword’s attack range was longer than most weapons.

Due to Eline’s charging momentum and 『Exvaine』’s blade length, Wilhelm felt as if the tip of the foe’s blade suddenly appeared before his eyes.

“

Wilhelm struck back that same tip, without a word. Holding 『Beinot』 near the tip, he counterattacked with the least movement possible.

The strike had been performed with surprising reaction speed, and the small arc it formed repelled 『Exvaine』's blade.

Wilhelm followed it by stepping forward. His left hand still held the spear's tip, while the right changed positions and lifted the end of the handle upwards.

“Oops!”

The strike, aimed square at the chest, was avoided by Eline twisting his body out of the way. With his extended arm, he then forcefully swung 『Exvaine』 wide.

Even without Eline's full strength behind it, that slash would have been enough to cut Wilhelm apart.

Judging it not necessary to parry, Wilhelm avoided it by crouching. At the same time, he quickly rotated 『Beinot』 and thrust it at Eline.

After observing the sword cleave above his head , Wilhelm released a thrust with all his strength.

The strike, enveloped in blue and silver light, stabbed Eline's chest with a speed that far exceeded his predictions.

“Tch!!”

The piercing strike that had left a blinding light effect on Eline was the spear and light combination art “Tetralight Firestreak”.

After a strike performed with 『Beinot』, four spears of light followed by piercing Eline's armor.

Yet Wilhelm's hands did not feel the sensation of pierced flesh.

“That kind of speed...it's not just an ordinary skill, is it.”

Glancing at the missing pieces of armor from his abdomen, Eline stopped smiling.

Even though he barely parried it, the damage he received would have been enough to inflict a grave wound had he been hit squarely.

“You're not the only one who wasn't serious yet.”

Wilhelm watched Eline with the vertically slashed pupil of his left eye. It was

the sign that the Dragnil blood flowing within Wilhelm had awakened.

What had pierced through Eline's armor was not just the weapon's strength.

Wilhelm had unleashed his trump card, the "Evil Dragon Release", which allowed him to use Lord and Dragnil powers at the same time, thus boosting his stats.

"That eye...I see, so you are a *critical*."

A streak of blood flows from Eline's abdomen.

Even if slightly, Wilhelm's strike had managed to wound him.

Without bothering to answer Eline's words, Wilhelm kicked the ground.

The thrusts of his spear, infused with his whole body's power, moved at a speed incomparable to the strikes Eline had previously parried.

『Beinot』, transformed in a silver blur, attacked Eline while piercing through the air with sounds akin to screams

"Don't you dare look down on me!!"

Eline attacked back at the enemy spear, which looked like a blur.

Even if Wilhelm's physical abilities had increased, it was not enough to determine who had the advantage.

Crimson slashes danced in the air.

Silver and red. The two lights clashed repeatedly between Wilhelm and Eline, creating innumerable sparks in midair.

".....!!!"

After a more intense clash between the blades, the two contenders created some distance between each other.

After a brief moment, they started their offensive at the same time.

Wilhelm chose the spear and lightning combination art "Thunderhowl".

Eline chose the sword and fire combination art "Blast Cross".

"WOOOOOOOOHHHH!!!"

Their battle cries overlap.

At this point, not only Wilhelm but also Eline could not afford to hold anything back.

He who relents will lose. As both men knew it, the strength gripping their weapons' hilts was the maximum they could muster.

"Gh...! This, can't...!!"

Eline voices his disbelief. 『Beinot』, which had turned into a silver flash of lightning before his eyes, was cutting down the blood-red fiery flames wrapped around 『Exvaine』.

"Your mask is falling, false hero!!!"

The sparks and flames emitted from their clash of strength were burning the floor and ceiling.

A good distance behind Wilhelm, Hermie let out a scream.

The balance slowly changed. The sound of Eline's shoes grinding against the floor grew louder and louder.

—I can cut through you!!

With a sharp stroke, Wilhelm thrust 『Beinot』 forward.

Their clash had lasted for roughly 15 seconds. The fiery flames, crushed under the lightning's pressure, disappeared in a thin mist.

"It's over!!"

Eline replies quietly to Wilhelm's shout.

"Yes...it's over indeed."

As Eline finished uttering these words, Wilhelm felt a shock throughout his body.

"What....the....?"

Alongside the shock, Wilhelm felt something entering his body, His experience told him it was a small blade.

What he didn't understand was who could have done it.

“You didn’t think I would just do nothing, did you...?”

“W-what...?”

Wilhelm felt his hands losing their strength. 『Beinot』, which he was about to pierce Eline with, turned into a spark and vanished in midair.

Eline, his composure regained, motioned with his chin as if telling Wilhelm to look behind him, and the latter does.

“Da..DAMN YOUUUUUUU!!!!”

Wilhelm shouts loudly, trying to move his now powerless body.

Before him stood Millie, with hollow eyes and a bloody knife in her hand.

She had come closer to Wilhelm and Eline’s clash and her arms suffered burns because of it.

The knife had probably been poisoned, as not only his arms, but Wilhelm’s whole body was gradually losing strength.

Hermie’s scream wasn’t due to the effects of Wilhelm and Eline’s battle.

“It looks like you gathered a fair share of information, but apparently it wasn’t enough. It’s possible to control more than one person at a time, you see?”

Eline makes his revelation with a smile again plastered on his face.

Hermie and Millie are in the enemy’s hands, the guide cannot be of any help in battle. Furthermore, Wilhelm was wounded by surprise. The situation was already desperate.

“Fighting you has been quite entertaining. It’s a true shame that there won’t be a next time, you know?”

Eline’s smile twists and warps. His expression didn’t show a shred of heroic valor.

His smile, an expression that normally gives positive feelings to others, had turned into a hideous mask that could only provoke disgust.

In its eyes danced only the insanity of a life spent pursuing desire.

“Time to say our farewells. We shall make good use of your corpse.”

Eline, showing no intention of capturing his prey alive, raised 『Exvaine』 high, ready to give the final blow.

....but his intentions would never be fulfilled.

Just before his sword arm swung down, the room's door blew open with a booming sound.

The solid door swung open in a V shape and flew towards Eline.

“WhaGHAH!!”

What split the flying door in two and blocked Eline's eyesight was a fist clad in a red gauntlet.

That one blow crushed Eline's nose, smashed his chin and sank his face inwards.

Where Eline was standing there was a black-haired man wearing a black long coat with red streaks.

“I made it just in time...or was I too late?”

Looking at Wilhelm and Millie, Shin let out words filled with anger.

Part 3

Around the time Wilhelm was heading over to meet Millie.

Shin's party was inspecting the interior of Palmirack, as they were looking for a certain room.

"This one is closed too."

They were looking for Cain's – Palmirack's master – room.

Cain was extremely fond of gimmicks, a passion reflected by the great number of hidden doors, passageways, and armories throughout Palmirack that would normally go by unnoticed.

Among them was a hidden passageway that led to the room housing Palmirack's core. It was located in Cain's room, the room with the most dangerous gimmicks in all of Palmirack, as proof of its special status.

But as long as they found the room, Shin's party would have broken through. Once inside the room they would fully activate Palmirack's core and take back control of Palmirack: Millie's location would then be crystal clear.

Thus they kept searching for Cain's room, but the sheer number of closed partitions was making their search a difficult one.

If they could find the passageway, they would have already entered the room and activated the core.

"Being a room of top importance, it's probably designed to not let anyone inside."

"It could be. I'm also concerned that Wilhelm's not answering our messages... let's look one more time. If we don't find anything, we're breaking through."

Shin nodded at Schnee's words and decided their next course of action.

They didn't do so from the beginning because most of Palmirack's walls and partitions were made of chimeradite, a material with incredible properties.

It wouldn't be too hard for Shin's party to simply break through, but destroying a 20-cemel thick chimeradite wall without anyone noticing would be

impossible.

An attack of considerable strength would be required, and the resulting sound and vibrations could alert the surroundings.

If only a few people were present in the Church, it was possible for nothing to happen, but, unfortunately, many resided within Palmirack's walls, especially figures of high rank; like the pope and cardinals, priests in training and the senior priests instructing them. In addition, there were many knights stationed to protect the church.

The priests in training were also in charge of cooking and cleaning, thus always on the move throughout the building. If loud sounds or vibrations occurred, they would learn of it immediately.

"It's not here either."

Shin's party had moved past a hallway blocked by a dead-end, returning to the previous doorway, but found their progress once again opposed by a partition.

Nothing else to do, they decided. We must break through.

At first they sensed the surrounding presence, waiting for as many people as possible to be far from their location. At the same time Schnee activated "Silent Domain", a skill disrupting the surrounding sounds. The probability of anyone noticing sounds caused by them thus dropped significantly.

Shin confirmed the skill's activation, pulled out a card from the item box and materialized it. From Shin's hands then appeared one katana.

Resting within a candid sheath decorated with red petals was 『Hakuramaru』, a katana of Ancient grade.

Shin calculated the timing when the least people were in their surroundings and prepared to unsheath 『Hakuramaru』.

As the skill activated 『Hakuramaru』's hilt became a blur and three silver streaks ran across the wall's surface.

The katana martial skill "Iai – Hiengasane" (Iai – Flock of Swallows) accelerated the slashes which drew an imperfect triangle on the wall.

Without relaxing his guard, Shin placed 『Hakuramaru』 in its sheath and pushed the wall with his right hand, causing part of the slashed partition to fall on the side opposite to Shin's party.

The falling metal caused a large vibration upon hitting the ground.

However, thanks to "Silent Domain" the rumbling sound was not heard by anyone.

Also because of the distance, the people present near Shin's party did notice the vibrations but did not make a ruckus about it.

"Let's go."

"Yes."

Shin and Schnee passed through the opening in the wall and stepped into Palmirack's inner quarters.

In the off-chance someone passed nearby, they put back part of the fallen partition where it originally was. After returning the wall to its former state, all light penetrating from outside was shut out, making it hard to see anything.

Shin and Schnee both activated their detection skills to their maximum capabilities and proceeded quickly along the dark corridors. What they were wary of the most were the traps set around Cain's room.

If Shin was registered as Cain's comrade there would be no obstacles, but if that had been revoked it would mean stepping foot in Palmirack's most dangerous trap zone.

Shin, partly involved in the creation of the traps, absolutely did not want to fall victim to their effects.

"...no traps, apparently."

"Yes, I do not perceive any danger either."

Shin and Schnee proceed onwards, with the utmost care possible. No matter how much they advanced through Palmirack, no traps seem to activate.

Taking advantage of such an opportunity, they quicken their steps towards Cain's quarters.

Even though the map function was unusable, he had visited that place many times in the past. Shin proceeded with confidence and stopped before a certain door shortly after.

Confirming the absence of any traps, Shin was preparing the keys, when a rattling sound reached his ears.

“The lock opened?”

“Probably.”

Schnee nodded to Shin’s question.

Putting strength in the hand holding the knob was enough for the door to open without any resistance. It appears that the lock had been disabled simply by Shin’s presence.

“My registration... is still active, then.”

Shin still remembered that function. If someone registered in the system simply touched the knob, the door would open automatically.

The room was as Shin remembered it: a round table and chairs, cupboards, kitchen and other furniture, in the same arrangement he was used to, lying quietly in the darkness.

One difference was the dust piled on all of them. The room’s environment control system was not active.

Not only Shin, but any visitor could have understood that the room had not been in use for a long time.

“...let’s go. The secret passageway is in the back.”

“...yes.”

After a brief pause in the silent room, Shin walked towards the back. Schnee followed after softly replying to him.

The room in the back was only about 30 square feet: dust completely covered the desk and chairs within.

Shin drew closer to the bookshelves and pushed on the 4th book from the left of the 4th shelf from below. This caused the shelves to quietly slide to the left,

showing a type of door that opened left and right from the center.

That door too opened automatically as Shin went closer. It concealed a so-called elevator.

The doors closed on their own after Shin and Schnee stepped past them; the elevator then started descending.

After roughly 10 seconds of that floating sensation, the elevator stopped and its doors opened to a dimly lit hallway.

One minute later, Shin and Schnee had already reached Palmirack's center, the room housing the core.

The room was shaped as a cube, with each side measuring 10 mels. At its center floated a black sphere of 50 cemels of diameter.

Innumerable geometric symbols were engraved on its surface, while streams of light ran periodically through the thin canals etched on the object.

Those lights, however, were extremely faint.

"What's this?"

Shin, after checking once again for the presence of the traps, walked towards the center of the room and the core.

"Is there anything wrong?"

"The core looks different from what I remember. The lights running on its surface used to be brighter and even though my data should still be registered, it won't respond to my presence."

Originally, the interior control menu was supposed to be displayed in midair whenever a member of the Rokuten approached. However, this was not the case this time around.

"Shin, there are traces of miasma in this room!"

"Miasma!?"

As Shin walked forward for a closer examination, Schnee raised her voice suddenly, looking shocked.

Surprised, Shin focused on his surroundings and felt the unmistakable

nauseating presence of miasma.

“Are you serious? I hadn’t noticed.”

“I suppose your resistance is too strong, thus its effects were nullified without you noticing. I do not possess a resistance as strong as yours, that’s why I could notice, I think. Nevertheless, what could this mean?”

Shin was now extremely resistant to all types of abnormal status effects. The miasma in the room was just enough to cause an ordinary person to feel sick, so it did not have any effect on Shin.

Schnee’s resistance, also because of her race’s characteristics, was greatly inferior to Shin’s, thus she could notice the miasma’s presence.

“It doesn’t look like it’s penetrating from outside.”

“A possibility is that the miasma mixed within the atmosphere accumulated over time, I suppose.”

Miasma is present wherever living beings are. In a place like the kingdom’s capital, a mass of all sorts of entangled emotions, it was possible for miasma to accumulate without anyone knowing.

Of course, even if such a thing had been done deliberately, it was not possible for it to accumulate enough to cause something serious. The quantity in that room was that small.

Palmirack operated its interior by absorbing the surrounding magical power. Thus, while gathering magical power it had also absorbed the miasma mixed within it, or so Schnee thought.

“Could be. It’s too little to be caused by a Demon.”

Shin could not deny the possibility that after 500 years, some effect would be expected. He nodded while purifying the miasma.

After the miasma disappeared, the lights streaking over the core regained their brightness. At the same time, the Palmirack control menu appeared before Shin’s eyes.

Without wasting a second, Shin searched all individuals present within Palmirack. Narrowing down targets using categories such as level, race and

gender, he found only one applicable result.

“Underground, huh. There are 4 other responses nearby?”

He found a response in one of the rooms underground. It was a relatively large one.

Together with the response thought to be Millie, there were 2 others in front and 2 behind her.

“...!? This is...!!”

Shin operated the menu to display the room in question. The screen shifted to show Millie running, a black blade in her hand.

Before her, Wilhelm was clashing against a man with a red great sword. Millie was running towards Wilhelm, but her facial expression seemed to lack focus.

“Schnee, we’re jumping!”

“Yes!”

This is bad.

Shin felt it instinctively. He operated the menu at high-speed and activated the short-distance teleportation function within Palmirack.

Shin and Schnee had been transported just in front of the room where Millie and the others were. Thinking it troublesome to open it, Shin let his strength take control and punched the door open.

The doors opened in a V-shape and flew with a booming sound towards the man with the red sword

Shin had found the location of the people inside the building with the menu and his detection abilities, while seeing the red sword was enough to let him understand that the man facing against Wilhelm was Eline.

Shin flew into the room right after the door did.

There, he found Wilhelm kneeling on the floor, with the knife protruding from his back, and Millie staring blankly at her bloody hand.

To Shin’s eyes as player, Millie’s status was clearly shown as “Submission”.

The visual seen in the core room and this status window were enough to let Shin know what had happened in the short time they employed to teleport.

“Wgwah!!”

With the same skill-powered fists that had broken the door in two, Shin pounded mercilessly on Eline’s face.



Leaving the sensation of broken bones on Shin's hands, Eline spun in midair.

After flying for several meters he crashed on a wall and slumped down on the floor.

He would not die; the skill was used to prevent it.

There were things Shin needed to ask: and no matter how enraged he was, he would never kill someone on the spot.

It was a completely different question if being left alive would be pleasant for Eline, though.

“I made it just in time...or was I too late?”

Looking at Wilhelm clenching his teeth and Millie’s still vacant expression, Shin realized his voice was still imbued with anger. He grabbed 『Exvaine』 with the hand that had sent Eline flying.

“Schnee, heal Wilhelm. I’ll take care of Millie.”

“Understood. What shall we do about that?”

“Our first priority is this. I paralyzed him, so he can’t use teleportation.”

The skill Shin had used on his fists was the bare-handed martial skill “Nonfatal Fist”.

A common element of RPGs and battle-focused VR games, this technique leaves the opponent with at least 1 HP.

This technique also had the effect of paralyzing the opponent and preventing the usage of skills for a set time. Among similar skills there are “Willow Throw” and “Nonfatal Blade”, previously used against Barlux.

Shin saw clearly from Eline’s HP gauge that he barely had any left. Shin’s attack had landed cleanly. If it wasn’t for “Nonfatal Fist”, Eline would be mincemeat by now.

After confirming that he had been inflicted with paralysis, Shin decided that they could ignore him for a while.

Schnee nodded at Shin’s words and cast healing magic on Wilhelm.

Shin made sure Wilhelm’s HP gauge was increasing and turned over to Millie.

“.....”

Even with Shin standing before her, Millie didn't show any response. She simply stared blankly into space, hollow reflections filling her eyes. As the displayed "Submission" status clearly showed, she had to be equipped with a submission item.

Shin focused on observing Millie and noticed a kind of black mist emanating from her right arm.

"Let me roll up your sleeves a little."

Rolling up Millie's right sleeve exposed a round item with the same golden characters present on Hermie's collar.

Submission items were generally shaped like collars, but this allowed them to be equipped on the arms or legs of children like Millie.

Even during the game, believing in stereotypes like "collars are always equipped on necks" caused players to be caught by surprise from time to time.

Not knowing that the item would be effective even if equipped on someone's arms, Hermie and the others did not consider the possibility that Millie could have been manipulated too.

"I'm going to release you now."

Probably thanks to his ability as "Liberator", Shin knew how to destroy the item.

Shin focused magic power on his left arm and grabbed the bracelet. The focused magic power scattered the black mist away and the loud noise of something cracking could be heard.

As Shin released his grip, the bracelet, now reduced to bits, vanished in a puff of smoke.

As the "Submission" status display vanished along with the bracelet, strength left Millie's unconscious body. Shin caught her as she slumped to the floor, then faced towards Hermie.

".....I will remove the collar. Please come closer."

".....Please."

Hermie was slightly wary of the man who had abruptly appeared in her quarters, but relaxed after witnessing how he punched Eline, healed Wilhelm, and freed Millie.

Hermie came closer and Shin stretched his magic-powered hand, just as he had done with Millie. The collar visibly cracked at Shin's touch, dissolving in the exact same way as Millie's bracelet did.

"It's really disappearing..."

Unlike Millie, Hermie did not lose consciousness; She touched her neck where the collar used to be, as to make sure it was really gone.

"My name is Shin, the woman tending to Wilhelm's wounds is Yuki. Lilishila requested our help. You are a Holy Woman, is that correct?"

"Yes, I am. So you are the allies Lilishila talked about...my name is Hermie Schultz. I am deeply grateful for your help."

"We had our own reasons to do this, so please don't worry about it. Could I ask you to take care of Millie? I'm afraid things will turn quite bloody from now on, thus, it would be truly helpful if you headed with Yuki to where Lilishila is, milady."

Shin spoke to her because he didn't think what would likely happen next was something for women to witness.

While saying those words, Shin emanated a completely different aura than when he asked Hermie to take care of Millie. His expression and tone of voice were calm and collected, yet Hermie felt a chill so severe that her whole body trembled.

"...Understood. I leave the rest to you."

Shin nodded and entrusted Millie's still unconscious body to Hermie.

When he faced towards Schnee again she had finished healing Wilhelm, who had stood up and was recovering 『Beinot』.

"You're feeling alright?"

"Yeah, you saved me."

“If Millie hadn’t been manipulated, victory would have been yours. I’d have appreciated being contacted though.”

Shin’s words turned Wilhelm’s expression sour.

“Yeah, I messed up there. I wasn’t focused enough on reporting the situation closely.”

Hearing Wilhelm’s words made Shin think that this world’s Chosen Ones had abilities so great that it caused them to act without thinking too deeply at times.

“Well, I’m sure you won’t repeat the same mistake twice. Be careful in the future.”

After saying this, Shin turned towards Eline, still knocked out cold on the floor.

“It’s time to have a little chat. What are you going to do, Wilhelm?”

“You’re the one who dealt the final blow. It’s all up to you.”

Wilhelm left everything up to Shin without hesitation because, from Eline’s standpoint, that would be the worst outcome.

Wilhelm and Shin had been talking casually, but as soon as the latter turned his eyes on Eline, they displayed such an intense rage that you could almost see it around him.

Hermie, who had moved close to Schnee, felt her own body tremble because of that pressure.

The guide too almost jumped to protect Hermie after feeling the fierce aura Shin projected.

“You two should come this way. With them in that state, I think it is best to not stay here much longer.”

“Y-yes. We are in your debt.”

Schnee exited the room with Hermie and the guide, judging it wiser for them to leave after noticing the change in Shin’s atmosphere. She contacted Shibaid and they headed to the room where Lilishila was waiting.

After confirming that the group of 3 left the room, Shin and Wilhelm walked closer to Eline.

“.....gh.....”

Before Shin could do anything to Eline, they heard him emit a weak grunt. It appears that the upper class chosen one's recovery ability Eline possessed had allowed him to regain consciousness.

“Hey there, are we feeling alright?”

Shin spoke to Eline in an extremely casual tone.

It would have looked like a conversation between close friends, had Eline's face not been completely rearranged.

Despite being spoken to, Eline – dripping blood from his nose and mouth – was just trying to slowly stand back up, without saying a word.

Shin waited for Eline to close his wounds with medicine before talking again.

“There's a lot of things I need to ask you. You're going to answer me honestly, yeah?”

“How dare you use an underhanded trick like a surprise attack...and to someone like me...!”

Ignoring Shin's question, Eline let out a voice filled with anger.

He seemed to think that he received an unexpected amount of damage just because he had been caught by surprise.

“Underhanded? I didn't expect to hear that from the man who had Millie do that ambush”

“I am a chosen existence. My actions are justly performed in God's name!”

“....I see, talking will get us nowhere. Works for me.”

Eline's words were those of a fanatic. Words of a man who believed himself to be just, without a shred of a doubt.

For that very reason, Shin lost any scruples he might have had.

“If we can't resolve things peacefully through conversation, the only thing to

do is let our fists talk, am I right?”

Such words might suggest that Shin was thinking of finding a solution via dialogue, but of course that was not the case.

The very moment he saw Eline, he had discarded all possibilities except physical “language”.

“Here you go.”

Shin raised the 『Exvaine』 he was still holding and threw it at Eline.

Eline grabbed the weapon as it was flying towards him. Confusion was clearly present in his expression.

“You’re giving me back my weapon? Are you looking down on me!?”

“Wrong word choice! I’m not “giving it back”, just “lending” it to you for a while. It’s not even yours to begin with.”

Shin’s words started becoming rougher. He was different from the time with Girard: it was possible to sense his tone showed traces of cold cruelty.

“Come at me already. If you’re even able to handle that weapon, that is”

“Damn youuuuu!!!”

Shin’s utter arrogance pushed Eline to charge at him while raising an angry shout.

His physical damage was far from recovered, but even so his speed was enough that it would be hard to react in time for anyone not an upper class chosen one like him.

Shin simply raised his left arm against the coming blade, slicing the air in his direction.

It is not hard to imagine why Eline smiled at such a sight.

『Exvaine』’s sharpness, Eline’s own armpower, the weapon’s own mass. It was normally unthinkable for a mere arm to do something against a blow resulting from the combination of these three factors.

However, the crimson gauntlet equipped on Shin’s arm squarely blocked 『Exvaine』’s blade, which had cleaved through so many weapons.

“This...can’t be.”

Shin did not budge an inch even after receiving the full brunt of Eline’s blow. His arm did not move, nor did he show any expression of pain. He simply looked on at Eline, unfazed.

Sparks had scattered from the gauntlet, but its surface didn’t show the slightest mark. It was unscathed, much like its master.

A full power blow blocked by a single arm. A reality that made Eline emit a raucous whisper.

“.....next.”

“What?”

Eline voiced his doubts at Shin, who looked as if he was waiting for his next move.

“That wasn’t all your power, was it? I’m waiting. Show me your full strength already.”

“W-what!! You, you...!”

Eline’s fury had almost vanished, but Shin’s look – now mixed with pity – stoked its flames high again.

“DON’T LOOK DOWN ON MEEEEEE!!”

After instantly increasing the distance from Shin, Eline healed his damage with a skill, which he could finally use again. Without a moment of delay, he delivered another blow reinforced by an offensive skill.

It was the sword and flame combination skill “Clear Bite”.

A diagonal downward slash by a sword wrapped in white-hot flames and a diagonal upward slash with a blade of pure fire attacked Shin from above and below.

“No, that’s my line.”

Even before a strike charged with all the strength Eline could muster, Shin did not draw. He crushed the blade of fire coming from below with a kick through his leg guards and blocked the blade coming from above with his gauntlet, once

again.

“H-heh, this is noth...gwaaah!”

Even if the blade had stopped, the flames engulfing it did not.

Eline was confident Shin would have been damaged after blocking the blade the same way as he had done before, but was instead burned by the flames of his own blade, reflected back at him.

“W...what is...going on...”

“What, do you think I’m going to tell you?”

With these words, Shin pressed closer to Eline, without a sound.

Shin’s right arm shot towards Eline, as if with a roar.

“Aah!!”

Eline barely managed to shield himself with 『Exvaine』. The shock of parrying Shin’s blow however, blew the great sword out of his hands.

“As I thought, you’re not fit to handle it...I will face you from the front, fair and square. When you feel like talking, just give the signal.”

Eline’s expression was distorted because of the dull pain in his hands. Without a care for the man’s state, Shin stepped right in front of him.

An uppercut right into the solar plexus. Without a moment to react, Eline is thrown in the air.

“!?!?”

Eline flies away, spitting blood, and crashed against the same wall he had been blown to before. The wall, built with special materials, sustains the impact of Eline’s body and repels it back.

Eline falls towards the ground, powerless.

Before he can reach the floor, however, he is stopped by a crimson gauntlet.

“Gwooh!?”

Another fist crashes into him.

A flurry of fists and their afterimages do not allow Eline’s body the solace of

reaching the ground.

Face, stomach, right shoulder, face, left body, right chest, face again.

A series of blows which would have knocked out cold any average man, but that an upper level chosen one like Eline could sustain.

Or rather, was made to sustain.

“Oh yeah. I’ll heal before you die, so rest easy, ok?”

After indirectly informing Eline that he will not be allowed to die easily, Shin continues his attack.

The reason why Eline did not die even after such an amount of blows is simply “Nonfatal Fist”.

Thanks to the skill enveloping Shin’s fists, even heart-rending blows or head-splitting attacks see their impact vanish right before it could prove fatal.

Bones are shattered, organs are crushed, but death does not come. It is not possible to die due to shock either.

What increased Eline’s misfortune even more was that Shin had a great quantity of recovery items with him. During the continuous attacks, a small bottle was thrown at Eline, who was in such a pitiful condition that it was almost a mystery how he could be still alive. The small bottle shattered as it made contact with Eline, its liquid contents spilling all over him.

The next moment, Eline’s battered body recovered almost instantly: it looked like someone had pressed the rewind button of a video player.

That was not something to rejoice about, though.

A physical recovery also meant that the sensation of pain, paralyzed by the massive damage, returned as well.

The recovery took a mere 2 seconds. Eline, still floating in midair, was again on the receiving end of a storm of fists.

“Bwaagh!”

The words Eline was about to utter died in his throat. A cycle of destruction and recovery repeating again and again, truly an endless hell.

Shin's face as he repeated his attacks was completely void of emotion.

He had overcome his anger, now no emotion could be perceived from his expression towards Eline.

It was only a matter of time until Eline's heart collapsed under this machine-like cycle of actions.

"Ghaah, sdob, sdop..."

The flurry of fists stopped for a moment. Eline, slumped on floor, desperately tried to move his powerless body away from Shin.

There was no trace of the earlier arrogance or anger in him anymore. As Shin moved but one step forward, Eline's body shook in an almost comical fashion.

"Let's hear what you have to say then. Oh, any lies and I'm going to kick it up a notch, ok?"

Looking at his own blood dripping from Shin's fists, Eline nodded energetically. He had received the first completely one-sided beating of his life, which had pulverized any and all thoughts of rebellion.

"Number one. What did you plan to do by kidnapping Millie?"

Eline answered Shin's questions honestly.

Bulk's objective was to bring Hermie and Millie to the location of a certain ritual and offer them as sacrifices. He planned to solidify his position in the organization that way.

Eline confessed to not know the location of the ritual and that 『Exvaine』 had been given to him by Bulk.

Concerning the manipulation item, it could control not only the actions but also the memories of the wearer. It cannot, however, alter existing memories, but only delete them.

"I see."

Eline was speaking the truth.

Even if his spirit had been broken, there was no guarantee he wouldn't lie. But when he blew Eline away with his fists, Shin had already used a mind

interference-type skill.

The skill caused Eline to not feel any desire to hide the truth or any sense of danger in saying everything he knew.

“.....”

Wilhelm was standing behind Shin, silently listening to Eline answering Shin's questions. Wilhelm expected this kind of outcome, that is why he left everything to Shin without a word.

Wilhelm knew Shin was a High Human. Thus he also thought that he would likely know a mind interference skill, perfect for interrogations.

He did not know if the skill had been used this time, but as Eline was coughing up the requested information, it did not matter if the reason was the skill or the beating he received.

Wilhelm also realized that, considering Shin's personality, he would not have used a mind interference skill unless absolutely necessary.

The current situation made it undoubtedly necessary.

Shin's rush of punches made Wilhelm wonder if the man was still alive. Seeing Shin use healing medicine, however, cast away all unneeded worries.

“W-what will you do with me?”

“Hmm? Well, we got the information we needed. Next...you know, don't you?”

We did what we had to, so you know what's coming, right? Shin's expression towards Eline told a clear message.

“L-lord Bulk has probably already captured Lilishila by now. If anything happens to me, who knows what they will do!! Not only to Lilishila, but also the Holy Woman who left earlier!!”

Eline suddenly raised his voice towards Shin. Talking about Bulk made him remember something he had forgotten.

“He's going to Lilishila, you say?”

Eline grinned at Shin's question .

“They have chosen ones the same level as me with them! If you want to help them, do not lay another finger on me!!

Apparently Eline was planning to use the hostages as a shield to escape the current situation. If they could take Hermie and Millie hostage, he was sure it would be more difficult for Shin’s party to move as they wanted.

Eline’s tough act was extremely ridiculous to Shin and Wilhelm’s eyes.

“Yeah, I surely hope for you they’ve taken hostages.”

Shin cast words filled with pity to Eline.

Eline’s smile stiffened when faced with Shin’s nonchalant attitude.

“W-what are you saying. The Elf Tamer is going to the inn this very moment. The elf that was with you can’t stand a chance against Konig’s close combat prowess either. Will you act so tough even after they are captured?”

“I think there’s a big misunderstanding here...”

Shin looked at Eline coldly and delivered a verbal coup the grace.

“...when have I ever said that my comrades are not with Lilishila right now?”

Part 4

“Will Shin and the others be alright?”

After Shin’s party left, Lilishila’s group was waiting in her room.

In the current situation, even if they acted, they wouldn’t accomplish much. As it was unthinkable that only Eline was under Bulk’s command, acting carelessly would have been dangerous.

Waiting without doing anything, though, was painful not only for Lilishila, but also for the knights at her side.

“Shin and Yuki will not have any trouble even if they face Eline head on. What we should worry about is the movements of the enemy’s other troops.”

Casting Lilishila’s worries aside, Shibaid leant against the wall of the corridor leading to the entrance. His words were filled with the absolute trust he felt towards Shin.

Not knowing that Shin was a High Human, Lilishila’s group was probably worried at the thought of a head-on battle against Eline. Eline’s fighting ability was just that great.

“Well then, it appears it is time for us to move too.”

Less than an hour since Shin’s party left, Shibaid spoke while staring at one point in the room.

“What happened?”

“There’s a group of people walking in this direction. Judging from the fact that they are not hiding their hostile intentions, they must be Bulk’s lackeys.”

Shibaid’s words made Lilishila feel more anxious.

On her side there were 4 people, Shibaid included. Even if they were all competent fighters, depending on the enemy numbers, they might be at an overwhelming disadvantage.

Shibaid’s party left the room, thinking it would be dangerous to fight inside. As they got out, there was a group of people heading towards them.

Leading the group was none other than Bulk himself.

“Oh my, where are we going now?”

“Nowhere that may concern you, Father Bulk.”

“My apologies, but I do have business with Lady Lilishila. If you would kindly accompany me, I am sure Her Highness the Holy Woman would be pleased as well.”

“Kh...!”

The sly grin formed by Bulk’s lips made Lilishila feel goosebumps.

If it was possible, she would have crushed him to the ground, then and there. Her clenched fist and teeth expressed that wish very clearly to anyone who would look at her.

Someone then put a hand on Lilishila’s shoulder.

“Lady Lilishila, it appears you do not need to accompany this charming fellow anywhere anymore.”

“But...could it be that...!!”

Lilishila, who had understood the meaning implied by Shibaid’s words, completely changed her expression.

“Yes, I just received contact from Yuki. They are heading here as we speak.”

Shibaid nodded strongly, and not only Lilishila but also the knights erupted in cheers. At the same time, their hostility flowed freely to the group blocking their way.

“W-what’s with those looks? Have you forgotten what it means to defy me!?”

“How could I forget. Or rather, it’s impossible for me to forget.”

Lilishila could not contain a chuckle, as her body was wrapped in highly dense magic power.

Bulk, feeling the danger emanating from Lilishila’s clear intentions of attacking, drew his weapon and stepped forward.

Those behind him also took out their weapons.

“Ko, Konig! Protect me!! You all too, step forward!!!”

“Konig? It can’t be, you too...?”

Looking at the knights before her, Lilishila too said that name, with surprise in her voice.

Konig was a knight that was dispatched to Balmel, and by that logic, he was not supposed to be here at Palmirack.

“Lady Lilishila...I apologize..”

“Do not apologize. I am aware of the circumstances.”

Konig, who had stepped forward as well, showed eyes clearly filled with regret.

His struggle to stop the body that was moving against his will was palpable to Lilishila, who was also well versed in the ways of fighting.

His regret was felt by the people opposing him, as if it was their own.

“Flee, I beg of you...! Or I will cut you down...!”

Konig’s arms slowly reached the blade at his waist. The brilliantly decorated weapon was the legend-class magical sword 『Haufer』.

『Haufer』, unsheathed with a brilliant sound of metal, sparkled with an almost transparent silver gleam, in utter contrast with its owner’s will.

“Is that a real magical blade?”

As he drew the magical blade, an overwhelming pressure emanated from Konig’s body, as if to crush his opponents. Despite his manipulated state, his strength did not waver an inch.

Lilishila’s party, who was prepared to fight, could not help stiffening before Konig’s presence.

“Ha-hahaha. What happened to all your confidence and boasting?”

Noticing Lilishila’s party’s hesitation, Bulk had regained his composure and was now jeering at them, standing right behind Konig.

None of them, however, had lost to Konig’s aura of pressure.

“Well then, I suppose we should start by stopping this man.”

These nonchalant words were spoken by Shibaid.

His equipment was the same as when he joined with Shin’s party, light gear covering only part of his body.

The only difference was the silver-colored gauntlet he was now wearing. Lines of black mixed with silver grain covered the whole item.

Shibaid had materialized one of his original pieces of equipment.

“Hmph. Konig is one of the most capable upper class chosen ones. If I were you, I would not boast so quickly.”

Bulk, enjoying the view of Lilishila’s party being pressured by Konig, bit back at Shibaid.

To Bulk, it looked like Shibaid was just bluffing.

“You petty scum...do not think that you have angered only Lady Lilishila.”

As Shibaid uttered those words, the pressure bearing on Lilishila’s party suddenly vanished.

Immediately after that, as if the pressure had simply changed targets, the knights standing before Bulk kneeled to the ground.

They looked as if an unseen giant was pushing on them with all its weight.

“W-what the...gah...!”

The sight of his knights groveling had shaken Bulk, who too was forced on his knees slightly later.

A pressure so strong, trained knights succumbed to it: it was impossible for Bulk to resist. He cried, lying on the ground like a flattened frog.

Originally, techniques that pressure the opponent with one’s aura or spirit did not have the effect of pushing the opponent down physically. The pressure was felt simply on an emotional level.

However, in Shibaid’s case it was slightly different.

“I have heard of all your despicable acts. You will not escape me.”

Shibaid's deeply resonating voice shook Bulk's eardrums. As if responding to his anger, the pressure emanating from Shibaid grew even more intense.

At the same time, the floor around Shibaid started cracking.

Shibaid's main job is Holy Knight. Its role is to be an iron wall, a shield to repel enemy attacks.

If we were to compare skills that attracts the enemy's attention and pressure enemies into submission. Shibaid boasts the best aptitude among all the support characters.

Against enemies with great difference in abilities, it even manages to pressure them physically.

"The church headquarters...is vibrating...?"

Konig, the only one of Bulk's entourage still on his feet, looked at Shibaid with disbelief in his eyes.

Konig felt that Palmirack itself was resonating with Shibaid's anger.

"I know you are being controlled, Sir Konig. As I have no way to break that collar, I will have to be somewhat rough...I trust you will understand."

"...I would rather be killed than for my blade to slay those without sin".

"Your spirit is truly commendable."

Shibaid's words provoked an explosive acceleration in Konig's movements. The afterglow following his blade swings painted streaks of light in the air.

As a weapon worthy of its "Legendary" grade, 『Haufer』 sliced through the air with little resistance, aiming at Shibaid's neck.

It all happened in an instant.

Being controlled allowed Konig to perform a movement he would normally find difficult, a swing at his maximum speed.

The blade, however, was stopped right before meeting its target, by a silver gauntlet.

"!?!"

A sharp metallic sound. It was 『Haufer』's cry after grinding against the gauntlet.

The shock of the impact and the difference in quality between the two weapons resulted in only 『Haufer』 to be damaged.

A result which left Konig wide-eyed and speechless.

Immediately after that, the gauntlet, which had stopped 『Haufer』, vanished in thin air, together with Shibaid himself.

“.....Go to sleep.”

The instant those words reached Konig's ears, he was already drawing his blade...only to be hit vertically into the air.

Where Konig was standing just before, now stood Shibaid, his fist raised in the air. The armor which saved Konig's life so many times on the battlefield now bore a deep dent in the shape of Shibaid's fist.

Konig, blown in midair by Shibaid, crashed against the ceiling with roughly the same speed as he had stepped in to swing his blade.

“Gwah!!”

A counter performed after blocking the opponent's attack.

That single blow was enough for Konig's body not to follow its master's will anymore.

Yet the emotion filling Konig's chest was not surprise.

Towards the existence of an overwhelmingly powerful warrior, capable of dealing with upper class chosen ones with ease, who did not accept or forgive evil.

Towards the fact that a person like that appeared before him.

“I am...thank...ful...”

After uttering these words, Konig lost consciousness.

“If you lose consciousness, you cannot move even under manipulation, is that it?”

Shibaid went closer to Konig's body and confirmed that all strength had left it.

As he did not know how the control worked, Shibaid put restrains on him to be sure.

"I cahn't, beliive it..."

Watching Konig be defeated so easily left Bulk flabbergasted.

The other knights too seemed to grasp just how dangerous an enemy Shibaid was, and they were desperately trying to crawl away to safety.

"Lady Lilishila, could I ask for your help in restraining them?"

"Of course."

Shibaid captured the higher-leveled knights, while Lilishila took care of the rest. Bulk tried to flee too, but he was obviously captured as well.

"H-how dare you treat me like this!!"

"Your subordinate in the other room has been defeated already, did you know?"

Bulk was cut off as he was trying to talk. Shibaid informed him about Eline's capture and Hermie and Millie's rescue.

Bulk's expression was one of utter shock. Considering that Lilishila's party turned against him, he realized that Shibaid must have been speaking the truth.

They did not need to endure humiliation to protect the controlled ones any more.

There wasn't a reason anymore not to oppose him directly.

"You have done as you pleased more than enough..."

Probably because of the anger within her, a heat haze was surrounding Lilishila as she walked towards Bulk.

Her beautiful features hid a strong aura projecting a "I will beat you till you're an inch away from death!!" vibe, was abundantly clear to anyone who would look at her.

Her pressure was so fierce that even the valiant knights present stepped back.

“I-I don’t deserve to die in a place like this!! Teleport!!!”

Under the weight of Lilishila’s pressure, Bulk frantically chanted the keyword. It was the same teleport crystal stone that Shin had used before.

“No! Wai-”

Bulk disappeared before Lilishila could prevent it. It was as if he never was there in the first place.

“Kh...! To think that he had a teleport crystal stone that was supposed to be lost...!”

Lilishila’s expression was distorted by regret. The other knights too were left stupefied by Bulk’s sudden disappearance.

Differently from Lilishila, however, Shibaid showed no sign of apprehension.

“Do not fret, Lady Lilishila. Bulk hasn’t escaped us yet.”

“But he already completely disappeared...”

“This building is the High Human’s – Cain’s – base. A crystal with such low purity can’t teleport outside its walls.”

“I-is that really true?”

“I have lived my share, you see. I have had the chance to learn about this Palmirack from High Elves and High Lords. He is likely regretting trying to escape right now.”

Shibaid nodded with confidence, which let Lilishila feel at ease.

Some time later Lilishila, who had reunited with Hermie’s party, felt as if something akin to Bulk’s screams reached her ears.



“Your comrades?”

“Subduing Lilishila’s party while the main force is headed to the Holy Woman. That much is easy to predict. Thus we only needed to set a fitting opponent in wait for them.”

“Ridiculous...Konig will be accompanied by other upper class chosen ones! No

matter how strong your comrades might be, they too surely have their limits!”

Konig, a warrior close to Eline in ability, was heading to Lilishila’s location. Shin did not know Konig very well, but he was not worried in the slightest about the possibility of Shibaid’s defeat.

“If that Konig is close to you in terms of strength, as you say, then it will be child’s play.”

Even if there was another chosen one on the same level as Eline, Shibaid would not have trouble defeating him. It was a definite fact.

Shin spared no expense to reinforce his support characters, his companions were not to be trifled with.

“Well then, now that you know that there is no way left to stop us, let us talk about what to do with you.”

“Eek!”

Shin walked closer to Eline, slowly. The latter, remembering the punishment he had just received, let out a cry and tried to flee.

No matter how much of an upper class Chosen One he was, not enough time had passed for him to recover. The type of movement available to him was on all fours at most.

Maybe because all he had in mind was to run away as fast as possible, Eline crawled away with a speed Shin and Wilhelm did not expect. He could not truly escape, obviously. Shin gradually closed in on the distance between them.

“S-shit!! Why am I...why is this happening to a chosen existence such as I..!!!”

As if he failed to grasp his current situation, Eline was muttering senseless words.

Eline had advanced for several meters when it happened.

His body started convulsing wildly, with jerky movements like a puppet with unoiled joints.

“What’s going on?”

Shin was puzzled at Eline’s sudden strange movements.

“Aaah...gah...why? N-no...NOOOOOOOOO!!!”

Eline screamed out of the blue.

Perhaps he had been hiding something in card form, Eline was holding a short sword with a black blade in his hand. After that, right before Shin and Wilhelm’s eyes, Eline stabbed himself with that same blade.

“What the!?”

The sudden insane act stopped both Shin and Wilhelm in their tracks for an instant.

The moment the blade penetrated Eline’s body, his HP gauge, as it appeared in Shin’s eyes, instantly dropped to 0.

Instant death.

“Gah...i...”

Eline whispered something, spat blood and dropped to the ground. A mixture of fear and confusion remained on his face.

“Give me...a break...suicide all of a sudden? Is this a sick joke?”

Unable to understand what had happened, Shin grimaced at the blood flowing from Eline.

“We don’t know for sure. That bastard sure didn’t look like someone who was thinking of offing himself.”

It was clear that it had not happened because of Eline’s will. His movements, as if under someone’s control, led Shin to think of a certain item.

Shin drew closer to Eline and examined his neck, arms, legs. However, not a single submission item similar to Millie’s could be seen.

“So, he wasn’t controlled via an item?”

“Looks like it. Did he have any abnormal statuses?”

“No, it didn’t look like he was affected by anything...”

Shin checked Eline’s general status display, but found no trace of status abnormalities.

He wasn't controlled by an item, nor under the effect of confusion or brainwashing. It was a very odd situation.

(Could it be something I'm not aware of? Or is there something I missed...?)

As the game turned into reality, it was highly possible that something not existing before now did. However, it could simply be that Shin had forgotten about it.

Even a long-time player like Shin could not remember all events and in such detail.

"I can't think of anything related, but it's probably better to check with Schnee too."

"Why's that?"

"Well, it could be something I forgot about."

As Shin mentioned that Schnee and the others might know something about it, Wilhelm nodded in approval.

"It's surprising that there are things that even you don't know. Anyway, he was raised by Bulk since he was a child. The Summit Faction likely did something to him, not that I pity him though."

Rather than an item, he could have been under the effect of magic. If that was true, that could perhaps also explain his contorted personality.

Wilhelm, having heard of Eline's feats from Jai, did not have any compassion to spare.

Memory manipulation by an item could delete memories but it could not affect the person's personality. And Eline who actually used this type of item, said as such.

Even after such a death, it was clear that he wasn't worthy of pity.

"We got the information, but I can't call this a pleasant way to close the curtains."

"I feel the same. The body...I suppose we can leave it here."

This room too was inside Palmirack.

As with the chosen one who exploded, after some time passed the corpse would be dispersed.

The two removed all of Eline's equipment and items, searching for what could have been manipulating him. Not even Shin knew of a way to preserve corpses, thus they left it to be dispersed.

As Shin left the room with Wilhelm, a Mind Chat from Shibaid reached him.

“(Shin, we have subdued Bulk's subordinates who attacked us.)”

“(They came to you then, as expected. What happened to Bulk?)”

“(He ran away with a teleport crystal stone. However, the crystal seemed to be quite low in purity. He should have fallen in the maze section.)”

“(Please give me a second...yes, I found him. Leave the rest to me.)”

Shin, who had activated Palmirack, could use part of its functions even without the control console.

He used the search function he had previously used to find Wilhelm and confirmed that Bulk was moving within Palmirack.

Even a teleport crystal stone of the highest purity would not allow instant escape if used inside Palmirack.

Even Shibaid, whose fighting-oriented job did not grant especially high appraisal ability, understood that the crystal stone used by Bulk was a low purity one. Such a crystal stone would not allow the user to flee, but instead would transport him directly to the maze section, built for intruders.

As he closed the Mind Chat with Shibaid, Shin called to Wilhelm, who was walking ahead.

“Listen, Wilhelm. It looks like Bulk ran away. I'm going to go catch him, so go ahead and join the others.”

“He ran away? You don't need any help?”

“I already know where he is, so no problem. He can't get out, or rather, he ended up in the maze section we used for training. If we leave him there, he's going to die. We have information to extract from him too, so I'm going to

secure him.”

“Looks like his luck finally ran out, eh? I’m going ahead then. Make sure you give him a good scare.”

Wilhelm, with an evil grin, walked on through the corridor.

After seeing him off, Shin used Teleport.



“Aaaahh!! Eeeekk!! What, what’s going ooon!”

Forcing his pudgy body to an awkward run, Bulk cursed his fate.

Bulk, church priest and central member in the Summit Faction at the same time. After gaining a pawn such as Eline, he had stained his hands in all sorts of evil deeds.

Drunken by the vision of attaining High Human status, he had slain not only monsters but also other humans.

He was responsible for the death of many humans with special abilities, offering them in ritual sacrifice.

After gaining control of the Holy Woman and the knight guarding her, thanks to an item obtained by chance, he even managed to control a girl with the “Star Reader” title. In that moment, he thought that the whole world was moving to help him become a High Human.

“Shit!! Someone of my caliber is not supposed to end in a place like this.....! Bwah!”

Bulk was running frantically, but finally his unhealthy lifestyle caught up and his feet tripped each other up. He fell to the ground and, unable to break the fall, was struck badly all over his body.

“Gaah! Where is this place supposed to be anyway! I used the teleport crystal, so why am I not outside!?”

Bulk flew in a fit of anger while squirming because of the pain.

He was supposed to have been transported outside Palmirack, but he found himself inside a dark cavern instead. The unexpected situation was already

pushing Bulk's frail mind fortitude to its limits.

"Grrrrrrrrrrrr—"

"Eeep!"

What eroded Bulk's spirit the most was the roaring cry which would sometimes resonate in the cavern. The cry, clearly coming from a monster, was coming closer and closer to Bulk's position.

He could not see where the corridor lead, no exit was in sight, nor were any of his guards escorting him.

The increasingly louder roar was shaking Bulk to his core.

"Da-damnitall!!!"

"Yo"

A hand touched Bulk's shoulder as he was about to run again. As Bulk turned around, his field of vision was filled with the figure of a man emerging from the darkness.

This new surprise caused the already tense Bulk to utter an incomprehensible scream: "KWESDRFIGYYFIJIKIIII!!"

"Fijiki" is the only thing I could make out from that."

Bulk had jumped up, crashed back down, and was now looking up at the face of the young man who talked to him.

"W-what in blazes is going on!! But no matter! You, take me out of here! Now! I am a church priest, you shall be amply rewarded."

Bulk, in a state of confusion because of the extreme situation, barked his orders without confirming the young man's identity.

To such a Bulk, the young man talked with a smile and a menacing tone.

"Hahaha. Your face is the only joke we need here, pig bastard."

"W-what did you say? I'm a priest of the church, I said!!"

The young man walked closer to Bulk while cracking his knuckles. The closer he came, the farther Bulk crawled.

In that moment, Bulk finally understood that the young man had clearly hostile intentions.

But it was far too late.

“I have a bunch of things to ask you. You better answer if you want to stay in one piece.”

Eyes lit up in the dim darkness.

A completely artificial smile.

Hostility so palpable that his instinct was screaming to run away.

It was the manifestation of fear, a terror the likes of Bulk had never experienced before.

Bulk had no room to crawl backwards anymore, and part of his clothes had started to become slightly damp. A faint scent of ammonia pricked the two men's noses.

“Let's start talking.”

Bulk's screams resounded through the barely lit corridors.



Lilishila's party had reunited with Hermie and Millie, led by Schnee, and was in a joyous mood.

Lilishila shed tears of happiness at the sight of Hermie's neck, finally free of the black collar; seeing her in tears made Hermie cry as well.

The knight cheered loudly, confident in Bulk's downfall.

As Wilhelm arrived, Millie, who had been eagerly awaiting him, ran up to hug him.

“Oh, nice cheery mood here folks.”

“Here you are. Hey, it's still alive right?”

“He's not dead yet, nope. I doubt he'll be able to continue being a priest though.”

Wilhelm sighed while talking to Shin, who had joined them with some delay.

Millie was still stuck to him and wouldn't let go.

The reason was an unconscious Bulk, carried by Shin's left arm.

Seeing the priest with white eyes, drooling and sometimes trembling would have provoked the same question not only from Wilhelm but from anyone who witnessed it.

"Shin-sama? What did you...."

"I just squeezed information out of him. I'll let the church decide what to do with him next."

Shin handed Bulk over to the guard knights and opened a Mind Chat with Schnee and Shibaid.

"(According to Bulk, there's a high chance that Filma was captured by the Summit Faction. It looks like 『Exvaine』 was given to him by someone claiming to be from the Faction.)"

The two's eyes narrowed after hearing Shin's information. They could not remain indifferent after hearing that a comrade might have been captured.

"(Is there no information about the ritual site?)"

"(Someone was supposed to come pick him up. I know the date, but who knows what this messenger will do.)"

"(Any other clue?)"

"(Nothing. I had the impression that he doesn't know anything either. Looks like they deleted the important parts of his memories.)"

Making Bulk sleep and using an item like the manipulation collar on him wouldn't have been difficult. Lilishila's method too would allow a similar result, if used with ill intentions.

"(Mind type skills are a real pain.)"

Right next to the rejoicing Lilishila group party, Shin's could not feel at ease.



After Shin and Wilhelm left, something started moving in the room where Hermie had been captured.

“Uuh..ghaah...”

The figure awkwardly standing up was none other than the man who was supposed to have died on the spot after piercing his own chest, Eline.

“Kaah, he’s finally dead!”

Eline’s smile was even more distorted than before. More than half of his face was covered with a tattoo of thorns.

“This guy’s contortion was of decent quality, but it was pretty obnoxious.”

Eline talked as if concerning someone else. To a third party’s eyes, he would look like he had become someone else.

“Aaaah, having a body is really fantastic after all. Better not waste any more time here though, let’s hightail it before that monster notices us.”

The words coming from his mouth clearly showed how the spirit inhabiting the body was no longer Eline.

Something was controlling Eline’s body. With a small chuckle, Eline’s body vanished into the darkness as if melting in it.

Nothing else was left.



Tiera, who was heading to the inn after parting ways with Shin, was suspicious of the lack of any pursuers. She tried asking Kagerou and Yuzuha, but apparently there were no hostile presences in the surroundings.

Tiera too was worried about Millie, but she knew well that with Shin’s party heading to rescue her, there was nothing for her to do.

Tiera climbed onto the inn’s roof and stood gazing at Palmirack. She let slip a small grumble.

“They told me to stand guard from outside, but I can’t see anything. Someone that could slip away from Shin and the others...who could ever do something like that?”

She ended up wondering if she was really being of help to them.

Yuzuha and Kagerou, who were on lookout, drew closer to her as to reassure

her.

“Kuu”

“Gruu”

“Thank you. Should something unexpected happen, I’ll do my best.”

Tiera answered to the two and focused her sight on Palmirack.

Her focus then paid off, as she perceived unrest among the spirits around Palmirack.

Tiera followed their trail with her eyes and saw something fly from the roof of a building on the edge of Palmirack.

“What’s that?”

Tiera’s excellent eyesight allowed her to recognize the flying figure as humanlike. However, there were two pairs of wings sprouting from its back.

As far as Tiera knew, all Bird-type had just one pair of wings. None of the ones Tiera knew had two.

In addition, those two pairs of wings were one bird-like and the other insect-like, completely different types. It was clearly something abnormal.

The fact that the figure looked almost transparent must have been due to a skill.

“What in the world is that shadow? Is there any skill we can use to track it?”

Yuzuha activated a skill after Tiera’s request. A bird-like something, melting in the moonlight, danced in the sky and flew after the shadow.

“Did something happen to Shin and the others...?”

Tiera then was informed of Millie’s rescue by a late message.

The shadow she had witnessed.

That very shadow would decide the next destination of Shin’s party.

Side Story

“Fumu...”

“Shibaid-dono, are you alright? You’re not acting like usual.”

He had come to Falnido’s estate for Girard’s funeral and also have a reunion with Shin. Shibaid was seated deeply in a chair, arms crossed, relaxing himself.

It was hard to tell if he was a human or beast, but as a Dragnil, it was clear to see that he was unsettled.

He was acting so strange that Shumaya Uru Kilmont, envoy and representative of the emperor of the Dragon Empire Kilmont, began to get suspicious.

“It’s just that I was a bit surprised. As an escort, it is quite pathetic of me to have worried our representative.”

Despite saying so, there was no indication that Shibaid’s mood had changed at all.

Even if he wasn’t composed, his emotions weren’t necessarily negative ones, such as impatience or anxiety. Rather, they seemed to be something positive; it seemed like he was holding himself back from bursting out in laughter.

Shumaya smiled at Shibaid’s answer.

“No no, on the contrary, I’m pleased to see this different side of you, Shibaid-dono. So even the hero of the Dragon Empire is unable to conceal his joy.”

The smile of the first imperial princess, who also served as the general of the imperial troops, was a rare occurrence that few have seen.

She had a human body with the wings, tail, and horns of a dragon. Emotions were more expressed on Shumaya’s compared to Shibaid’s, whose head was completely that of a dragon’s. When she smiled, she squinted pleasantly with her jet-black eyes and her crimson hair shook delicately.

“I still have some ways to go, thus I’m still immature. No matter what I do I

can't seem to control my emotions. The reason I'm happy is that this is what we desire most."

In response to Shumaya's smile, Shibaid spoke with deep emotions.

When he was with Shin he endured it, but now Shibaid relaxed his tail, covered in distinct Dragnil scales, and it hovered just above the ground.

If Shibaid had been a beast like Girard or Cuore, the tail extending from his back would have been fiercely wagging from side to side.

For the Dragnil, however, to show emotion with one's tail was proof of being immature. So Shibaid earnestly minded his heavy tail.

"We, huh...So you mean to say it was the same for Girard-dono?"

"Ah, him. Without a doubt he knew this feeling."

The corners of his mouth raised as he declared this.

He had been shaken when he received the news of Girard's death. However, looking at Girard's satisfied face in the coffin however, and comparing it with what he'd heard from Shin, he felt certain that Girard had left this world content.

Maybe if he had been killed by some stranger from a far off land, he may not be able to hold back the negative emotions. Girard had worried he might die without proving his loyalty. But during his illness, Shin had watched over him, and assured him he had already done so.

It was exactly for this reason that Shibaid could enjoy the reunion with Shin.

"May I ask what is it that you desire most?"

"Sorry, but I can't discuss it. It's not something I need to hide, but neither is it something I can go about freely proclaiming to all."

"I see. I began to think something auspicious had happened so that I need send a gift, seeing Shibaid-dono so joyed."

"Your words are sufficient. It's about time for the conference. I need to head to the hall."

Failing to master his emotions meant he was still immature. While thinking

that, he tried to distract himself by encouraging Shumaya to join him.

“Shibaid-dono never requests my company. Maybe I’ll go and attend to business as is expected of me.”

As Shibaid stood up, Shumaya began to get ready.

The countries outside Falnido, too, had seen much change since Girard’s death.

This included Kilmont, of which Shibaid had been its founder. In Kilmont not only the imperial family and soldiers who had met him, but also the commoners were still mourning Girard’s death.

Girard and Shibaid had spent long years together on the battlefield following the High Human, both as friends and as rivals.

Girard with his technique and speed, Shibaid with his strength and defense.

They were different from one another, but it had happened often that they were an equal match as vanguards.

“It’s nothing to fret about if those who scheme get caught.”

Girard was the symbol of the beasts, and coincidentally the deterrence towards troubling elements.

There are people who hold contempt towards heroes that are loved by all. Girard’s death seemed like it might unearth things long dormant. At the conference they were to discuss what to do about it.

“It will be fine. There is an official heir to be the bearer of 『Crushing Moon』. He’s still young, but he seemed skilled enough to me. Don’t you agree?”

“Fumu. If Shumaya-dono saw him and thought so, one can rest easy.”

Coming from the imperial family, Shumaya had judged many people, so Shibaid was relieved to know that she thought so.

Even Shibaid, who had encountered people of all kinds, struggled to see through people’s true nature.

If other party was a warrior, he could identify their character even without a meeting on the battlefield; but not all were warriors.

Shibaid acknowledged Wolfgang as a successor from his warrior's intuition. But if he could just get Shumaya to agree, he would have peace of mind.

In addition, Schnee had previously mentored Wolfgang on occasions. If there was something to be concerned about, it was expected to have been addressed together with Girard.

"I'm ready. Shall we go?"

"Yeah."

As a warrior and as a man, his skills could not be doubted. But what about as a statesman?

In order to figure it out, Shibaid headed towards the conference with Shumaya.



It was the day after reconfirming the alliance between the two countries.

Shibaid had taken to the sky in order to return Shumaya to the empire.

He had heard that Shin and company would return to Bayreuth temporarily, so in the meantime Shibaid will prepare for his own departure while they were there.

"It's nice to fly like this."

"Yeah. We can't fly with these wings of ours, after all."

Nodding to Shumaya, who flew alongside him, Shibaid looked down upon the landscape extending below him.

Among the Dragnil there were some whose appearance were almost identical to humans and some whose appearance were close to dragons.

Whether one had wings on their back was decided by birth.

Despite that, no matter how big or small their wings, the Dragnil couldn't fly, as stated by Shibaid.

They could flap their wings, but gliding for a short amount of time was the limit of its use. This remained unchanged even after the 'Dusk of the Majesty'; players and NPC alike were still unable to fly.

If he were to fall from the wyvern he rode on, even if it was Shibaid, how could he come out unscathed?

However, falling from an altitude of more than 1000 mels, the extent of damage received would be light for Shibaid. With his skills, strength, and equipment thing would turn out all right.

“A giant wyvern would be nice, though.”

“Don’t start with that. Those are for transporting materials in times of emergency. And, you’re speaking strangely.”

Shibaid was wary of Shumaya, whose behavior had changed completely since they left Falnido; she was listless and spoke in a flat voice. With no one around besides Shibaid, the real Shumaya had come out.

Shumaya thought of getting on a giant wyvern so she would be able to bind herself to Shibaid during the confusion, but he had realized immediately what was going on. The first imperial princess of Kilmont was quite honest about what she desired.

Even though he renounced the seat of the Dragon Emperor, there were none in Kilmont who didn’t know of Shibaid’s character and abilities; his reputation was immeasurable.

If Shumaya could make him into her groom, the benefits would be numerous: a mightier army, increased support for the imperial family, strengthening ties with Schnee Raizar, *etc.* And if she could make it happen now, an extra benefit would be being affiliated with High Humans.

“Born with it or not, huh.”

Surprisingly, if you traced Shumaya’s desires, most of them were bound up with the interests of the empire. Such a behaviour of bouncing around usually turned into profits. Shibaid didn’t know if the person in question was aware of it or not.

In any case, Shibaid reciprocate to Shumaya’s feelings towards him.

Shumaya’s father was the current Dragon Emperor, and thereby Shibaid’s comrade in arms. Along with the empress, they were close friends who had

experienced many battles together.

He had also helped from time to time when she had been a child, so Shumaya was like a daughter to Shibaid.

He was glad that they were close when she was younger, but to be seen as a potential mate was a problem.

“We’ll arrive at the castle soon. No more sulking about.”

“How presumptuous of you to say.”

Shumaya drew her lips into a pout. Shibaid just gave a strained smile.

“Don’t act like that. I still have things to do – still had, at least.”

Shumaya noticed a change in Shibaid’s voice. His eyes weren’t there; they were looking at something far away.

“Shiba——”

“Wyvern over there, slow down!”

Shumaya was interrupted mid sentence as they approached the castle; four wyverns approached them. They were Kilmont’s Dragon Knights, charged with protecting the skies of Kilmont.

“My name is Shibaid! I have brought Lady Shumaya Uru Kilmont, the first imperial princess! Here is my proof!”

Shibaid flew up to the knights and unfurled the banner of the imperial family.

It was imbued with magic, and would respond to magical equipment carried by the Dragon Knights.

“——Authenticity has been confirmed. We apologize for the formalities.”

“Good. You men are the guardians of my country’s skies! Continue on and return to your posts.”

“Yes, sir!”

At Shumaya’s command the men saluted and flew off. The two watched as they flew away in perfect formation. By watching them one got a sense of the training the knights underwent.

“Hm? It looks like there’s a welcome party.”

“Welcome party?”

Following Shumaya’s eyes, Shibaid looked at the castle and saw on the wyvern dock a group of people. At the front was someone Shibaid knew well.

Once they had landed safely that man approached them with a servant beside him.

“It’s good to see both of you back. You returned earlier than I expected.”

“Father, what are you doing here?”

The man Shumaya had just called father was unmistakably Zaikuin Baal Kilmont, Dragon Emperor. His body that rivals, or may even surpass, Shibaid’s was covered in deep crimson scales, and his violet horns towered majestically above him.

“I had a feeling you might be coming back today. It seems there were no issues.”

“Yes. Girard-dono’s descendants are distinguished individuals.”

Zaikuin nods in satisfaction to his daughter’s answer.

Even though they were father and daughter, presently they were conducting what seemed to be a business-like report between an emperor and his retainer.

“If Shumaya says so, then I am sure there are no problems. We can talk about the details later. Now it is time for you to rest after your journey.”

“Yes, my Lord.”

Shumaya left the dock and made for the castle, and Zaikuin told the guards who had stood vigilant behind them to withdraw. Knowing the emperor would be safe with Shibaid accompanying him, they obeyed without a second thought.

“Now, before Shumaya gives her report, I’d like to hear from you. You have time, surely?” asked Zaikuin; With his guards gone, he relaxed his tone somewhat.

“Yes, I also have something to discuss with you, your Grace. I will set aside

time tonight.”

After a moment of slight surprise, the emperor nodded.

It was just the two of them; there was no one to object to Shibaid ignoring the emperor’s request.



It was later, at night. Shibaid had been brought to Zaikuin’s private room.

“There is no need for formalities here. What did you want to discuss with me?”

“Before that. I apologize, but I’d like to request the men hiding to leave the room.”

“...it seems it’s something very important.”

Zaikuin ordered the men hidden under the floor and in the ceiling to leave. Normally the emperor would never be allowed to be alone with an adventurer, but if it was the former emperor Shibaid, that was a different story.

“Now then. What on earth has happened? Does it have to do with Girard-dono?”

Zaikuin’s voice echoed throughout the quiet room. Due to Girard being the topic of discussion, the tone of his voice seemed to show worry for Shibaid.

“No, it’s not about him. Girard passed away content and at ease. His face looked peaceful after he had gone.”

“I see. After I heard the news I thought it would be impossible, but I’m relieved to know that he went without regrets.”

Hearing what Shibaid said, Zaikuin let out a sigh of relief. He, too, had once fought side by side with Girard.

Like Shibaid, although not to the same extent, they were both rulers, warriors and comrades with a long-standing relationship. He didn’t want to imagine Girard suffering as he died.

“However, if it’s not about Girard-dono, what is it you wish to discuss?”

With the circumstances as they were Zaikuin believed it must have to do with

Girard. He looked at Shibaid slightly confused.

“Let me apologize in advance for my bluntness. I will leave the empire. It doesn’t worry me, but from now on it will be difficult for me to help you.”

“...so this means you don’t plan to return?!”

Zaikun’s astonishment was so obvious it could be seen clearly on his dragon face.

Up until then Shibaid had worked in the heart of Kilmont. What he had just said, however, made it seem like he would leave and never return.

“Perhaps, a new High Human based had been discovered?”

In the continent of Elnia there were several bases the High Humans had left behind. Among them were the famed flying castle Rashugum and Palmirack, which now served as a stronghold of the church.

However, with continental drift several bases had disappeared. The base of Shin, Shibaid’s master the ‘Dark Blacksmith’, had yet to be found.

Looking at the worried Zaikuin’s face, Shibaid says calmly.

“No, it’s not that. Nor am I staying in Tsuki no Hokora.”

“Well, then why is it you need to leave? The only other thing I can think of would be demons. But I haven’t heard any news since the ‘Dusk of the Majesty’.”

“It’s not that either.”

“So what then? You might as well just spit it out,” said Zaikuin, letting out a disgruntled sigh. He trusted Shibaid, so when there was no one else around, the emperor could let his manner slip.

“A companion who I swore allegiance to has returned. Do you understand what I am hinting at?”

“You can’t mean...!?”

Zaikun’s eyes opened wide. The pupils staring at Shibaid were filled with something beyond astonishment; there was admiration in them.

“It’s certain. And sooner or later there will be others who’ll notice. That’s why

I'm informing you now," said Shibaid, looking straight at Zaikuin.

"From now on, under no circumstances are you to confront our master. Should you do so, I will need to draw my sword against you."

Sitting before him was not an SS-rank adventurer, nor the founding Dragon emperor of the empire. It was a single warrior who had sworn allegiance to his master. It was written in his eyes: we may have fought many battles together, but oppose me and you will find no mercy.

"...I see. He truly has come back."

In the face of Shibaid's resolve Zaikuin was silent. After a few moments he exhaled quietly.

It's not as if a farewell isn't sad.

But Shibaid could see it in Zaikuin's expression; they had spent so many years together that the emperor understood how he felt.

"I am sorry. I can't just stand idly by, now that we have met once again."

"Don't apologize. I'm on your side. I would be glad to have someone like you following me. Your master must be glad as well. When we first met, you were always staring off into the distance. I knew that you were still longing for something."

"Ha. Really?"

"You didn't know? I suppose the person themselves never notices."

This bastard, chuckled Zaikuin.

To Shibaid, Zaikuin's smile looked just as it had in the days when they had first met each other. It was his true smile, the one that lay beneath his emperor's facade.

"Shumaya will be very upset," said Zaikuin with a sigh, as if to sweep away the tension.

"She'll be fine. She's tough."

"You're the only one who would think that."

Shibaid frowned as Zaikuin shrugged off what he said.

It was Zaikuin who knew that his daughter had feelings for Shibaid, but did nothing to stop it from developing.

“So, when will you leave? You’ll allow us to send you off?”

“I have some assignments to take care of first. They shouldn’t take long.”

“I see. It will be difficult to explain to the others, though. It’s not as if I can tell them the truth, after all,” said Zaikuin, scratching his chin, his face filled with concern.

A High Human had returned. Were the news to spread, many groups would begin to mobilize. The Black Faction of the Shiten cult would be overjoyed; they would certainly attempt to make contact with him.

The news wasn’t all good, however.

There were fools who, not comprehending the power of the High Humans, might seek to manipulate them. And to most people, the High Humans were the stuff of legends; they thought of them as fairy tales, not understanding what was the truth and what was not.

“I expect nothing but your best to keep the secret. However, their time spent being anonymous won’t last long. Schnee is already accompanying him, and I’ve heard there are others too. Even if I were to do nothing, their name will still come up.”

“So it is. Strong men are a magnet for trouble. You’re no exception.”

“I’m not?”

“Of course.”

Zaikuin seemed to want to say something to Shibaid who looked puzzled.

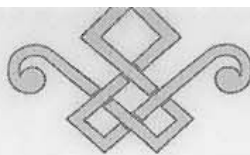
“I understand if you don’t want to stay here. But for now, for old times sake... join me for a drink. For me this may be a time to mourn, but for you it will be a drink of celebration.”

“Fumu. Let’s drink.”

As Zaikuin brought a special bottle, Shibaid pulled out a treasured item from his Item Box.

They may never meet again.

Knowing it would be so, the two Dragonewts, one jet black and the other crimson, raised their glasses to one another.



Name: **Wilhelm Avis**
(Evil Dragon Release)

Gender: **Male**

Race: **Lord + Dragnil**

Main Job: **Spearman**

Sub Job: **None**

Adventurer's Rank: **A**

● **Stats**

LV: 189

HP: 6800 + 1000

MP: 4700 + 500

STR: 613 + 100

VIT: 477 + 100

DEX: 431 + 50

AGI: 540 + 50

INT: 332 + 50

LUC: 55

● **Battle Equipment**

Head: None

Torso: Steel Silk Battle Attire

Arms: Dragonscale arm guards (VIT bonus [M], flame resistance)

Legs: Dragonscale leg guards (Binding reduction)

Accessory: None

Weapons: Holy Spear Beinot (Sustained damage -20%, Immune to penetration, Auto MP recovery [L], user limitation)

● **Title(s)**

● Master of the Holy Spear

● Instructor of Spear Arts

● Instructor of Martial Arts

● Vice-instructor of Magic Arts

● Protector of Smiles etc

● **Skill(s)**

● Tetralight Firestreak

● Thunderhowl

● Calamity Piercing Thrust

● Furrow Pierce

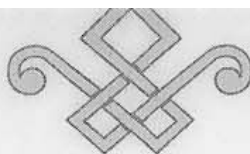
● Ki Manipulation etc

Other

● Owner of the ancient grade spear "Beinot"

● A Critical

*Bonus ranking: XS < S < M < L < XL



Name: **Shibaid Etraku**

Gender: **Male**

Race: **High Dragnil**

Main Job: **Holy Knight**

Sub Job: **Dragon Knight**

Adventurer's Rank: **SS**

Affiliation Guild: **Rokuten**

● Stats

LV: 255

HP: 9704

MP: 4790

STR: 930

VIT: 892

DEX: 624

AGI: 578

INT: 581

LUC: 70

● Battle Equipment

Head: Dragonshell head plate (STR bonus [XL], Status effect resistance [XL])

Torso: Dragonshell knight armor (VIT bonus [XL], auto-recovery of equipment durability)

Arms: Dragonshell gauntlet (DEX bonus [XL], creation of barrier(s) from a distance)

Legs: Dragonshell greaves (Knockback immunity, Restrain immunity, Debuff immunity)

Accessory: Age of Gods Earring

Weapons: Placid Moon (Immune to weapon-breaking attacks, Immune to penetration, attack range boost, Taunt (XL), user limitation)
Great Shell Shield of Collision (creation of barrier(s) from a distance, piercing damage reduction [L], Shield Bash ATK boost [L])

● Title(s)

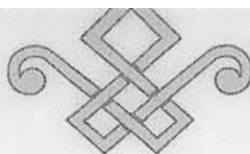
● Master of Magic Spears and Axes
● Apex of Spear Arts
● Apex of Axe Arts
● Ally of Dragonkin
● Holder of Dragon Genes etc

● Skill(s)

● Storm Hammer
● Fierce Impact
● Hell Thrust
● Dragonclaw
● Dragonbreath etc

Other

● First dragon king
● Shin's support character no. 4



Name: **Vizzy Laurette**

Gender: **Female**

Race: **High Pixie**

Main Job: **Tamer**

Sub Job: **Magic Fist Fighter**

Adventurer's Rank: **None**

Affiliation Guild: **Rokuten**

● Stats

LV: 255

HP: 3840

MP: 7821

STR: 533

VIT: 315

DEX: 644

AGI: 511

INT: 719

LUC: 65

● Battle Equipment

Head: Stardust Hairpin (Knockback boost [L])
Torso: Special class Tamer's battle dress (Monster affinity boost [XL], monster damage reduction [XL])
Arms: Stardust ring (Sustained damage reduction [XL])
Legs: Wind Spirit Boost (AGI bonus [L])
Accessory: Disorientation earrings (long-range attacks aim reduction [L], Spiritual skills ATK boost [M])
Weapons: Grand Fist of the Spirit King ((Random elemental damage, MP absorption [M], user limitation)
Cicada's Wind Whip (Monster taming probability boost [M], "Conceal" attached to all attacks)

● Title(s)

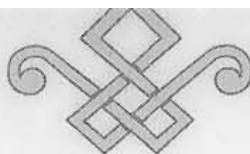
● Monster breeder
● Apex of Magic
● Contractor of Beast Followers
● Troop Commander
● Fighting Fairy
etc

● Skill(s)

● Monster Trace
● Riding Assault
● Summon Partner
● Fairy Straight
● Dancing Smash
etc

Other

● The Silver Summoner Cashmere's support character
● Guardian of the Dragon Nest



Name: **Hermie Schultz**

Gender: **Female**

Race: **Human**

Main Job: **Priestess**

Sub Job: **None**

Adventurer's Rank: **None**

Belongs to: **Church**

● Stats

LV: 12

HP: 410

MP: 712

STR: 71

VIT: 62

DEX: 81

AGI: 47

INT: 92

LUC: 39

● Battle Equipment

Head: None

Torso: Magic thread dress robe (INT bonus [XS])

Arms: Blue crystal ring (INT bonus [XS])

Legs: Tranquility Boots (DEX bonus [XS])

Accessory: Submission Collar

Weapons: Priestess Wand

● Title(s)

● Star Reader

● Art(s)

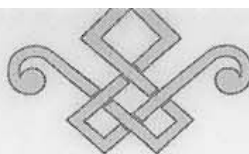
● Heal

● Cure

● Spirit Unification

Other

● Soothsaying Priestess



Name: **Eline Sperizer**

Gender: **Male**

Race: **Human**

Main Job: **Holy Knight**

Sub Job: **Magic Knight**

Adventurer's Rank: **None**

Affiliation: **Church**

● Stats

LV: 255

HP: 6544

MP: 3653

STR: 621

VIT: 533

DEX: 301

AGI: 384

INT: 247

LUC: 48

● Battle Equipment

Head: Holy Knight Helm (VIT bonus [M])

Torso: Holy Knight Plate mail (Sustained damage reduction [M])

Arms: Holy Knight Gauntlet (Knockback resistance [M])

Legs: Holy Knight Greaves (AGI bonus [M])

Accessory: Holy Tree Necklace (Auto-barrier, Auto durability points recovery)

Weapons: Exvaine (Added damage to normal attacks [Anti-humans only [XL]], Magic nullification [Blade tip only], user limitation)

● Title(s)

● Expert of Sword Arts

● Instructor of Spear Arts

● Vice-Instructor of Shield Arts

● Murderer

● Hero
etc

● Skill(s)

● Clear Bite

● Aerial Slash

● Luminance Saber

● Hidden Sword

● Blood Eater
etc

Other

● Cathedral Knight

● Chosen One

Credits

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Publication Platfom	—	Syosetu.com
Publisher	—	Alpha Polis.co.jp
Translator	—	Shin
Book designer	—	Armaell