

風波しのび
Kazunami Shinobi

RENEW

ザ・ニュー・ゲート

GRAVE

09.天下五剣

The New Gate

- Volume 9 - The Five Supreme Blades

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[Shin Translations]

THE NEW
ザ・ニュー・ゲート
GATE

Kazanami Shinogi
風波しのぎ

09.天下五剣

Illustration:魔界の住民



Rindou Suzune
17 years old Beast
(Tanuki).
Onmyoji who fights
with “Shikigami”
spirits. Her sister was
trapped in a dun-
geon.

Shibaid Etraku
521 years old High Dragnil. Shin’s sup-
port character since the game era. First
king of the Kilmont dragon empire.

Filma Tolmeya
521 years old High
Lord. Shin’s support
character since the
game era. Dependable
“big sister” and mood-
maker of the party.

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

Main Characters

Mikazuki Munechika
521 years old. Supporting NPC and
boss monster. Born from the anthro-
pomorphization of the katana with
the same name.

Odenta Mitsuyo
521 years old. Supporting NPC and
boss monster. One of the “Five Su-
preme Blades”, like Munechika.

Tiera Lucent
157 years old Elf. Assistant at
Tsuki no Hokora. Her hair is
mostly black due to the effects of
a powerful curse.

Shin
The story’s main character. 21
years old High Human. The
strongest player who engraved
his name in the history of an
online game. After clearing a
death game, he was sent 500
years in the future of the game

THE NEW GATE

Elnia Continent

Sea

Sigurd

Dragon Empire
Kilmont

Falnido Beast
Alliance

Sacred Place Kalkia

Lens

ラミアの森
Larua Grand
Woods

Beirun

Balmel

Black Priestess Shrine

Wraith Plains

Kujou Castle

Bayreuth
Kingdom

Sacred Mountain Fuji

Hinomoto



C h a p t e r 1

霊 峰 の 異 変

THE NEW
GATE

Chapter 1

Part 1

After quelling the revolt in Hinomoto, Shin headed towards the Sacred Mountain Fuji to fulfill his promise with Mikazuki Munechika, one of the Five Supreme Blades.

Once outside Kujou territory, Shin's party proceeded to their destination with a horse carriage. Running on foot would have been faster, but they didn't have any particular reason to hurry.

They were traveling at a lower speed than when they had traveled to the Futaba and Shijou territories to suppress the revolt, but their carriage was still much faster than average.

“—so why does this Supreme Blade lady, with a name that screams nothing but danger, want to talk to you?”

Filma asked Shin, who was sitting on the coachman's seat.

In the game era, support characters could not fight the Five Supreme Blades, so not only Filma, but also Schnee and Shibaid didn't know how powerful Munechika was.

However, hearing from Shin about her level and equipment, they could measure the level of danger she posed.

Above level 900 and equipped with Ancient-grade gear. Even for Schnee and the others, who possessed overwhelming strength by this world's standards, she was not an opponent they could afford to face without preparation.

“I don't know the reason why, to be honest. But she's been around ever since before the “Dusk of the Majesty”, she could have something important to say, no?”

“Won't there be any danger?”

“We talked and crossed swords in a match, but there was nothing particularly

suspicious. Even if she was hungry for a serious battle, she was keeping herself under control.”

Shin answered Schnee’s question while remembering how Munechika had withdrawn her wooden sword before getting completely serious.

It could not be said that she did not desire to fight, but Munechika was not the type to only talk via battle.

Even if Karin and Kanade had visited her by themselves, she would have probably requested something else in exchange for the herb, or nothing at all.

“I’m asking just in case, but she isn’t going to say she fell for you like Karin did, right?”

“Come on, Filma, the arranged marriage thing was something Karin’s mother pushed by herself...”

“I heard that already. But her eyes were those of a maiden in love, you know? You aren’t going to tell me that you had no idea now, are you?”

“I kind of... noticed, yeah.”

Any normal person would have noticed if she expressed it that clearly. Shin was no exception, but at the same time he found it strange.

“Karin’s behavior changed after I refused the arranged marriage thing. I don’t really understand why that happened. Why do you act like you’re in love after you’ve been refused? Isn’t it the opposite usually?”

Shin couldn’t wrap his mind around it.

“I bet she didn’t realize her feelings until late. She had this “I live for the sword” aura and all.”

“...I don’t get it after all.”

Shin knew how it felt to like someone, but he couldn’t understand Karin’s circumstances.

“Let’s stop talking about past things. So, what kind of person is this Munechika?”

“I don’t really know her well myself. The first time I met her was—-”

Shin talked about how he brought Karin and Kanade to the peak of Fuji and how he fought Munechika for the medicinal herb.

“She was strong.”

“Yes, as Yuzuha said, her sword arm was something else. I couldn’t win in a pure match of sword skills. If everything was allowed though, it would be different.”

Shin talked while remembering his match against Munechika. If he could use magic and skills, there was no way he could lose.

“Hmm, yes, an unshackled Shin would surely find a way to win, even if inferior in sword ability.”

“Shin never loses after all.”

In contrast to Shibaid’s rational analysis of Shin’s strength, Schnee retorted as if she found the very consideration of Shin losing preposterous. She looked so adamant that Tiera couldn’t help reacting.

“Ehm, master...?”

“...ahem. We’re almost at Fuji.”

After coughing to change the subject, Schnee noted they had reached their destination.

Fuji stood imposingly before the horse carriage...

As always, a thick fog laid heavily all around the peak.

“I heard that the fog doesn’t disappear, but the woods appear to be pretty quiet.”

Tiera whispered after looking at the mists, then the forest.

“Really?”

“We’re close to the World Tree forest. I suppose mysterious forces are at work.”

Schnee answered Shin's question while looking at the forest extending at the foot of Fuji, just like Tiera.

"I heard there are high-level monsters around here too, but is it true?"

"On average monsters are at level 500, the same as before. But the Eight-Headed Orochi on the peak is a whole other category. Level 833."

Shibaid grumbled after hearing Shin's reply.

"It might be lower than Munechika, but still it's not an opponent we can underestimate."

"We're not going to fight, so I think it will be all right. When I visited Fuji last time it wasn't belligerent either."

Some heads looked at Shin with curiosity, others were even sleeping: it looked like each head had a distinct personality. It was a powerful monster, but as Shin had only seen such behavior, to him it seemed more cute than dangerous.

"Anyway, let's start climbing. We don't have to worry about the monsters with the members we have here, but don't let your guard down."

"Well then, I'll take the lead going up."

Schnee was walking in the lead, with Shin and the others behind her. Looking at the party from above, Tiera was in the center, Shin on the right, Filma on the left and Shibaid took up the rear. Yuzuha was riding on Shin's left shoulder.

With Kagerou around, there was no need to focus on protecting Tiera, but they assumed that formation naturally.

Tiera equipped a bow as main weapon. Taking a formation focused on rear support had become almost second nature for Shin's party.

"We're entering the mists."

The group penetrated the area hidden by the fog, their formation unbroken.

Differently from when Shin had come with Karin and Kanade, they didn't move stealthily this time; but thanks to Schnee's precise guidance, they passed the fog area

without encountering any monsters.

Maybe because it had sensed the approach of Shin's party, after emerging from the mist they found Orochi's heads awaiting them.

"H-huge..."

Tiera couldn't hide her surprise at the monster's towering figure. Just like last time, Eight-Headed Orochi was looking at Shin's group with curiosity.

Maybe because they were many, or because it had felt their high levels, this time all 8 heads were fixated on them.

"It's true, I feel no intimidation or hostility from it."

"Hmm, I suppose we do not need to be wary."

Schnee and Shibaid relaxed their stances after looking at Orochi.

"Rather, I'm more concerned about over there."

Differently from Schnee and the others, Filma was looking towards the interior of the small shrine.

A few moments after her comment, something sparkled from within the shrine.

"You came earlier than expected, Shin."

"I said I would not make you wait."

The source of the light was the armor Munechika was clad in. She was walking towards the party, holding her helmet with her left hand.

"There is no need to act so formal, considering our relationship."

Munechika laid a hand on Shin's shoulder, her face coming closer to his. Surprisingly close.

"Well... I only remember we crossed swords once, that's it."

Shin had no idea why she would act so intimate with him, and squeezed out a response despite his confusion. He had recently assisted her in defeating the demon foxes, but he didn't think that was enough to cause her to act so affectionately.

"Ah, now that I think about it I had not talked about it yet. "You made me fall a lot, I won't let you say that I won by chance"...you said things like these before our last match, right? After you left, I thought about those words. It took me a few days, but I clearly remembered."

"Could it be that you recalled the memories from the game era?"

It was something from more than 500 years before. It wasn't something one would normally remember.

"It would probably be impossible without some trigger. I did not think I could recall them so clearly either."

Munechika explained how she had not recalled just by looking at him during their match. Shin's words were what acted as trigger.

"That day, I said that I wanted to talk to you again... maybe because I had unconsciously remembered."

"How much do you know of me?"

"I didn't know a lot about you personally from the start. But I remember how burning hot your blade was when we fought, you know?"

The hand resting on Shin's shoulder moved towards his face.

"There are people other than you that defeated me. But no one challenged me as many times as you did. The more I remembered, the more my chest felt hot and... well, isn't this quite uncouth of you?"

Munechika's last words, directed at the person who had suddenly appeared before her, were spoken as her shoulders dropped.

The person cutting in the progressively decreasing distance between Shin and Munechika was Schnee.

“My apologies, but it will be a problem if you come any closer to Shin.”

“A problem, hmm. Don’t you mean to say that you’d be envious?”

“.....”

Munechika’s taunting words were met by a sharper look from Schnee.

“Okay, okay, stop, stop I say! Schnee, you calm down too, she’s not serious anyway. Munechika, enough with the jokes!”

“Hehe, you know how it is. I had just put a hand on your shoulder, but I felt such a fearful look from over there... of course I would want to tease a little. And now your formal tone disappeared too, right?”

“Give me a break...”

Shin sighed, his hands on Schnee’s shoulders to calm her. He wholeheartedly wished for them to stop making the mood dangerous.

“Well, I have to say she’s pretty different from what I expected.”

“Indeed, this is not what Shin’s words suggested.”

Witnessing the scene, Filma and Shibaid were puzzled.

They had confirmed her level and were positive that she had to be really strong. But the feeling of intimidation often associated with powerful warriors was nowhere to be found, hence their comments.

“Ehm, Shin? I think you should have taken your hands off by now.”

“Hm? Ah, aah! I’m sorry!”

Shin looked in front of himself after hearing Tiera’s remark, only to find Schnee frozen in place, completely red.

“...that’s not, a problem.”

Maybe embarrassed to be seen blushing like that, Schnee mumbled while keeping her

head down.

“Haha, you folks are never boring to look at.”

“And whose fault is it? Well, let me hear the rest of the story.”

“Apologies, it had been a while since I had so much fun. Let us get to the point, Shin. I believe I know both your original fighting power and personality. As such, there is something I wish to ask of you.”

Munechika was smiling at the start, but as she approached the heart of the topic her expression turned completely serious.

“Is that something my companions can hear too?”

“Yes, not a problem. After all, as you command an Element Tail, you are not completely unrelated to this.”

Munechika spoke while looking at Yuzuha. Hearing that it was something related to Element Tails, Shin imagined it was related to Ley lines.

“Come. There is something I wish to show you.”

Following Munechika, who had turned around, the group entered the shrine.

After about 5 minutes, a red light entered their field of sight.

“This is Fuji’s original master, Kagutsuchi.”

“That’s...”

Looking at the source of the light, everyone became speechless.

The red light came from a phoenix-shaped red crystal.

The crystallized Kagutsuchi, wings spread as if protecting something, emitted a red light that brightly illuminated the room.

“What’s going on here?”

“In the past, miasma seeped in the Ley lines. In order to restore balance to the Ley lines, it turned like this. Despite the appearance, Kagutsuchi isn’t dead. You can come out now! These people aren’t dangerous!”

Munechika shouted towards the crystal. Shin was wondering what she was doing, when something moved from the shadows behind the crystal.

A small creature the size of a fist jumped down from the crystal, flapping earnestly its small wings, and landed on Munechika’s head.

“Pii!”

“Bad! Land on my shoulder, not my head, how many times have I told you?”

Spreading its wings declaring its presence on Munechika’s head was a little bird with red plumage.

It was a bit big for a baby bird, but it was like a slightly larger chick painted red, very fluffy-looking.

“Pii!!”

““Welcome, o fellow Element Tail” is what it said. 2 times.”

To Shin’s party it only sounded like it was crying, but according to Yuzuha the two “Pii” had said the same thing.

“You understand what it says?”

“More or less.”

Yuzuha explained that maybe because they both can influence Ley lines, they can also communicate.

“It might look like this now, but this is Kagutsuchi. At least, a part of it.”

“It can do something like that?”

“It retains little strength, though. It can just communicate, that’s it.”

“Pii! Pii!”

The baby Kagutsuchi poked Munechika with its rounded beak. Munechika didn't look like she was hurt in the least.

“I know. More than that, what happened to Tsunetsugu and Mitsuyo? We should talk to them too.”

It appeared that Munechika also understood Kagutsuchi's speech.

The names mentioned by Munechika, Tsunetsugu and Mitsuyo, were the names of Supreme Blades like her.

“There are others from the Five Supreme Blades?”

“Only two, though. I'll explain. —Here they are.”

2 silhouettes appeared from the corridor next to the crystallized Kagutsuchi.

The first was an old man probably over 60 years old, judging from his appearance.

His slicked back hair was a silvery grey. He was observing Shin's party while stroking his unkempt beard, but did not show a single opening. He wore samurai-like protective gear on his shoulders, legs and around his waist.

The other sword was a young girl in her late teens who, like Munechika, wore armor on her whole body, helmet excluded.

She was not very tall and looked rather thin as well. Her twin pigtails and pretty features made her seem very cute, but her sharp, cold stare destroyed this impression.

Despite looking young, she seemed eager to fight; her yellow-bordered black armor had a design different from Munechika's.

“Hoho, we just came because of Kagutsuchi's call, who knew we had guests too.”

“Munechika? You allowed people here without our permission?”

“Because it involves Yasutsuna and Kunitsuna. And suppress that killing intent a little, Mitsuyo. If they were dangerous, whether I was here or not, Kagutsuchi wouldn't have

come out, would it?"

"Pii!"

Right after her appearance, the young girl created a tense mood. Shin's 【Analyze】 displayed her name as Oodenta Mitsuyo.

The old man who appeared with the girl was Juzumaru Tsunetsugu.

Mitsuyo's level was 908, Tsunetsugu's 941. Both their names came from the swords they were based on.

"Look at the Element Tail on this man——on Shin's shoulder. No Element Tail would ever follow someone who disrupted the flow of the Ley lines. They are the people I talked about before, that we could request to help us. Further, in regards to Shin, this is not your first time meeting him. Mitsuyo, you even lost to him once. Try to remember."

Munechika had already talked about Shin's party to them, apparently. She looked at the Element Tail as Munechika said and, with a growl-like grumble, suppressed her killing intent.

Munechika's last words, however, prompted her to look at Shin even more sharply.

"As they do not have impure thoughts, they might indeed be worthy of trust. Kagutsuchi said the same too, so I'll believe that. But there is one thing that I cannot just accept. I have lost!? What exactly do you mean!?"

"Do not raise your voice, Mitsuyo. Good grief, the only one among us who did not lose is Tsunetsugu."

"An old man like me? It is true that I can count the times I lost on the fingers of one hand... hmm. Young man, try to show me your killing intent."

"Eh?"

Shin was dumbfounded at the sudden request to release his killing intent.

"You see, this old man here is bad at remembering names and faces."

“I see, I understand then. Here I go.”

Shin looked at Tsunetsugu with some killing intent. Other than Tsunetsugu’s reaction, Mitsuyo too opened her eyes wide.

“Hoho, I see, I see. I felt this killing intent a very long time ago. I did not lose, but I did not win either. I don’t remember killing you.”

“That’s because I felt I couldn’t match you and ran away right away.”

In the battles against the anthropomorphized swords, if moving was possible fleeing was possible too, as the swords could not leave a specified battle range.

Losing to a weapon and dying would naturally mean to receive a penalty for dying, so many players fled rather than risk it. Few managed to flee successfully, though.

“Kahah! That was some mighty fine running!”

In the game era, Shin had managed to obtain four of the Five Supreme Blades.

He had obtained [Mikazuki Munechika] shortly before the event ended, and time ran out on [Juzumaru Tsunetsugu]. The [Juzumaru Tsunetsugu] Shin now carried was something he had obtained in a revival event.

Judging from the three swords’ conversation, they did not have memories of the revival event.

“What! You say you defeated me, and you didn’t defeat Tsunetsugu!? Beat us all properly!!”

“Don’t be ridiculous! I barely managed to take Munechika down before time ran out. I could have fought a few times, but there wasn’t enough time.”

Mitsuyo, dissatisfied that the person who had defeated her didn’t defeat Tsunetsugu, a Supreme Blade like her, complained to Shin.

Shin had attempted to study his attack patterns, like when fighting a boss, but he didn’t have enough time to carry it out.

Considering his stats and equipment at the time, even if he had plenty of time it would

have probably been difficult. Shin did not yet possess his current power.

“So, did you remember? Mitsuyo.”

“Hngh, well, I think we fought before...”

Mitsuyo nodded while mumbling something. She did not mention having lost, but frustration was clearly visible on her expression.

“But! Maybe that happened in the past, but it doesn’t mean he must be strong now too. It happened 500 years ago, after all.”

“I made sure to check that by crossing swords with him. His sharpness increased and I didn’t feel impurities that would lead him to be contaminated by miasma. If anything strange had happened to Shin, I doubt they would just sit by and do nothing too.”

Munechika answered Mitsuyo’s remark by looking over towards Shin’s group.

What her eyes found were a slightly blushing Schnee, silently observing Filma and Shibaid, then Tiera, who was intently trying to keep up with the conversation.

“Ehm, so in the end, what is it that you want us to do? You said I’m not unrelated?”

“Yes, I’m sorry. It’s my fault that we were not exactly of the same page on my side.”

“Well, if Munechika says there are no problems, then I believe so too. Mitsuyo, you should stop sulking.”

Next to the apologizing Munechika, Tsunetsugu nodded in acceptance. At the same time, however, he added an unnecessary comment, met by an angry shout by Mitsuyo.

“Who’s sulking!?”

“Pii!!”

“Hnngh... I get it. Go on.”

Because of baby Kagutsuchi’s reproach, Mitsuyo reluctantly urged Munechika to continue talking.

“I’ll continue, then. What I wished to request to Shin and his group was to help us look for two of our fellow Supreme Blades.”

“All 5 swords... no, 5 people... aren’t here?”

Shin had not expressed it in words, but was wondering why only 2 of them, Mitsuyo and Tsunetsugu, had come out.

The answer was, because they were not there in the first place.

“I think that your Element Tail probably knows. It happened roughly 500 years ago, when the crust shifted. In that period, miasma suddenly seeped into the Ley lines.”

Munechika explained that the demons probably did something when the Ley lines were in a state of chaos.

“Great multitudes of monsters appeared, peculiar areas formed too, maybe?”

“Exactly. We were dragged in it too.”

The contamination of Ley lines and corruption of Sacred Places via the miasma was also an event in the game era. In the game it was sufficient to defeat the monsters and demons causing the phenomenon, but in this world things would not be that simple.

The territory around Fuji repeatedly moved up and down because of the crust shifts, causing the Five Supreme Blades, normally always apart from each other, to gather in one place.

Munechika continued by recounting how, thanks to Kagutsuchi’s power, they managed to restore balance to the Ley lines, but then the incident happened.

“The Ley lines were supposed to have calmed down, when suddenly thick miasma entered them. To restore them again, Kagutsuchi took this current form, but Yasutsuna and Kunitsuna were swallowed by the miasma and disappeared.”

“That’s incredible... it’s true that Yuzuha also suffered because of the miasma, but...”

“Kuu, maybe it happened, all around the world.”

Yuzuha, who like Kagutsuchi used her powers to suppress the crust shifts, talked with

some restlessness in her voice.

“In that case, however, I can’t just accept it easily. Do you have any clues?”

“We didn’t exactly do nothing all this time. We Five Supreme Blades can sense each other’s presence. It took a while because of the miasma, but we have found the general location they should be in.”

Munechika answered Shin’s doubts. That information was more than what he expected.

“Let me ask just for confirmation, but it wasn’t possible for one of you to go meet them, or rather, bring them back?”

“We wouldn’t be asking you if we could!!”

“Easy, Mitsuyo. Don’t start biting at any chance you get. I understand what the boy means, though. We cannot, however, move beyond a determined radius. You know what I’m talking about, don’t you boy?”

“...I see, that’s why you said that the Supreme Blades, which would normally never be together, have gathered.”

The Five Supreme Blades not being able to move beyond a certain radius was one of the event’s rules. Unrelated to the developers’ intentions, this had been applied to the current world too, as Shin understood from Tsunetsugu’s words.

“Fuji is also different from the game era. We are bound to the land. Because of that, we cannot go look for Yasutsuna and Kunitsuna. But because we are bound to the land, we could gather together because of the land’s movements. If we had been suddenly released from such bonds, we probably would not have come all the way to the region ruled by Kagutsuchi. In that case, no one could have protected this place: Fuji would have become a den of monsters. Whether it was fortune or misfortune, in the end, I cannot say.”

Tsunetsugu spoke while fiddling with his unkempt beard.

“Can’t say, that is true.”

“Well in any case, we can only do what we can now. Apologies for cutting in. Munechika, continue.”

“Yes, so... we have more or less traced Yasutsuna and Kunitsuna’s location. We would like to ask you to go pick them up.”

“I see. I understand that it’s something you can’t ask to the people here.”

The Five Supreme Blades were opponents that even Schnee and the others would have a rough time facing one-on-one.

Now that Shin had renewed their equipment and they had powered up they might be able to go toe to toe with them, but for Shin’s former support characters, as they were in the past, it would be a very dangerous battle.

At the same time, for the denizens of the current world it was a nearly impossible request.

Even former players that could get on par with them were limited in numbers.

“I would cooperate if we know the location, what do you think everybody?”

“I’ll follow you, Shin.”

“What Schnee said.”

“Hmm, if miasma is involved I couldn’t leave it alone.”

“I too think it’s better to accept it.”

“Kuu! Go!!”

The whole party answered positively to Shin’s question, albeit with different reasons.

Kagerou would follow Tiera, so everyone agreed naturally.

“It’s decided then. The closest one first... no, which one should be picked up the soonest?”

Shin changed his question halfway through.

If they were corrupted by miasma, it was better to prioritize whichever was tainted more.

“That I do not know. I was thinking of having you go toward the closest one.”

Munechika stated again that all they could tell was the general distance and direction.

“That can’t be helped. Where is the closer one, then?”

“Closer, well, it’s in the depths of the dungeon below this very mountain. I suppose that saying “secret dungeon” will make it easy for you to understand.”

“Fuji’s... secret dungeon?”

Munechika’s words took Shin by surprise. He had heard rumors of a hidden dungeon beneath Fuji, but no one had actually ever gone there or even seen it.

There was also the possibility that whoever found it had hidden it.

“You were a player, so you should know that much, no?”

“So the rumors were true. But then you could go save—oh, I see. The dungeon is considered a different area.”

“Correct. It lies at our very feet, yet we could do nothing... that was truly vexating.”

Just like Munechika as she spoke these words, Mitsuyo and Tsunetsugu’s expressions became clouded too. Their pain of not being able to go save their companions was clear even if they didn’t put it in words.

“Got it. The depths of the dungeon, then?”

“Yes. As long as my and Kagutsuchi’s perceptions are not wrong, Yasutsuna is somewhere in the lower floors of the dungeon. The hidden dungeon too, however, is affected by the miasma. It could be hidden somewhere, so if you go to the deepest part but still find nothing, we will have to think about what else to do.”

The Fuji dungeon was originally under Kagutsuchi’s control, so it knew of its internal structure, albeit not completely.

However, they could not discard the possibility that it had been warped by the miasma: thus even Kagutsuchi’s usually energetic “pii!” cries now sounded like a feeble “pii...”.

“Roger. This time, we’ll have to explore as if we wanted to map the whole dungeon. If we use detection-type skills, it might take some time but it’s possible, after all.”

“I apologize for burdening you with this. If I could go personally, I would be able to detect a more precise position.”

Munechika stated that if they could get closer to the target, the precision of their detection would increase too. If only they could bring Munechika, who was bound to the present location, with them... thinking this, a question popped up in Shin’s mind.

“Say, Munechika. Your original form is the sword [Mikazuki Munechika], right?”

“That it is. The sword I carry is, while very similar to it, a fake. Even so, its stats and effects are the same. If I release my human form, the real sword appears. That’s my original form”

“Pretty much as I expected. Then I ask, can the one I have take human form?”

“That’s...”

Shin took an item from the item box. The item was one of the Five Supreme Blades, [Mikazuki Munechika].

“Why do you have something like that!?”

“Why of course, 500 years ago you won against me. There’s nothing strange in you having it.”

“Yes, I’m going to say something a bit weird, but I was thinking if this couldn’t be used as a substitute.”

If Munechika and the [Mikazuki Munechika] in Shin’s possession were one and the same, Shin thought that maybe the latter could enter the dungeon in place of Munechika, who couldn’t move from Fuji.

If the consciousness dwelling within this [Mikazuki Munechika] also wished to save her companions, that is.

“I see. It is true that if I am bound to a master, I can go where the master goes. But my master now is Kagutsuchi, so I cannot come alongside you, Shin. Further, I cannot

perceive any aura from the [Mikazuki Munechika] you hold. Even if it is the same sword as I am, the moment it became the possession of a player, it probably completely became just a weapon.”

“I see... if you could come with us, we would be able to move with more precision, is what I thought.”

“Wait, though. That line of thinking could hold some truth.”

“It could? What do you mean?”

Shin was about to put [Mikazuki Munechika] back in the item box, as it didn’t look like it could be of use, but Munechika stopped him. She was looking at [Mikazuki Munechika], now in card form.

“Can you let me have that for a moment? There is something I wish to try.”

“Of course.”

Munechika received the item card from Shin and materialized the blade. She then closed her eyes to focus.

“...hmm, as I thought. Rejoice, Shin. It appears I can accompany you.”

Part 2

Roughly 3 minutes had passed.

Munechika opened her eyes and made this declaration.

“Er, what does that mean exactly?”

“This sword does not host a consciousness. But I can transfer mine into it. Leaving my original form here.”

“Is it alright to do something like that?”

Listening to Munechika’s explanation, Shin was reminded of a videogame’s VR technology.

To leave the real body behind and move with only one’s consciousness as a VR avatar was similar to Munechika’s proposal of transferring her consciousness to another sword, he thought.

“T-that’s right. Isn’t it dangerous to do something like transferring your consciousness?”

“No, it doesn’t seem like there would be any trouble. Because this too is [Mikazuki Munechika]. I know that even before trying.”

Munechika firmly nodded to Shin and Mitsuyo’s questions.

“Let me confirm, just in case. What would happen if you were defeated after transferring your consciousness?”

“If the host disappears, my original form would simply awaken. Of course, my original form would be defenseless while my consciousness is transferred elsewhere, though.”

“What if the host was contaminated by miasma?”

“I would not be able to transfer my consciousness anymore, or I would be trapped by it, I suppose. I cannot say with certainty unless that actually happens.”

What she knew was simply that she could transfer her consciousness into Shin’s [Mikazuki Munechika]. That even after transferring her consciousness she could

detect Yasutsuna and Kunitsuna's presences. Lastly, that if the host body was broken her consciousness would return to the original one.

Shin tried to ask her the tricky question of how she could know all that, but Munechika simply replied "somehow".

"This is just a hypothesis, but the sword you hold is also me, in a way. I do not know if we can consider it and me as one and the same, but I don't think it's wrong to consider it as something born from myself."

"In other words, there are multiple containers for you?"

"That could be a way to put it. To inhabit them, though, I would need permission from the holder. I could not inhabit just any unknown stranger's [Mikazuki Munechika]."

To inhabit a weapon, first it was necessary to align one's wavelength with it, explains Munechika. She could not just inhabit any weapon as she pleased.

"It's turned into something huge."

Tiera was listening silently, but in the end blurted out a comment. Filma nodded in agreement.

"To inhabit other bodies with one's consciousness... anthropomorphized weapons sure can do amazing stuff."

"We are aware that we are unusual beings. We can also alter our appearance to a degree."

"Indeed, we might be weapons but we also host a soul. I don't imagine such bizarre creatures exist anywhere else."

Munechika spoke seriously, while Tsunetsugu commented while laughing. Their reactions were different, but they both seemed to comprehend what kind of beings they were.

"..."

"Hm? Why the sudden silence, Shin?"

“No, I just wanted to ask something else. Could you inhabit this weapon even if it had been reinforced?”

“Reinforced?”

“Yes, being an event item it doesn’t have many capacity slots, but [Mikazuki Munechika] can still be reinforced. I thought that since we’re going to use it, it’d be better to boost it up while we’re at it.”

Shin thought that if the weapon Munechika carries in human form has the same stats and effects as her original form, if the original weapon was powered up maybe the human form would be strengthened as well.

“Wait just a moment there. You are aware that [Mikazuki Munechika] is one of the Five Supreme Blades, right? Maybe Munechika recognized your ability, maybe you’re an incredible guy, but don’t just say you can “reinforce” it so casually!”

“No, I mean that it’s not a problem—don’t glare like that, please.”

Shin could only laugh wryly before Mitsuyo’s accusing stare.

“Calm down, Mitsuyo. That’s true, something unexpected might happen, I cannot refuse to be reinforced. I do not know what would happen if you fiddle with my main body, but I have no objections. As long as I can keep my form as the weapon [Mikazuki Munechika], being reinforced is not a problem.”

“I see. The sun will set soon, so we will leave the exploration for tomorrow and do the reinforcing today. Do you have any requests in what way you would like to be reinforced, by the way?”

Weapon reinforcement contained many options: sturdiness boost, attack power increase, attack range extension, element attachment, etcetera.

The times a weapon could be reinforced too had different patterns: depending on the strength of the effect applied, many different ones could be added, or it was also possible to focus on a single element.

Based on how it was reinforced, a weapon could change to the point of becoming like a completely different one.

“Hmm. Personally, I would favor sharpness and sturdiness. Because the ideal katana never breaks, never bends, and slices well. Besides, adding unique effects could make me feel weird when I return to my original body.”

“I see, roger then. I’ll use the clearing in front of the shrine for a while.”

After obtaining permission, Shin materialized Tsuki no Hokora. Shin headed straight to the smithy, but for some reason, behind Shin’s group, the 3 Supreme Blades and the baby Kagutsuchi were following.

“Wait, why are you all coming?”

“What? Is that a problem or something?”

“Well now, is that not the place where weapons, what we would call a part of ourselves, are tempered? It is not something we can see every day. It is not strange for our interest to be piqued. Or are women forbidden to enter a smithy?”

Depending on the age, some locations were forbidden to women. Munechika’s question to Shin was probably because she knew this fact.

“No, I don’t particularly care about things like that. I understand Munechika, but I didn’t think that Mitsuyo and Tsunetsugu, and even Kagutsuchi would come.”

“I don’t mean to boast, but we are not weapons that average blacksmiths can handle. I cannot deny I am interested.”

Tsunetsugu spoke with an innocent smile.

In the game era, Shin had very rarely let others see him work in the smithy.

The residential area and smithy of the Tsuki no Hokora weren’t accessible to any player outside the Rokuten members; keeping one’s ideas and methods hidden was also common practice.

Furthermore, having people watching made him feel a little awkward too.

(Maybe because of the people present, it feels pretty different from the time at Falnido.)

Probably because of the presence of Munechika’s group, weapons with a

consciousness, it was different from having Girard's attendants or Tiera watching. Shin felt a kind of nervousness he couldn't quite put into words.

Munechika especially, was completely serious. Even the baby Kagutsuchi resting on her head, which would normally brighten the mood, had a deadly serious expression now.

"Then, I'm starting."

With these words, Shin started the fire in the furnace.

He checked the appearance of the magic power-imbued flames, impossible to generate in reality, then took out ingots of Orihalcum and Scarletite from the item box.

He placed them in the furnace and waited several minutes. A mineral sparkling with a mix of silver and red was formed.

"Is that..."

Mitsuyo commented, impressed.

"Something we call Chimeradite."

"Hmm, it hasn't become a weapon yet, but I already feel a peculiar intimidation from it..."

"Is it something you can use without problems?"

Tsunetsugu and Munechika both stared intently at the Chimeradite ingot, after feeling its magical power.

"No problem at all. I have already used ingots like this to reinforce weapons."

Shin understood their feelings, now that the world had become reality. Normal minerals do not possess magical power, and even unique minerals for blacksmithing would not emit unusual magical energies like Chimeradite does.

"I will focus on tempering now. I don't think I'll be able to answer anything even if you ask me, so please keep it in mind."

Everyone in the smithy felt the atmosphere changed after Shin spoke these words using a serious tone.

“—I’m starting.”

Shin first took [Mikazuki Munechika] out of the item box and removed its hilt from the blade. Holding it with tongs, Shin heated the blade over the furnace, turning it gradually whiter.

The magic power-imbued flames depended on the magic power of the blacksmith that had ignited them. Because of this, they could have various effects, depending on the blacksmith’s will.

This time the weapon was gradually reaching the most suitable temperature for reinforcing it.

“.....”

After about 20 seconds, Shin silently removed the blade from the furnace and placed it on top of the Chimeradite ingot atop the anvil.

The white hot blade, with the sharp side pointing down, cut through the Chimeradite like a knife through butter. When the blade reached the center of the ingot, Shin lowered his hammer.

“...hnngh!”

The hammer swung down on the ingot.

Every time the hammer struck, a long, bright sound of struck metal echoed in the smithy. At the same time, like ripples in a lake, the magic power imbued in the hammer spread through the ingot and the blade.

“Whoa, what’s this magic power...?”

“Hmm, now this is impressive.”

Looking at Shin performing blacksmith work, feeling the echoing sounds and the magic’s ripple, Mitsuyo and Tsunetsugu couldn’t help but to voice their surprise and admiration.

Munechika simply stared at Shin, without a word.

“As usual, Shin is really amazing when he does blacksmith work.”

“Of course he is, blacksmith is his second name after all.”

“That’s true. His strength stands out more, but originally this is what Shin is best at.”

Following Tiera’s words, spoken while her body trembled because of the ripples of magic power, Filma replied jokingly, while Schnee did with pride.

“It looks like it will be complete soon.”

Shibaid, who had been nodding silently, commented too.

As Schnee and the others turned their eyes back on Shin, the Chimeradite on the tip of Shin’s hammer had become very small, as it had been gradually absorbed into the blade, and had mostly disappeared.

“Shhh!”

The metallic echoes resounded one more time, stronger than before. With this last blow, the Chimeradite was completely absorbed by the blade.

Supported by the tongs, the blade was not touching the anvil and was held in midair. The silver aura surrounding the katana was clearly denser than before the reinforcement.

“Phew, it’s complete.”

With a small sigh, Shin reattached the hilt to the blade.

The katana’s appearance had barely changed, but he understood that its attack power and resilience had grown by 20%. The name had also changed to [Mikazuki Munechika – Shinuchi].

“Here we are. Just in case, check if everything’s all right.”

“Yes, I will... it’s all right.”

Munechika closed her eyes holding the sheathed [Mikazuki Munechika – Shinuchi], then nodded with conviction. A small grin on her lips suggested her excitement.

“I will try to transfer my consciousness right away. Mitsuyo, take care of my body.”

“Leave it to me.”

“Here I go.”

Munechika’s body glowed silver, then after a few seconds turned into light itself, vanishing in the air. From inside the light, a katana just like [Mikazuki Munechika] before the reinforcement appeared.

As Mitsuyo grabbed the katana that appeared in midair, it fell in her hands, as if it had lost whatever was supporting it.

On the other hand [Mikazuki Munechika – Shinuchi] was floating, in the same position as when Munechika was holding it. At the same time as Mitsuyo had grabbed the materialized [Mikazuki Munechika], [Mikazuki Munechika – Shinuchi] started to glow.

Silver light gathered around the reinforced katana, gradually forming a human-like silhouette.

After a while, it morphed completely into a human.

“...phew, looks like there really are no problems.”

“Er, what?”

“Hmm.”

“Mitsuyo, Tsunetsugu, why are you surprised? Hmm? Shin, you all too?”

Not only Mitsuyo and Tsunetsugu were surprised to see Munechika as she appeared again in human form.

Their reactions, though, were a mixture of awkwardness and looking pointedly at Shin.

“If no one talks, I don’t know how I’m supposed to react.”

“Well, er... yes, I think it’s faster if you take a look yourself.”

Shin materialized a hand mirror from the item box and gave it to Munechika.

Even if still puzzled, Munechika took it in her hands.

“Oh? I see, so this is the reason.”

Looking at herself in the mirror, Munechika nodded in understanding.

“What!? Is that it!?! Why are you more beautiful than before anyway!?”

Mitsuyo loudly voiced what everyone other than Munechika was thinking.

Munechika was already considerably good-looking, but her beauty seemed to have been upgraded too.

Her waist-length black hair had acquired an even shinier gloss, making her pale skin stand out even more. Her well-defined eyes expressed a proud elegance blooming from her beauty.

It seemed that even her chest, pushing up her armor, had become more ample than before.

“It looks like being reinforced also influenced my appearance.”

“Hey, Munechika!! Why are you so calm and collected!! This is just weird!! Not only did you get prettier, but your curves improved too!?”

She might be a weapon, but now she was a woman. She apparently harbored the desire to be prettier, so Mitsuyo questioned Munechika.

“Wait, Mitsuyo, that’s not something I can answer. Shin, do you know what could have caused this?”

Shin was the author of the reinforcement, but even he could not explain this phenomenon.

“Of course I don’t. If you transfer your consciousness to a reinforced weapon you can become more beautiful... I had no idea this would happen!”

“Maybe you put in even more effort because Munechika is a beautiful lady?”

“He-hey now, Tiera! Stop saying things that could cause misunderstandings. I really, really don’t know why this happened!”

Shin desperately explained himself to Tiera’s suspecting gaze.

Next to her, Schnee was looking at him with eyes clearly saying “that’s not the case at all, is it?” To Shin, this was the bigger menace.

“This too must be a feat the “Dark Blacksmith” can do, I suppose?”

“It could be. The quality has improved after all, it would be difficult to say they are unrelated.”

In contrast with the commotion that broke out on Shin’s side, Filma and Shibaid nodded to each other in understanding, while Yuzuha and Tsunetsugu were simply impressed.

“Kuu, Shin, amazing!”

“Amazing indeed. Even more than expected.”

“Anyway! The reinforcement is complete! Tomorrow morning we’re exploring the dungeon. Let’s get some rest!”

Shin shouted to forcefully end the conversation.

Tiera also let it go, maybe because she didn’t feel like pressing him further. Schnee sighed in relief.

“Yes, Shin is right.”

“But I just can’t accept it.”

“Hehe, Mitsuyo is a bit lacking in that kind of growth after all.

“...what did you say?”

“Hoho, my my, so scary.”

Mitsuyo's killing intent leaked towards Tsunetsugu's direction.

She still seemed dissatisfied, but had not forgotten their primary goal. She knew that today they wouldn't push themselves into exploring the dungeon. That's one reason behind her reactions.

"Tomorrow, then."

"Yes, I'll do the necessary preparations."

After seeing Munechika's group off, Shin called Filma and Shibaid.

He meant to let the other members rest first, but as they were interested, Tiera and Yuzuha remained too.

Only Schnee, who understood the situation, went to make preparations for dinner.

"Do you still have something to do?"

"I already had Schnee do it, but please look at this."

Shin pulled out [True Moon] from the item box and showed it to the two.

"[True Moon] was broken!? Who the heck did you fight against?"

Filma looked at [True Moon], her eyes wide open in surprise. She knew well how sturdy it was, so she couldn't believe that it had been broken.

"Could that be..."

"Shibaid can probably guess the cause. This happened when I fought Girard and it clashed against [Crushing Moon]."

Shin explained how he tried to fix it multiple times, and how he felt that a piece was restored when Schnee poured her magic power in the katana.

"Schnee and us, meaning it's the number of those who serve under you?"

Shibaid made his guess after hearing that 3 pieces were missing.

The pieces Shin vaguely felt to be missing and the former support characters who had not poured their magic power in [True Moon] were the same number.

“Probably. That’s what I felt when Schnee infused her magic power in it. If this wasn’t tied with my support characters, then I would have no idea what else it could be.”

“Pour magic power in it, right? Let’s get it done then.”

After listening to Shin, Filma received [True Moon] from him and closed her eyes to concentrate. As she did so, the glow emitted by [True Moon] changed from violet to red.

As the red light was absorbed by [True Moon], Filma let out a sigh.

“My part is done. This sure takes a good chunk out of you.”

“Then my turn is next.”

Shibaid took [True Moon] from Filma and concentrated. The katana started glowing in a black light mixed with silver.

The light shone a little longer than Filma’s, but when it disappeared Shibaid too let out a small sigh.

“I can’t do it as Filma did. But my magic power is definitely within it too now. There’s only one remaining now.”

“There’s still someone?”

Shibaid’s words provoked a question from Tiera.

Schnee, Filma and Shibaid, then Girard. With so many powerful members already present, she was surprised that there was still someone else.

“A party could contain up to 6 members, after all. Shin had 5 support characters. The last one is a girl called Sety. She was born a bit later than us, so she was like a little sister. You can’t get ahold of her now, right?”

The Sety Filma talked about was the last one of Shin’s entourage. Support character no. 5, High Pixie Sety Lumiere.

Different from the close combat-type Filma and Girard, the wall-type Shibaid and the all-rounder Schnee, she was a rear support type mainly specialized in magic.

“Yes, completely lost. I don’t have a single clue.”

Shin answered making a gesture of surrender.

Just like Filma, Sety was acting freely on her own. She had not become famous like Schnee or Shibaid, so they did not have any idea where she could be.

“Shibaid, haven’t you or Schnee ever managed to reach her?”

“We haven’t. Just like with you.”

Shibaid looked at Filma with a certain tired annoyance in his eyes.

“I couldn’t help it, could I?”

Like Filma, she might be in need of help, so Shin had already made a search request to the Golden Company through Berett.

“Either she’s stuck somewhere like Filma was, or she has no intention of answering, I guess.”

“That’s right... but isn’t there also the possibility that she’s sleeping?”

Filma added one option to the possibilities Shin thought about Sety’s lack of a response.

“Sleeping? Ah, that’s true.”

Long-living species such as Elves and Pixies sometimes slept for dozens of years at a time. It was one of the game’s features. There also was a quest about waking up a NPC Pixie, so it wasn’t impossible.

“That makes it hard to join with her, though.”

“Right. We found Filma purely by chance too. For Sety, all I know is that she could maybe be in a faerie village.”

Faerie villages, home bases for Pixies, existed in several locations. Some were open to contact with the outside world, while others weren't; if Sety was in one of the latter type, it would have been difficult to look for her.

The barrier protecting faerie villages was something not even Shin could detect without being very close.

"If she is in one of the villages that communicate with the outside world, there would be at least some information coming in. But only those with high rank know the location of those sleeping, supposedly. We can only go directly and make sure."

"In any case, we can just wait for information from Berett. If we don't learn anything by the time this mission is done with, I'm planning to go to Garden first."

Shin replied to Shibaid. After meeting Girard again he was always involved in some trouble and had not had time, but he knew that he needed to make the time for this.

Inside it there should be Oxygen and Hydro, a High Pixie-High Lord duo serving under the Red Alchemist Hecate.

They were both research maniacs who would not take a step outside for years at a time, had completely different attitudes depending if they were interested in something or not... when Shin heard of the characteristics Hecate had created them with, he couldn't help being perplexed as to why she would create them like that.

"Those two, if we're lucky, are just immersed in their research. I looked at it from far away, but Garden didn't appear to be damaged."

"I'd like to object to that line, but I really can't."

"I understand that I should be worrying, really."

Shin's words were said in a joking manner to hide his worry, but Shibaid and Filma did not understand them like that.

They could not imagine Oxygen and Hydro, inside Garden, to be in any sort of trouble.

Shin only knew them from the game era, so he did not know how their personalities were now that the game had become reality. Looking at Filma and Shibaid's reactions gave him an idea though.

If they didn't change from the game era, they were likely still pursuing their research: they could probably even say that they didn't notice the Dusk of Majesty had happened.

Abundant food and supplies, ample research material and facilities, combined with the high protection of being a Guild house. They had all they needed to shut themselves in it, so Shin wasn't too worried either.

If they used the items within Garden, they could even deal with the powerful poisons surrounding it. Shin thought that they could have come out if they wanted.

"Well, no use talking about that here and now. Let's settle this Supreme Blades business first."

Their opponent was someone that, based only on strength, could rival Schnee.

As Shin's party was superior both in numbers and ability, they had no risk of losing, but it was already a situation that was not present in the game. To be ready for any situation, he decided to review items and equipment before sleeping.

"OK, let's recover our energy with Schnee's dinner now. We can really look forward to her cooking."

Everyone present knew of Schnee's cooking skills.

As they entered the dining room, the food was already ready, while the table was being prepared.

"And... why are you here?"

"Because Kagutsuchi said it wanted to eat here. The High Elf there gave us her permission, by the way."

Mitsuyo answered Shin's question while pouting.

She was looking at the baby Kagutsuchi, sitting in the middle of the table.

"Pii!"

"It's saying, I shall grant you the honor of feeding me."

“Very high and mighty, but still a chick...”

These words would feel appropriate if said by Kagutsuchi’s original form, but the current fluffy chick had little authority to show. They had no reason to chase it out, however, so Schnee made dinner for Mitsuyo too.

“Pii!”

“Truly a delicacy. You have my praise”, it said.”

“Hehe, I’m honored.”

Kagutsuchi cried while pecking happily at the food, and Schnee answered with a smile.

Kagutsuchi was not the only one lost in the pleasure of Schnee’s food. Mitsuyo too, who had accompanied Kagutsuchi and sat at the table almost against her will, had been relentlessly and silently serving herself since the start of the meal.

Looking at the smile her lips formed, there was no need to ask for her impressions.

The dinner with such unusual guests continued: after it ended, Kagutsuchi and Mitsuyo returned to the small shrine.

After dinner all members proceeded to their respective rooms and prepared for the next day.



“...kuu.”

After everyone else had fallen asleep, Yuzuha cried softly on the bed.

She was remembering Filma and Shibaid pouring their magic power in [True Moon].

Shin said that there were 3 pieces missing: after Filma and Shibaid, just another one.

Even in its broken state, [True Moon] was a superior Ancient-grade weapon. If more magic power than just the last missing person’s part was poured in, it could surpass any other existing weapon.

Even if her knowledge was still limited, the Element Tail Yuzuha knew that.

What Yuzuha was concerned about was whether [True Moon] had capacity for her to pour magic power in or not.

Being his partner, Yuzuha also wanted to be of help to Shin. But if [True Moon] didn't have room, there was nothing she could do.

"Kuu!"

I want to be stronger. So Yuzuha thought.

If she recovered all her powers and used all of her knowledge, she might be able to do something.

These were the thoughts that started to sprout in Yuzuha's mind.



At the same time, Tiera was still awake.

Sharing similar emotions as Yuzuha, she was thinking of Filma and Shibaid.

"...haah."

She could only sigh.

She had become unmistakably stronger. Yet she was still far from matching Schnee and the others. Even if she poured magic power in [True Moon] like them, the resulting boost would surely be minimal.

"I'd... hate that..."

Her thoughts spilled into her words.

Tiera was aware she was the least powerful of the current members.

But even so, she wanted to be useful to Shin.

Tiera couldn't yet decide if that desire came from the gratitude to him for dispelling her

curse or for another feeling that was slowly taking shape within her.

She hated not being able to do anything though.

“I want to... be stronger...”

She didn't want to be a burden.

She didn't want them to keep looking out for her.

She knew that it was an arrogant wish, but as of now they were not on equal standing.

I want to stand... at his side.

“...haah.”

Her feelings were strong. But reality wasn't that easy.

The difference in strength was overwhelming, she did not know what she should do.

But even so, her feelings remained.

“Sniffle...”

It would take a while before she could sleep that night.

C h a p t e r 2

灼 熱 迷 宮

THE NEW
GATE

Chapter 2

Part 1

“Hey, Tiera. You don’t look too well, is everything alright?”

“I’m fine, I just had some trouble sleeping.”

The next morning, Shin and Tiera bumped into each other as they left their respective rooms, and Shin inquired about Tiera, who looked less lively than usual.

Her answer also felt less energetic than normal.

Shin thought she might have been sick, but Kagerou, ever present at Tiera’s feet, did not seem to be worried.

【Analyze】 would not display small changes in one’s condition, but, if Tiera had been pushing herself, Kagerou would have reacted in some way, so Shin chose not to pursue the matter any further.

Tiera headed to the bathroom before breakfast. When she came back, she looked the same as always.

“And... you’re here in the morning too.”

“Pii!”

Shin’s eyes were pointed at the fluffy, red ball of feathers, baby Kagutsuchi, as he spoke. Roasted fish just out of the oven lay on the plate before the bird.

As Shin and the others started eating, baby Kagutsuchi started pecking away at the fish too.

The fish was much more than baby Kagutsuchi’s size seemed to allow, but baby Kagutsuchi ate until the fishbones had been picked clean.

Baby Kagutsuchi gave a small cry while patting its stomach, which had become rounder than before.

“Truly a delicacy, he says.”

Mitsuyo translated Kagutsuchi’s cry while she was eating in a slower, more polite manner.

“Kuu, ball of feathers, acting so high and mighty.”

“PYO!?”

Maybe because she didn’t appreciate Kagutsuchi’s attitude, fox-mode Yuzuha tried to push down its head with her paws.

Surprised, Kagutsuchi dodged the sudden attack at the last second and raised its small wings to intimidate the opponent.

“Pii!”

“Kuu!”

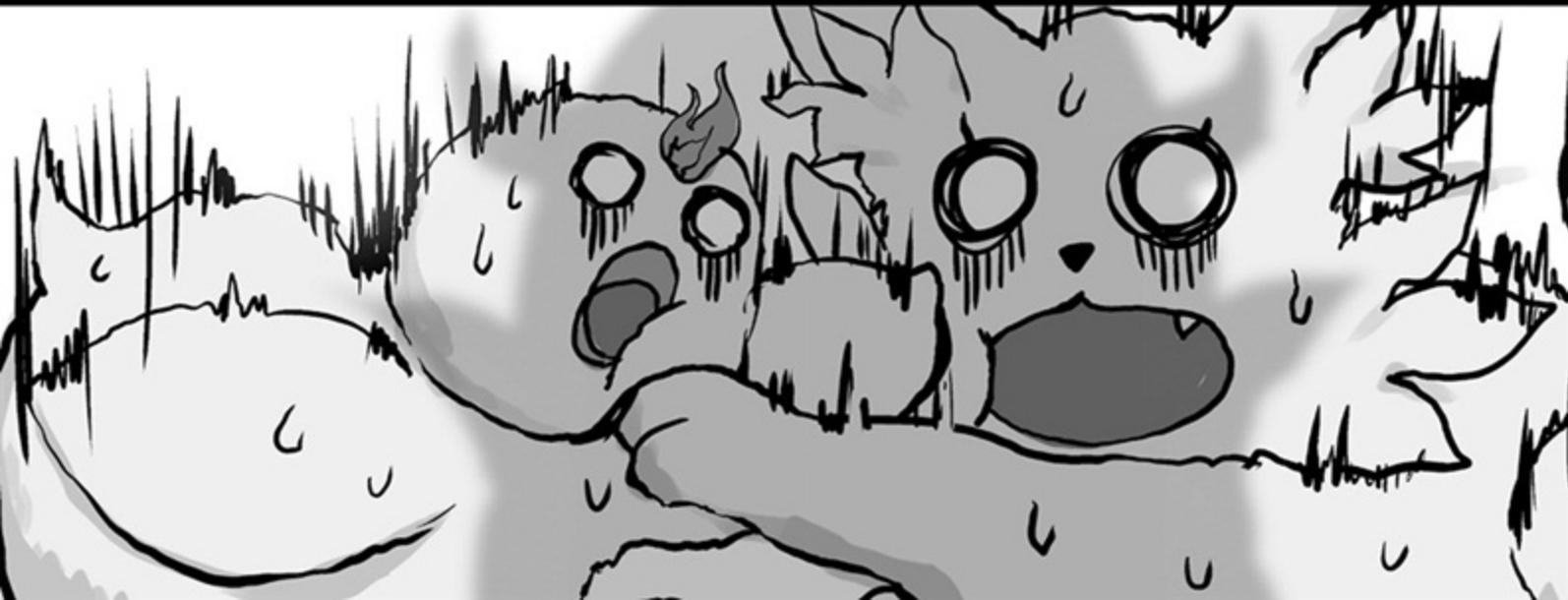
A bizarre battle had broken out in the middle of the table.

“What are those two doing?”

“Who knows? Playing with each other as entities related to the Ley lines?”

Watching the fight out of the corner of their eyes, the group continued eating their meal.

The bout between Kagutsuchi and Yuzuha was concluded with a lightning bolt from Schnee.



“By the way, Mitsuyo, are you Kagutsuchi’s caretaker?”

“I’d love to say no, but yes, I pretty much am. In theory, it’s a task that rotates between Munechika, Tsunetsugu, and me. But rather than that, that’s a rather familiar way of addressing me, without honorifics or anything. It is true that we requested for your help, but it’s quite irritating to be treated as inferior.”

“Ah... I’m sorry. A long time ago, when I was discussing battle strategies with my comrades, we called you without honorifics, so...”

Having been programmed with the movements of martial arts masters, the Five Supreme Blades were not opponents beginners or players with just some experience could hope to handle. But as they were ultimately programs, even their refined movements contained patterns.

At the time, Shin studied these movements and snatched victory by a hair. As they had met and fought many times, he ended up talking to her with familiarity.

“You look younger than the other two, so maybe he felt closer to you?”

“Hey, Filma!”

Shin reprimanded Filma because Mitsuyo seemed to be sensitive about her appearance. But Mitsuyo herself did not seem to care much.

“...well, that’s fine. I remembered you after all, so I’ll let you call me as you like. I’ll address you the same way though. That’s fine, right?”

“Yeah. call me what you want.”

“By the way, there was something I wanted to confirm, may I?”

“Hm? What’s that?”

“What you did to Munechika yesterday, can you do it to other Supreme Blades too?”

Mitsuya probably referred to Shin’s reinforcing of the [Mikazuki Munechika]he possessed.

“I can do the reinforcement itself. But in regards to [Juzumaru Tsunetsugu], I acquired

it in a slightly different way, so I don't know if the consciousness transfer can be done."

"I see. If you can, then it's alright."

Mitsuyo did not add anything after that. "Lend me your reinforced [Oodenta Mitsuyo]", or "I will be coming with you"...Shin was expecting a development like this, so he was a little taken aback.

After breakfast, Shin and his group headed to the shrine. At the entrance, Munechika and Tsunetsugu were already waiting.

"Sorry, did we make you wait?"

"No, we just arrived as well. Then let's enter the dungeon immediately. I shall show you to the entrance. Follow me."

The group followed Munechika inside the shrine.

When they arrived in front of the crystallized Kagutsuchi, Munechika turned around.

"We will be transported to the dungeon from here. Are you ready?"

"No problem. Anytime you want."

Shin nodded firmly to Munechika's final confirmation.

As they had little information about the dungeon, they could not prepare for specific situations. Shin's item box, however, included enough supplies to handle any kind of situation.

Concerning recovery items, each member's item box had been provided with a sufficient quantity.

Tiera couldn't use the item box, so she carried items in card form in a pouch at her waist.

"I'm counting on you."

"Pii!!"

“Kagutsuchi wishes you fortune in battle too. Come back in one piece, you hear.”

Munechika replied in a clear, powerful tone to Tsunetsugu and Mitsuyo, who would stay in the shrine to protect it, and baby Kagutsuchi, who couldn't fight for itself.

“Leave it to me.”

Her answer did not contain the slightest hint of worry.

“Kuu...”

“I'm sorry Yuzuha. You're the only one that can help with Ley lines right now.”

Because of Shin's group's entrance into the dungeon, the miasma that had swallowed Dojigiri Yasutsuna could have had unfathomable effects on the Ley lines inside the dungeon.

Because of that Yuzuha, who, like Kagutsuchi was capable of influencing Ley lines, would stay outside.

Influencing Ley lines was also possible inside the dungeon, but rather than inside a warped dungeon, staying in Kagutsuchi's shrine would allow them to influence the Ley lines from a safe location.

Shin promised the unhappy Yuzuha to brush her after coming back, then walked towards Munechika.

“I shall start the transfer then.”

As Munechika's spoke, the scenery before Shin and his group blurred.

Compared to teleportation using the crystal stone or the one at Bayreuth, the transfer was completed after a slight feeling of intoxication.

“It's hot.”

The instant after they transferred, a sauna-like heat attacked the party. Sweat would start trickling even without doing anything in particular.

For a dungeon located in a natural cave, its insides were extremely wide. 2 parties

could be formed within it without problems.

Thanks to the wide space, it was not necessary to pay special care to the fumes of hot steam spouting from the walls, boulders, and ceiling.

Because of the white steam generated in the already humid cave, the temperature was very high. The steam could also come from the floor too, so they had to proceed with care.

Shin was protected by powerful gear, but he didn't feel like trying to see what would happen if he was hit.

"Uuh, I feel sick..."

Different from Shin, who was disconcerted by the heat and humidity, Tiera was holding her hands over her mouth, unsteady on her feet.

Shin had just felt a slight disorientation from the transfer, but the effects appeared to have been greater on Tiera. The sweat on her forehead was not just from the heat.

Next to Tiera, Kagerou was crying out, worried.

Schnee cast **【Heal】** on the pale Tiera and gently rubbed her back.

"I too felt a kind of intoxication. Let's take a small break, just in case. Tiera, are you alright?"

"Yes, I feel much better already."

Her complexion seemed to look a bit better, perhaps because of Schnee's **【Heal】** .

After generating a barrier skill to guarantee their safety, all party members took a relaxed posture.

"We didn't feel like that when we used the crystal stone. Munechika, do you know what the reason could be?"

"I don't know for sure, but it could be the miasma. Even a weapon like me felt a little uneasy. I imagine that human types like you are more heavily affected."

Everyone thought that the cause could be the miasma, but no one knew why Tiera was the only one to show such a strong negative response.

For 15 minutes they talked while waiting for Tiera to recover.

Tiera announced that she felt better, and Schnee also confirmed that she had recovered enough, so the group resumed the exploration of the dungeon.

Fuji's secret dungeon was officially named "Depths of Hellfire".

According to Munechika, as the name suggests many fire-elemental monsters dwell in it; without resistance to fire, just being inside the dungeon would gradually sap one's energy.

"We could cut off the heat with a barrier, but moving will be troublesome."

Dungeons where simply walking makes your HP decrease are truly harsh.

As Shin's experience told him, item usage increased and in some cases, MP management became more difficult too. There were possible countermeasures, but if one wasn't of high enough level struggling was inevitable.

"We don't know what could happen, better be fully ready."

Shin took 7 cards out of the item box. They were all the same: when materialized, a bracelet adorned with red gems appeared. It was the [Enra Bracelet], an accessory that nullified fire-elemental damage.

"To think that it would affect even me."

"You're in human form, so I suppose the item identifies you as human too?"

Shin answered to the surprised Munechika. It was possible to apply external options to weapons, so that might be the reason why this was possible.

"It's fantastic that not only it stops damage, but blocks the heat too. If our hands slipped because of the sweat it would be a problem."

Filma spoke while lightly wielding her sword. In the game, sweat wouldn't weaken the weapon's grip, but now that was a factor to think about.

“But isn’t it a bit of shame for you, Shin?”

“What is?”

Filma seemed to have come up with something and whispered it into Shin’s ear.

“If the heat continued, the sweat would have made Schnee’s clothes see-through... right?”

“That’s ridic... wait, they don’t work like that, probably.”

In the game, armor would not get ripped or broken even if drenched or attacked. But things were different now.

Schnee was now wearing Ancient-grade gear hand-made by Shin, the [Moonlight Silver Maid Uniform]. Whether it would become see-through or not was unknown, but it wouldn’t be strange if it stuck to her skin and accentuated her curves.

“Anyway, jokes at a time like this?”

“This much wouldn’t shake you, would it Shin? Besides it helped you relax, right?”

“Even if I had been nervous, I don’t think this would have helped.”

“Filma, don’t trouble Shin too much.”

Maybe tired of the exchange, Shibaid lightly rebuked Filma.

Even while joking, neither Shin nor Filma neglected to be wary of their surroundings.

“You’re surprisingly relaxed even in this situation. No, I suppose it’s normal for Shin’s party to be like this.”

“Having a sense of tension is important, though. We just entered into the dungeon. If we were tense all the time, we wouldn’t last until the end.”

After the start of the Death Game, Shin explored dungeons alone most of the time.

Compared to that, having Schnee and the others with him made the current situation much easier to handle. At the very least, he felt relaxed enough to roll his eyes at

Filma's jokes.

"Okay then, looks like we have to welcome our first guest soon."

Shin detected an enemy presence and announced it to Munechika and the others. The simple map displayed 5 red markers.

Parts of the cave's walls and ceiling were red hot, so illumination was guaranteed to a degree, but they could not at all say that there was enough visibility.

Shin used a magic skill for lighting and prepared to confront the enemy.

"As expected, they're fire-elemental."

Appearing before Shin's party was a group of large monsters and smaller ones.

The first type were 2 roughly 4-mel tall golems which looked like they had been made with the cave's boulders, named Sledge Heat. The second, 3 large spiders about 1-mel large, with hair like flames, were called Molten Spider.

The Sledge Heats were walking closer, shaking the ground with their steps. Above them, the Molten Spiders were looking down at Shin's group while crawling on the ceiling.

The Sledge Heats' levels were 434 and 422, the Molten Spiders 369, 366 and 361.

"A small test to start with I guess. Let's do it!"

Following Shin's call, Shibaid, Filma, and Munechika stepped forward.

The all-rounders Shin and Schnee could have gone forward too, but the frontlines would have become too crowded, so this time they stayed with Tiera in the rear guard, which lacked numbers. Kagerou was Tiera's exclusive protector.

"We're going to suppress them first. Shibaid, everyone, take care of any monster that sneaks through!"

After giving his commands, Shin used the water-type magic skill **【Ice Bullet】** .

The magic skill caused several ice shards the size of a fist to appear around Shin and

Schnee.

Using the shards, floating thanks to their emissions of cold air, Shin aimed at the Heat Sledges, while Schnee sniped the Molten Spiders.

The shards, flying at a speed exceeding Tiera's arrows, pelted the Heat Sledges and Molten Spiders like bullets from a machine gun.

Their offensive power was too high for the monsters: the Sledge Heats broke down in pieces, while the Molten Spiders retained little of their original form.

"...listen, you two. If you don't hold back a little, we won't have anything to do here."

"No wait, they were too frail, seriously. I thought that monsters in a secret dungeon would have a bit more backbone."

"Well, I guess this is the obvious result though."

"Master's and Shin's magic power is so high that the monsters became nothing but shooting targets. Normally 【Ice Bullet】 doesn't have this kind of power either..."

Tiera put away the arrows she had prepared and commented while looking at the frozen and shattered monsters.

Once squeezed, the fragments broke down in small crystals. They were completely frozen and became brittle too.

"Anyway, did it have the effect of freezing the opponent?"

"It should have, at least a little. High magic power can amplify added effects. Depending on the opponent, wouldn't it be the same even if Filma or I had shot them?"

"Shin and Schnee's stats are high all around, after all. As we just saw very clearly."

Shibaid suggested an answer to Tiera's doubts about the magic's power.

In the end, that result had been caused by the difference in stats with the opponents. Golems like the Sledge Heats have low resistance to magic. The Molten Spiders were just completely inferior opponents for Shin and Schnee.

Inversely, it would have been absurd if a clean hit from Shin and Schnee didn't kill them on the spot.

"How very reliable."

Witnessing the group proceeding while instantly sweeping away any monster they came across, Munechika laughed wryly.

Maybe because the rule of "weaker monsters appear in the beginning of the dungeon" remained, all monsters appearing were under level 500.

Monsters of that level would fall after one hit of Shin and Schnee's magic.

Rarely, some monsters would escape their magic attacks, albeit never unscathed: they would then fall prey to Tiera's arrows.

"I don't even feel like I'm fighting, but my level keeps going up..."

"They're all low-level units for us after all. By the way, how are your stats?"

Shin inquired to the surprised Tiera.

Schnee and Filma had already reached the upper limit and their levels wouldn't increase anymore.

But Tiera was different. Leveling up increased her stats further.

Her parameters' values did not increase greatly, but she was undoubtedly growing stronger.

"Hmm, when I absorbed that light I told you that each parameter grew by about 200, right? Since then, I grew 11 levels, my status'... decks? (DEX) and... ants? (INT) grew by about 40, the rest by about 20. I also learned some skills. But is it normal to learn them so easily...?"

In the mysterious place where Shin's party reunited with Filma, Schnee and everyone else received a stat increase. On the other hand, only Tiera can level up.

"Seriously? Your growth rate increased too. Your skills as well."

Apart from the boost granted by the resurrection bonus, level up boosts were not as big as players believed. The increases Tiera reported, however, were much larger than what Shin knew.

In addition, Tiera had received the largest among the boosts granted by the light all members had absorbed.

“That’s true. I wonder if we have been influenced somehow as well.”

“Schnee and the others can’t level up anymore after all. It’s not a bad effect though, so isn’t it fine like this? To become stronger at a faster rate than normal is a good thing, I think.”

Shin did not absorb the light, but he felt that Tiera’s absorption of one of the lights, despite her not being one of his support characters, must have had some meaning.

The world was infested with powerful monsters. There was nothing to lose in becoming stronger.

“Well, becoming stronger is a good thing, of course. It’s just a little scary that we don’t know what that was. I know it sounds ungrateful since I’m enjoying the bonuses that light granted me.”

“Hmm, judging from your words, haven’t you simply received the Ley lines’ blessing?”

Munehika, who had been silent until now, suddenly voiced her opinion.

“The Ley lines’ blessing?”

“Yes. Their size may vary, but Ley lines are spread throughout most of the world. People, monsters, plants, animals, all sorts of creatures... their magic power and things like fragments of their consciousness seep into those Ley lines. Maybe because of this, the so-called heroes or saviors of each species sometimes are granted boons by the Ley lines. We call that “Blessing of the Ley lines”.”

“Who knew something like that existed... but looking at Schnee and Shibaid, I can see that.”

Shin was surprised to learn something completely new to him. But he could agree with part of the explanation.

“I can see why too, related to master and the others, who are in a High Human’s service. I don’t understand why I would be blessed, though.”

“I do not know that either. As Kagutsuchi said, blessings are not given only following people’s will. Tiera, your species is Elf, thus animals’ and plants’ will might be related as well. It is not something bad. It is a precious blessing, it will not hurt you to accept it.”

“I understand. But in that case, I’d think Shin would have been blessed too.”

“In my case, being someone from the distant past, maybe I was grouped together with the other players?”

Shin knew that High Humans were partly treated as a myth, so he thought that he hadn’t been treated as an individual, or was outside the circle eligible for blessings. The definition of blessing was ambiguous too, so he decided not to think too deeply about it.

“OK, looks like we can’t take it easy anymore.”

Shin spoke looking forward, as to signal the end of the conversation. Tiera followed him, raised her head, then, dumbfounded, whispered.

“What is... that...?”

Before Tiera’s eyes flowed a stream of lava. The cave was wider still, so a path was present, but an even fiercer heat awaited Tiera and the party.

“If Shin hadn’t given us those bracelets... I get cold sweats just thinking about it.”

“Without fire resistance, just going closer to this would kill you.”

Tiera swallowed her breath, and Shin agreed with her statement. In the game era HP would just decrease at fixed intervals, something that seemed an extremely small obstacle now.

Around Shin and the group the temperature was kept at the level that would make one sweat a bit after doing some exercise.

Though, that was all due to the [Enra Bracelet]. The temperature reached by hot steam

was nothing compared to lava.

Shin knew well that they were proceeding at a distance that, in reality, would be prohibitive without heat-resisting clothing.

Once again, Shin felt how incredible items were.

“By the way, what would happen if we fell into the lava?”

The doubt suddenly surfaced in Shin’s mind. In the game, status permitting, it was possible to dive in poisonous swamps or lava pools, something absolutely impossible in reality.

“If we equipped gear protecting the whole body, we could move freely until the endurance points last, I think.”

“Wait a second, don’t tell me that someone tried it?”

Shin had just mumbled his doubt, but Schnee heard and replied about what would happen. Hearing the answer, Shin couldn’t help but being surprised at the recklessness of whoever provided this piece of information.

“That person was wearing full-body Legend-grade armor. Maybe because of the magic power, no lava penetrated inside the armor, apparently. It started melting after 30 minutes or so though.”

“Was that person alright?”

“It was a Chosen One with high defensive power, if I recall correctly. In your case, Shin, you’ll be OK even if it touches your skin, I think. After all, you have higher defense than a dragon with its scales.”

“Even if I know that it’d be OK, I definitely don’t want to try it.”

Shin shook his head firmly: touching lava with his bare hands was something he would never want to do.

At the same time, he thought that he was well beyond human limits. It wasn’t just a matter of high defense.

“Does that mean that Chosen Ones like us wouldn’t be cut even if sliced by a blade?”

Shin asked the question to Schnee as they were crossing the lava stream.

Ever since coming into that world, Shin hadn’t received any real damage. Even when he faced Girard, an attack pierced his armor and caused damage, but he hadn’t sustained any actual wounds.

“It depends, but generally that’s correct. Even if a blade is pressed against the skin, people of our level wouldn’t be injured by a normal blade. It wouldn’t even cut a little. If we did so with the intent of cutting, we would be able to, though.”

“Oh, so that’s why the needle pierced when I made the guild card.”

Shin remembered when he bled in order to create his guild card. If his high defensive power prevented him from being injured, a powerful weapon would be needed to make him spill blood.

“Well, let’s continue this conversation later. Looks like there’s a monster inside the lava.”

Shin detected a presence while walking over the lava and directed the party’s attention to it.

“Eh, are you serious...?”

Tiera’s question was born out of her difficulty of believing Shin’s words, as nothing but molten rocks floated before her.

“It’s probably protecting its body with magic power, or something similar. Monsters don’t always fit the “animal” definition, after all.”

Creatures that would never exist in reality or defy the laws of physics often appear in games. These monsters are born from the mysterious energy called “magic”.

Shin and Schnee are used to such beings, and did not show any particular surprise. The less knowledgeable and experienced Munechika and Tiera couldn’t help being somewhat nervous.

Part 2

“A monster dwelling in a liquid that melts even iron. I heard about such creatures from Kagutsuchi, but it is curious indeed.”

“This is nothing special, pay attention to the lava and it’s the same as any other monster out there. Besides, if it’s a fish type it’ll be really delicious.”

“Heh, I am relieved to hear that. I shall make sure to cut it ready to be served, then.”

With a small laugh, Munechika readied her blade.

Each party member proceeded forward, their weapons at the ready. After about 5 minutes, a fish fin-looking object emerged from the molten stream.

The object, which emitted a metal-like glimmer, was about 1 mel long.

“A Kiral Laava, huh. Judging from the fin, it’s probably 4 mels long. If it jumps in the air, it will shoot 【Fireball】 from its mouth, so be careful!”

Kiral Laava was an orca-type monster.

It attacked in mainly 3 patterns: tackles using its massive body, fang attacks, or fireballs. As it dwelt within lava, fire-elemental attacks had little effect and it was also resistant to physical attacks.

What made it most troublesome was the fact that it attacked in groups.

“There are 4 of them, I see. I’m going to lure them out, attack them then!”

Shibaid, the tank, swiftly attracted the Kiral Laavas’ attention with taunt skills.

2 of the 4 Kiral Laavas jumped in midair, while the other 2 charged towards Shibaid.

The 2 that jumped in midair, uncaring of the possibility of hitting their fellow monsters, shot 【Fireball】 at Shibaid.

“This much is nothing!”

Shibaid held the [Great Shell Shield of Collision] in front and ran forward towards the 【Fireball】 attacks and the Kiral Laavas. The very instant before clashing against the monsters, he activated the Shield-type martial skill 【Eclipse Fall】 .

An emerald green, 3-mels wide transparent shield was formed with [Great Shell Shield of Collision] at its center and blew away the charging Kiral Laavas as well as the fireballs.

Shibaid had the lowest AGI among all the support characters, but he was still faster than the average Chosen One. As the one tasked with stopping enemies, his STR was very high.

His body's build was good and, in addition, his main job was Holy Knight. No matter how huge the Kiral Laavas were, Shibaid would never lose in a clash against them.

The orca monsters were thus blown back, their boulder-like scales shattered to pieces.

The 2 monsters that had shot 【Fireball】 attacks were still descending and couldn't assist their companions.

“Yes, as expected.”

Being blown in midair, the monsters were completely open except the front, from where they could shoot 【Fireball】 . Not missing this opportunity to strike, Filma closed in to cut down the monsters still floating in midair.

Moments later, Munechika flashed the blade of the katana she wielded and, like Filma, cleaved the Kiral Laava in two with one slash.

The monsters sliced in two squirmed for a few seconds, but quickly stopped moving.

“The rest are fleeing, I see.”

Probably judging that they had no chances of winning against Shin's party after seeing their companions defeated so easily, the other 2 Kiral Laava disappeared into the lava stream.

Shin looked at their markers on the map: they were moving away, as to go far from the river.

“This river doesn’t have only one course then?”

“What do you mean?”

“The two monsters that fled just now were swimming in a place that clearly wasn’t this river. There’s probably a passage leading to some other location hidden by this lava stream.”

Shin answered Tiera’s question by explaining the Kiral Laavas’ movements.

“So that’s why they don’t come out. Swimming away inside that makes them really hard to chase down... not that I want to fight them.”

“After all, the monsters are usually hard to fight. I thought we would have to battle them until the end, but I guess that even at that level they run, huh.”

The Kiral Laava’s level was 500 on average.

At that level, as far as Shin knew, most monsters fought until the bitter end. He thought they would attack again, so their escape caught him by surprise.

“The less fighting, the better. We’re almost in the middle of the dungeon, the miasma’s effect is getting stronger too. Be careful everyone.”

“Yes, the real thing is starting now.”

After Munechika’s remark, Shin and the others focused anew.

They had all noticed how their surroundings changed as they proceeded through the dungeon. Unnatural black dots had started appearing on the rocks.

When Shin tried throwing a pebble at them, the pebble turned black the instant it struck the black dot, then shattered.

“They’re clearly tainted.”

“Yes, this aura is miasma, without a doubt.”

Munechika agreed to Shin’s assertion. Part of the dungeon turning black was one of the game’s unchanged features.

As they proceeded towards the depths of the dungeon, Shin's detection picked up monster presences yet again. The detected units were 6, but their movements were clearly erratic.

"There are monsters up ahead, but there's something odd about them."

"What do you mean?"

"Their presences get closer, then get farther again. I think that the monsters might be fighting among themselves."

"Hmm, monsters fighting monsters over territory is not that unusual, though."

Munechika casted her doubts after hearing Shin's explanation. Monsters also had enemies among their own, and sometimes would fight each other while ignoring the players.

"That is true, but..."

"No, monsters inside dungeons never fight among themselves, do they? The monsters that dwell inside dungeons, even if their forms are different, are said to be of the same tribe."

Schnee answered Munechika in place of Shin, who was at a loss for words.

Monsters only fought each other in the field outside. Monsters inside dungeons, different from the ones scouring the fields, were not hostile to other monsters.

Shin's knowledge, however, was limited to the game mechanics; he could not give a definite answer.

"Even species that battle each other outside cooperate inside dungeons. Considering this, that is an unusual phenomenon indeed."

"In any case, we will encounter them if we go on like this. Let's go see with our own eyes."

Shin's party proceeded while erasing their presence and gradually came to hear clashing noises. There was a boulder ideal to use as hiding spot, so they peeked forward from behind it.

“That’s...”

What they saw was a giant scorpion-like monster, with half of its body painted black, named Schuberc, and a creature that looked like several monsters forcefully fused together.

“That’s a Chimera Invader.”

The aberration born from monsters corrupted by miasma was the Chimera Invader.

Created from the fusion of monsters tainted by miasma, its horrific appearance was disliked by female players.

“What is that... supposed to be?”

“You know that monsters transform because of miasma, right?”

“Yes, I have heard as much from Kagutsuchi. It is my first time to see one in the flesh though.”

“That’s the fusion of such monsters. Though, I have no idea why it turned into a form that makes it harder to move.”

Chimera Invaders did not have a fixed form, but changed based on the fused monsters.

The Chimera Invader fighting against the Schuberc was mainly formed of Kiral Laavas; from the right side of its abdomen sprouted a Golem-like arm, next to its dorsal fin there was the face of a dog-like monster, snake tails poked out next to its mouth, 8 spider-like legs from the left side of its abdomen.

Its fusion was so chaotic it was almost impossible to describe.

The creature’s fighting style did not possess the slightest regularity.

It deftly jumped using the golem arm and spider legs, struck the Schuberc with the snake tails, spewed fire from the dog-like face, faked a tackle then punched with the golem arm... it was completely unpredictable.

The biggest problem was that every time the Chimera Invader struck, the miasma’s corruption on the Schuberc’s carapace increased in intensity. If things continued like

this, the Schuberc would also turn into an Invader and would be assimilated by the Chimera Invader.

“The more monsters it assimilates, the more the level and fighting power of the Chimera Invader increase.”

“Let’s get rid of it before it assimilates the Schuberc.”

The whole party nodded to Shin’s words and stepped forward.

First, Shibaid activated **【Eclipse Fall】** and charged towards the monsters.

The two beasts, which were locked in a clinch, were blown away together and forcefully separated.

“I’m going to suppress their movements. Munechika, the Schuberc is yours. Let’s take down the Chimera!”

As Shin gave his instructions, globes of light appeared around him. The light bullets shot at high speed crushed the Chimera Invader’s golem arm and ripped through its spider legs.

Twisting its body, the monster tried to distance itself from the group, but the light bullets that had initially missed performed sharp turns in midair and shot the beast down.

The Light-type magic skill Shin had unleashed, **【Ray Stinger】**, was originally anti-air magic. Hitting the Chimera Invader, which only flailed in one direction, was not difficult.

“Sssh!”

Munechika’s battle against the Schuberc was completely one-sided too.

There was a difference in level and stats between them, but more than anything the sharpness of the [Mikazuki Munechika – Shinuchi], as tempered by Shin, was something to behold.

Schuberc swung down its massive pincers, only to see them cut off by [Mikazuki Munechika – Shinuchi]. The katana’s cuts were so sharply clean, it was even possible

to see the cross-sections of the monster's insides.

"If I get used to this, I'll probably find my original weapon lacking."

Cleaving through the tail that had attempted a surprise strike from above, Munechika closed in on the Schuberc.

Insect-type monsters had high lifeforce. Simply cutting away parts of their body was not enough to weaken them.

The Schuberc came charging at Munechika, trying to blow her away.

Before its sturdy carapace-clad body could clash with Munechika's body however, her blade -unsheathed as she leaped in the air- sliced through the monster's head.

The Schuberc, now with half of its body cleaved in two, stopped completely after twitching for a few instants.

"Shin's group has finished too I see."

As Munechika turned around, Filma's [Red Moon]slashed through the Chimera Invader, pinned to the ground by the light bullets shot by Shin and Schnee.

"Hmm?"

Even if torn apart, however, the Chimera Invader did not die. Its abdomen, now split in two, squirmed forward and attacked Shin's group again.

"I was ready for this!"

Tiera had been warned that the Chimera wouldn't die easily and quickly struck down the right abdomen with a thunderclad arrow, as it leapt through the air avoiding the light bullets.

Her arrows, expressing how much stronger they had become since Balmel, caused the abdomen to explode as soon as they pierced it.

The remaining left abdomen was burned to cinders by Filma's follow-up attack.

As the Chimera Invader turned to dark dust in the air, the tension within Shin's group

slightly eased.

“Still as tough to kill as always I see. Anyway, your arrows’ power sure is something, Tiera. Its weak points should be only Light magic and Divine magic, I thought...?”

“Even if you ask me... for the record, I am barely capable of attaching skills to my shots. The lightning before was thanks to the bow you gave me, and Kagerou.”

Thanks to the boost granted by the light she absorbed, or maybe because of level-up bonuses, Tiera had learned several skills. However, her ability to attach magic power to her bow had not grown so conveniently.

The mystery of her high damage remained, but it was useful nonetheless.

“Anyway, from here onwards it will probably be infested with Invader-type monsters.”

“There are a lot of those, then... honestly speaking, they are pretty disgusting.”

Shin nodded to Tiera’s clear dislike of Invader-type monsters.

“Some change their forms even without being Chimeras. Plus, they become stronger and cause weapons to become worn more quickly... a bonus we really don’t need.”

While it was harder to notice with Ancient-grade weapons such as the ones Shin and his group had, Legend-grade weapons risked being consumed if these monsters were engaged in long battles.

“Munechika, do you know how far Yasutsuna still is?”

“There’s still some distance. Definitely in the lower area though.”

Kagutsuchi had told them how many floors the dungeon was supposed to have. Shin’s group was now in the floor acting as a border between the middle and lower area.

The miasma’s effects were apparently stronger in the lower area: as Shin’s group proceeded, all the monsters they faced were of the Invader type.

In some cases Chimera monsters appeared in groups, making their pace slower than what it was in the middle area.

“If we go on like this, it’ll be night when we arrive in the lower area. It might be dangerous to spend the night in an area where Chimeras appear frequently, so how about we return to the slightly safer middle area and rest there?”

“Agreed, our pace is extremely fast already. We don’t need to fret.”

Shin proposed to rest in the middle area, where the miasma’s influence was smaller; Munechika was the first to agree followed by everyone else.

The area that wasn’t subject to visible effects of the miasma was the upper one, but going all the way back there would consume too much time, so they decided to take a brief rest, with someone standing guard.

Even if physical abilities increase through level up, the mental side is different. Going without rest for extended periods of time would decrease concentration.

“I’ll activate 【Wall】 and 【Barrier】 just in case, so I think we will be alright. If anything happens, wake me up.”

“Understood. Take a good rest.”

“Unless something extraordinary happens, Shibaid and I can take care of anything in seconds.”

The shifts would be 2 hours long, with the first one being Shibaid and Filma. The next would be Shin and Schnee, then the last Munechika and Tiera.

Shin laid out some simple tents within the barrier skill’s area, where they would rest.

Munechika, being a weapon, did not particularly need to rest, but said she would contact Kagutsuchi during her rest time.

It happened 4 hours after the rest time started, during Munechika and Tiera’s shift.

“Lady Tiera, there is something I would like to ask you, if that is alright with you.”

“Me? Ehm, what is it?”

Munechika talked to Tiera after making sure that Shin and the others were sleeping.

Tiera had not the slightest clue about what Munechika would want to ask her, so she could only tilt her head with curiosity.

“Lady Tiera, you are not just a normal Elf, are you?”

“Eh...?”

Tiera found herself unable to answer Munechika’s question, as her body stiffened. Her reaction clearly showed that she felt those words could be true.

“From you, I feel energies different than your partner’s, the Gruefago Kagerou. One of those is something I know well, something close to the power of the Ley lines. I would assume that you are some sort of priestess? One with very high ability too.”

“.....”

Tiera remained silent to Munechika’s questions. What that silence meant was assent.

“To avoid any misunderstandings, let me say that I do not mean to interrogate you. I simply wanted to tell you that those like me, familiar with the power of the Ley lines, could detect that in you, that is all.”

“No, that’s all right. You asked when we were alone so that Shin and the others wouldn’t hear, right?”

“Correct. All I know about priestesses is what I heard from Kagutsuchi. But I understand that priestesses are worthy of admiration and respect, as I know that their existence is kept hidden.”

“...thank you very much. Outside my family, only master knows that I am a priestess.”

Tiera answered in a feeble voice, holding Kagerou -now in wolf cub mode- in her arms. In answer to his worried cries, Tiera caressed him gently.

“Well, I suppose you have your reasons and circumstances. For a priestess to leave the place where she should be and participate in battle is unthinkable, after all.”

“I do possess the abilities of a priestess, but strictly speaking am not one anymore.

Even using the 【Analyze】 Shin gave me to see my status, the Priestess job is not displayed anymore.”

Tiera spoke with a mixture of sadness and loneliness in her voice.

“Besides, someone else took my place. In the village, they probably think I’m already dead.”

“...I see. I apologize for making you recall such painful things.”

“No, I also thought I should say it. But I can’t just come out with it...”

Tiera herself thought that Shin and the others probably thought something was off with her. Her high growth at level up, skill acquisition, absorption of the Ley lines’ energy, the miasma-purifying effect attached to her arrows.

More than anything else, the fact that she controlled a Divine Beast, a creature which would collaborate with people, but never form a contract with them.

Someone legendary like Shin was an exception, but Tiera thought that she didn’t possess much power herself.

Kagerou said he wanted to repay her for the kindness received in his younger days, but Tiera felt that there was something else to it.

“I will keep what we talked about tonight within my heart. I understand it is not my place to say, but please do not torment yourself too much.”

“Yes, thank you very much.”

After Tiera’s words of gratitude, silence filled the surroundings. They exchanged small talk every now and then, until their shift ended too.

Part 3

The next morning, when all members awoke they ate a small meal and resumed their exploration of the dungeon. Since they already knew the route, they quickly arrived at the point they had stopped at the previous day.

Maybe because they had slain all monsters they encountered the day before, they did not find many this time.

“Good, we’re going to finish this today.”

Everyone nodded in agreement to Shin’s words.

Shin’s 【Magic Sonar】 , the same skill he had used during the exploration of the Summit Faction’s base, gradually filled the unexplored areas of the map. The skill’s range was reduced because of the miasma’s effects, but its waves of magical power did their job effectively.

The group proceeded while making sure that the map was being updated. Naturally, the Invader-type monsters roaming the dungeon would sometimes attack.

They were, however, struck down by Shin, Schnee, and Tiera’s magic and finished off by Filma, Shibaid, and Munechika’s attacks. Before this simple but overwhelming power, they were all crushed with barely any chance to resist.

As their opponents were often close to level 600, Tiera’s level increased in an interesting way today too.

“To think that I’d reach level 200... I’m starting to feel sorry towards the people that level up seriously...”

“Really? Yes, this looks a bit like power leveling, but you’re not leeching off us by any means, so I don’t think you should worry about it. You’re damaging the Chimeras without a doubt too, I mean you even felled one in a single blow just now. This might sound weird, but this is a good hunting area for you, Tiera.”

As Shin said, Tiera’s arrows were extremely effective against miasma-tainted monsters. The damage was considerable too, but also the fact that Invader-type monsters were paralyzed after Tiera’s arrows struck them, dulling their movements.

Against Chimeras and their unpredictable movements, Tiera's arrows were incredibly useful.

Even Shibaid, who had not spoken much since they entered the dungeon, mentioned how she was a true asset to their fighting capabilities.

"As Shin said, we are having an easier time thanks to lady Tiera. There is nothing you need to be concerned about."

"Er, thank you, very much."

As they descended further through the dungeon's lower area, the space became gradually narrower.

"Looks like Yasutsuna will be in the lower area's boss room, right?"

"Indeed. As we said before leaving, we also think that the possibility of Yasutsuna being in the deepest part of the dungeon is high. Even now that we are in the lower area, I feel its presence coming from below. I do think that prediction is correct."

Munehika agreed with Shin's thoughts as they walked through a corridor.

The "Depths of Hellfire" were structured like a reverse pyramid: the lowest floor consisted of just the boss' chamber.

Yasutsuna was far stronger than the dungeon's boss, so it would not be strange for it to be in place of the boss.

"Doesn't it feel like the miasma is growing thicker? I'm starting to feel kind of sick."

On their way down, only Tiera seemed to perceive a change in the miasma in the atmosphere.

"I can't feel any particular difference. But Tiera is sensitive to miasma, better use some countermeasure. Materialize this card from the ones I gave you."

During their exploration of the Summit Faction base too, Tiera had shown to be sensitive to things difficult to determine and identify, such as miasma and the voices of the dead.

Considering this, Shin pulled out a card from the item box and showed it to Tiera.

“Schnee and everyone else as well, please materialize one of these and swallow it. I don’t know if it will affect you Munechika, but try just in case. This allows you to act even within thick miasma for one hour. We don’t know what awaits us down here, so let’s take it regularly.”

What was materialized was a round white pill less than 1 centimeter in size.

Named “Miracle Drug of Holy Skies”, it was an essential item when exploring areas infected with miasma for an extended time.

Swallowing the pill prevents miasma-caused status ailments for 1 hour. Depending on its usage, it could also serve as a means of attack.

Shin had prepared it for added safety when he heard that the miasma was powerful enough to swallow even an Ancient-grade weapon.

“It’s incredible, I feel better already. Is this what you were throwing at the Chimeras?”

“Yeah. In case of emergency, just throw one of these at the enemy. If it’s an Invader-type, this pill alone can cause serious damage.”

Shin had prioritized making a large quantity of them, so he did not have time to test their effectiveness before: that’s why he tested them directly on Invader-type monsters.

Shin had a natural high resistance to miasma, so swallowing the Miracle Drug of Holy Skies wouldn’t change his condition much. But he confirmed with Schnee that the pill was effective, so he told Tiera to swallow it right away.

“This too is effective even on me. As lady Tiera said, incredible indeed.”

Munechika was even more surprised than Tiera. Her true form was a weapon, but she was subjected to the effects of miasma like any other person.

Swallowing the pill, however, allowed her to suppress such symptoms, just like the other members of the group.

“It is truly helpful to be able to fight without worrying about miasma after all.”

Munechika thought that depending on the situation she might not have been able to assist them in fighting, so she was relieved.

“I didn’t expect for it to affect you too, Munechika. Oh, looks like we reached our destination.”

Normally, Shin’s group would find stairs leading to the lower floor at this point.

The corridor they were following though, led to a giant door decorated with a painting of a large bird-type monster, probably Kagutsuchi.

Two candle stands were erected at the sides of the door: they had surely been burning for a long time, but black flames still danced on them.

Large gates were always found before boss chambers, like a sort of landmark. In game terms, it was a way to show that a powerful enemy awaited.

In the current real world though, it intimidated and pressured any visitors. It silently warned them that they needed to be prepared to die if they wanted to go past it.

“OK, I’m opening it.”

After making sure that everyone else nodded in response, Shin pushed the doors.

The thick door had some resistance at first, but after moving it a little it naturally opened completely. The scenery inside, accompanied by the doors’ metallic creaking sounds, slowly showed itself to the eyes of Shin and his group.

“What an impressive welcome.”

Before he activated **【Analyze】**, Shin noticed several shadows.

A pack of Ogres, all with bodies mostly painted black. Their appearances showed that they were not regular Ogres, but a mix of different species, such as High Ogres and Warrior Ogres.

Behind all the Ogres stood a unit completely different from the rest.

The first thing that came to Shin’s mind after seeing it was Black Oni.

It was twice the size of the other Ogres. Its torso was naked and adorned with powerful muscles which were like an armor protecting the monster.

Its body was fully tainted black with miasma: only its eyes shone bright red.

From the forehead of a face which could be described with the word Oni, the demon of Japanese folklore fame, sprouted a pair of horns.

The lower half of its body was covered by a yellow and black striped cloth.

The beast's single piece of clothing, reaching until its ankles, was ragged and ripped, maybe because of the miasma.

"...Shin, it's holding Yasutsuna in its right hand."

Munechika spoke while keeping her feelings suppressed, looking at the katana the monster was wielding in its right hand, swirling with a black aura.

"!?!"

Shin's eyes opened wide one instant, then his look became even sharper.

The katana's blade was severely damaged, even cracked in parts. Rust could be seen in the joint between the blade and the hilt, its decorations-which surely were a work of art-discolored and indistinguishable anymore.

Its state was so horrible that one wouldn't even wonder if it still cuts or not. Could it even be called a weapon now?

It was as good as dead as a katana. Its Ancient grade was the only thing that kept it from breaking completely.

"What is that...!? What the hell is that!?"

Deep, menacing words, very different from the usual, came out of Shin's mouth. He felt clearly what Munechika was feeling, as one of the Supreme Blades herself.

The hand holding Munechika's sword was slightly trembling.

Seeing her companion being treated that way would undoubtedly rouse her anger.

—— “Ogre Invader – Level 723”

【Analyze】 displayed the “Invader” word. Shin wasn’t really concerned with it until now, but this time it really grated his nerves.

Maybe it was because Shin knew that the katana had a consciousness, or maybe because of his contact with Munechika and the others. Shin himself was surprised at how much the sight of the ravaged [Dojigiri Yasutsuna] made him furious.

In the current world, It was the first time for Shin to see a weapon corrupted by miasma at this point.

He couldn’t explain why, however, the scenery before his eyes disgusted him so much.

As Shin’s party entered the room, the doors behind them closed. But neither Shin nor Munechika, nor anyone else, cared about something like that.

“I will kill the Ogre without breaking [Yasutsuna]. I’ve been in the rear guard until now, but I’m going forward this time.”

“Understood. I find that repugnant as well.”

“Definitely, it’s just disgusting.”

Shibaid and Filma replied to Shin’s announcement, spoken in an unusual tone of voice because of his anger.

Munechika, Tiera, and Schnee did not speak, but all shared the same sentiment.

“...I am thankful.”

“Don’t mention it. As a blacksmith, I cannot allow something like that. I don’t think I’ve ever felt so disgusted.”

As if corresponding to Shin’s thoughts, the blade of the katana he was wielding, [Moonless], emitted a dull glow.

“We’re going to take care of the other Ogres. Shin, lady Munechika, the boss is yours.”

Schnee told Shin and Munechika to go forward.

If it was just about defeating the boss, Schnee, Shibaid, Filma, anyone of them would have sufficed. Tiera too, with Kagerou's support, would have been able to damage it.

But that was not the most important part.

Defeating it was just a prerequisite. More importantly, facing that boss here and now was something Shin and Munechika had to do, as a blacksmith and as a sword, or so judged Schnee.

"Help it as soon as you can."

"Leave it to me!! Let's go, Munechika!"

"Yes! You shall taste the blade of Mikazuki Munechika!"

Shin and Munechika kicked the ground to jump high in the air towards the boss, which was standing idly behind the monsters' group.

They ignored the pack of Ogres in the middle of the room and attacked the boss right away.

"I don't know the state the weapon is in. Even if the boss attacks with it, don't clash with it too hard!"

"Understood!"

The very moment they landed, Shin attacked the monster's upper body, Munechika the lower body.

A simultaneous strike coming from both right and left.

An average Ogre would have been sliced in three without even being able to react, but this Ogre was the secret dungeon's boss.

The boss naturally reacted, parried Shin's [Moonless] with Yasutsuna while retreating, then dodged Munechika's [Mikazuki Munechika – Shinuchi] by raising its legs in the air.

Parrying Shin's blow in that state, however, was not a good idea.

[Yasutsuna] was pushed back, knocking the monster off balance, easy prey for [Mikazuki Munechika – Shinuchi]’s following attack.

“———!!”

The blade, aimed at the monster’s legs, changed direction in a sharp angle and cut through the Ogre’s left arm.

The boss’ left hand had been cut off, forcing it to retreat further while screaming in pain. Its right hand, though, still gripped [Yasutsuna] firmly.

Even if it was an Ancient-grade weapon, Shin didn’t know how much durability remained in it. Because of this, when the boss took a stance to parry with [Yasutsuna] Shin held back on his attack.

He had not inflicted great damage, but instead noticed something.

“This response... it still has some durability left.”

Maybe because of his blacksmith skills, Shin understood indirectly that [Yasutsuna] retained more durability than what its appearance suggested.

While its appearance made it seem like less than 10% remained, actually the katana still retained at least 30% of its durability.

“You can tell?”

“Yes, it’s still at around 30%. At the very least, it won’t break after just parrying an attack. If it’s necessary, we can cross swords with it without worrying.”

“It is a relief to hear that. But attacks from an enemy of this level will not hit, and I have no intention of spending time on fighting it.”

After understanding that [Yasutsuna]’s durability, their greatest concern, was not at risk, Shin and Munechika’s movements improved.

Even if they defeated the boss, but [Yasutsuna] broke, they didn’t know if they could fix it. They could not be cautious enough.

But things were different if the katana’s durability was not in danger.

The Ogre Invader became much more vigilant towards the two as it distanced itself from them. Was it because it felt that Shin and Munechika's hesitation had disappeared?

“Too slow!”

Shin and Munechika spoke at the same time.

Thanks to the Movement-type Martial skill **【Ground Shrink】**, the two warriors stepped right next to the boss in a flash.

Even if powered up by miasma, for Shin and Munechika, the Ogre Invader was a clearly inferior opponent. Without any reason to hesitate to attack, they would never struggle against it.

“Shah!”

Shin's blade struck the monster's left arm and leg...

“Fuuh!!”

Munechika's slash cut through the monster's right arm; all its limbs were thus cut off and blown away.



[Yasutsuna], finally freed, was still in midair when Munechika safely caught it.

“We have no use for you anymore. Die already!”

Its left leg cut off, the monster collapsed on the ground, but Shin’s blade struck relentlessly.

A white visual effect signaled the activation of a skill: three blade streaks were drawn in midair.

Katana-type Martial skill 【Continuous Flower Wheel】 .

An upward slash, a downward slash, another upward slash. The first slash originally served to knock the opponent’s weapon upwards, while the other two would strike directly. The boss was already off balance even before receiving the first blow, so it had no way of dodging any of Shin’s blows.

Shin’s slashes cut the monster’s head and torso in two.

No matter how much its Invader transformation progressed, being cut into so many pieces prevented it from recovering or resurrecting. As its HP reached 0, the monster’s body crumbled away in dust.

“The others are already finished I suppose?”

Even if they were fighting the boss, Shin and Munechika were not attacked by its Ogre minions. The reason was that Schnee and the others had already done away with all of them.

The floor of the boss’ chamber was littered with the rods and great swords previously held by the Ogre monsters.

“I see you have finished too. How is Yasutsuna’s condition?”

“Its durability is alright at least. But it’s corrupted by miasma, so I have to take a closer look before I can say if it’s safe or not.”

Shin answered Schnee and looked at [Yasutsuna]in Munechika’s arms. It happened the next instant.

“Kh... looks like it was too early to relax”

“!? Hey, what’s going on!?”

[Yasutsuna], now held by Munechika, emitted a turbid aura. The tainted substance wrapped around Munechika’s arm, as if it possessed a will of its own.

Munechika grimaced, as if she had received damage, and [Yasutsuna] fell from her hands.

“Ggh... the source of the miasma that corrupted the cave was Yasutsuna itself it seems.”

After these words, Munechika fell to her knees. Even if [Yasutsuna] was no longer in her hands, the miasma did not leave her arm.

“Wait just a second. I’ll dispel it right away.”

Shin took Munechika’s hand and activated the skill 【Dispel Omen】. It was a skill to purify miasma, necessary when facing Demons or visiting locations affected by miasma.

The transparent light that appeared at the same time of the skill’s activation caused the miasma enveloping Munechika’s arm to vanish. Even so, Munechika’s complexion was as sickly as before.

“How do you feel?”

“I apologize. I did not think that Yasutsuna had been so...”

Munechika was looking at [Yasutsuna], stabbing the ground before her. Its appearance was nothing but a katana on the verge of breaking.

As Shin touched [Yasutsuna]’s hilt, the turbid aura that attacked Munechika appeared again. Yet as it touched upon the gauntlets equipped by Shin, it disappeared as if blown away.

It was a secondary effect of the [Hades Gauntlets] Shin had equipped.

Powerful Ancient-grade equipment would not be tainted easily, even if it came into contact with miasma.

Ancient-grade gear, especially if crafted by a high-level blacksmith like Shin, could dispel miasma via simple contact if it was in perfect condition.

That is the reason why Shin could hold [Yasutsuna] without being affected in any way.

“As I expected, this equipment prevents it from affecting me. Then, how about this?”

Shin activated **【Dispel Omen】** on the [Yasutsuna] he was now holding. Doing so dispelled the miasma lingering in the katana’s blade.

Yet as Shin deactivated the skill, miasma started creeping out of the blade again.

The only part of the katana that did not leak miasma was where Shin was holding it, as it was under the effect of Shin’s [Hades Gauntlets].

If Shin released [Yasutsuna], the hilt would also probably start leaking miasma.

“It won’t work even if you keep casting skills? Is destroying it the only way out?”

“I don’t know. Either I keep casting **【Dispel Omen】** and the miasma disappears or we have to destroy [Yasutsuna] itself. Honestly speaking, I cannot decide.”

Even under Munechika’s imploring gaze, Shin did not answer with hopeful predictions or change the subject.

Different from blade and weapon analysis, miasma was a field he knew very little about. Shin had no idea about what move he could make.

Schnee was the same: the only way she could think of was purifying the miasma.

In the case that miasma kept appearing even if **【Dispel Omen】** was cast, they always stopped it by destroying the source of the miasma.

“Ehm, could I?”

“Tiera?”

Among the silence the group had fallen into, Tiera timidly raised her hand and spoke.

“Well, first I would like to confirm something with lady Munechika... this room is

directly above a Ley line, correct?"

"Hmm? Why do you... no, let us set that aside. Yes, we are above a Ley line, no mistake about it."

"Then it might be possible. I cannot say for sure though."

"Tiera?"

Tiera, after receiving Munechika's confirmation, moved closer to Shin and put her hand over his and [Yasutsuna].

"In my village, there is a method of purifying miasma handed down through the generations. Shin, please keep casting the skill, I'll try doing most of the work."

"Will you be okay?"

"Leave it to me... don't worry, this isn't my first time."

With a calm expression, Tiera nodded, a tinge of sadness in her eyes.

Her eyes looked straight at Shin.

"...got it. I believe in you. Munechika, what do you say?"

"She is trying to save one of my companions. There is no other way."

"Then it's decided. Schnee, everyone, please stay alert of the surroundings just in case."

"Understood."

Schnee and the other members readied their weapons and focused on the surroundings. Miasma could sometimes give birth to demons, so they could not afford to lower their guard.

"I'll start now."

Tiera whispered softly.

[Yasutsuna]'s purification thus began.

“—————. —————.”

What Shin heard was a clear and serene melody, a chant not spelt with words, rising from Tiera’s lips.

Its echo had a mysterious charm to it, enough to make Shin almost forget that they were in the depths of a dungeon.

As the melody started, Tiera’s body started glowing. Her black hair flowed as if blown by a breeze, brimming in a transparent light.

The light emanating from Tiera’s body affected Shin too, as she had put her hands over his. The transparent light started enveloping Shin’s body as well.

“What’s this...?”

Shin let out a small exclamation. Something warm and cold at the same time, an indescribable sensation, permeated him.

There was no change to his status, and excluding that curious sensation, nothing was happening to him.

“This is...”

What changed was [Yasutsuna]. The miasma leaking from the blade started squirming and writhing.

It really looked as if it was suffering, so Shin became more alert.

Coursing through Tiera and Shin’s hands, the light came into contact with the miasma.

It was rejected once, as if their contact caused a violent reaction, but the second time it overcame the miasma and enveloped the whole blade.

“—n—-. ———.”

As the light and the miasma clashed, the rhythm of the melody sang by Tiera was disturbed. Large sweatdrops formed on her forehead and her expression was twisted in pain.

But even so, Tiera continued to sing the melody.

“Hm...?”

Shin was thinking of a way he could help Tiera.

The suddenly, his eyesight shook violently.

A forest.

A human-like silhouette, collapsed on the ground.

Someone kneeling down next to it.

Ple... se.....!..... An...!!!..... se!! I'm... don'..... ave... me..... one!!

Broken images appeared before Shin's eyes, a voice of someone not present reached his ears.

The visions that appeared before his eyes were out of focus, the silhouettes that appeared in them dark and blurry.

The voice was disturbed by noises, all he could make out were broken pieces of words.

Shin was still confused by what was happening when, as abruptly as they began, the visions and sounds ended.

“Ugh...”

“Hey!”

Before he realized, the light had disappeared and Tiera collapsed.

Shin held her body from falling, instinctively.

Tiera, breathing heavily, slowly stood back up, supported by Shin's arms.

“Now it, should be alright, I think.”

“...so it looks like.”

The purification seemed to have been successful: even if Shin released [Yasutsuna], its blade did not exude miasma anymore.

Shin looked at Schnee and the others, wondering if they had experienced the same thing he did, but their expressions did not show any confusion. Did only he and Tiera see those visions?

“First of all, let’s grab Yasutsuna and exit the dungeon. We can’t talk at leisure here.”

“Ah, yes, no objections here. Will Yasutsuna be alright?”

“I cannot say anything before I take a closer look. It’s not broken and it doesn’t look like its durability decreased, so I want to say that it’s OK, but... I can’t yet.”

Munehika looked at [Yasutsuna]with concern.

Their objective was nonetheless achieved, so after making sure that there were no other sources of miasma in the boss’ chambers, Shin’s group exited the Depths of Hellfire.

Part 4

Shin and his party left the dungeon and returned to Fuji's shrine. Mitsuyo, who had been sitting waiting for them, came running as soon she saw the group.

"That was pretty quick. Did something happen?"

Maybe because she had noticed Munechika's sickly complexion, Mitsuyo seemed to think that some accident happened.

"Something happened, that's for sure. For starters, we recovered Yasutsuna."

Shin answered somewhat awkwardly, then showed [Yasutsuna], which had not been changed to a card. The miasma had vanished, but the katana's hilt and blade were still in terrible condition.

"What's... that...?"

The sight of [Yasutsuna] left Mitsuyo speechless.

"It was already in this state when we found it. The miasma has been purified, but I don't know what happened to its consciousness. Maybe Kagutsuchi could know something?"

"This way!"

Mitsuyo grabbed Shin's hand and ran off. Transparent teardrops flowed from her eyes.

As they moved from the dungeon portal to the crystallized Kagutsuchi's chambers, Yuzuha, who had probably detected their arrival from the sound of their footsteps, came running to meet them, baby Kagutsuchi and Tsunetsugu in tow.

"Lord Kagutsuchi, Yasutsuna is... Yasutsuna is..."

Mitsuyo ran up to Kagutsuchi, but words wouldn't leave her throat.

Looking at Mitsuyo's tearful expression, Kagutsuchi and Tsunetsugu's expressions both darkened.

“Calm down, Mitsuyo. What happened?”

“I will explain. Please look at this first.”

Shin came forward from behind Mitsuyo and showed [Yasutsuna].

“I see, so this is how it is.”

“Pii...”

“Kuu, all worn out.”

They all understood right away the reason why Mitsuyo was crying.

For Mitsuyo and Tsunetsugu, Yasutsuna was one of their few brethren. Seeing it in such a state was more than enough cause to become emotional.

“I don’t know in what state Yasutsuna’s consciousness could be right now. I thought that maybe Kagutsuchi could know.”

“Pii!”

“He says he wants you to show him the katana closely. Right, please place it on that pedestal there.”

Tsunetsugu translated Kagutsuchi’s message. After Shin did as he was told, Kagutsuchi touched the blade with its small wings.

“Piyo!... pii.”

“Is that really so!? No, but at least there is still hope...”

“...”

Kagutsuchi was quiet for several minutes, then cried loudly. The words Tsunetsugu spoke in reaction contained both relief and discouragement. Mitsuyo, eyes looking down to the ground, was silent.

“Yuzuha, what did it say?”

“It’s very, exhausted. Like this, the consciousness will, fade away. But there is still, a way.”

“And what is this way?”

“...another one. With a container to transfer its consciousness to, it could be saved.”

Tsunetsugu spoke in Yuzuha’s place. The consciousness hosted within the weapon should be able to transfer itself.

“Another one? Aah, so that’s wha—-”

“Please!! Give us your [Dojigiri Yasutsuna]!!”

Tsunetsugu seemed to be uncertain about making the request or not, but Mitsuyo shouted in his place.

She placed her hands on the ground and lowered her head, prostrating towards Shin.

“Wait, what are you doing!? I knew that you’d ask me to give it to you! I’d never say no in a situation like this!”

Shin spoke while urging Mitsuyo to raise her head.

“But Ancient-grade weapons are rare items that could be impossible to find anymore. A blacksmith like you surely knows how much they are worth. Even so, you would give it away?”

Mitsuyo was aware how much Ancient-grade weapons were worth. She thought that no samurai or blacksmith would ever part ways with one.

“I know that it’s precious. But honestly, right now I’m using it only as a collector’s item. Besides, I’m someone who can reinforce [Mikazuki Masamune], not your average blacksmith... if I need an Ancient-grade weapon, I can just forge myself a new one. I forged this one too, you know?”

Shin talked while pointing at the weapon he had at his waist. Resting in its sheath was a genuine Ancient-grade katana, [Moonless].

“If possible, let us do it right away. Please look and see if you can.”

Shin put his materialized [Dojigiri Yasutsuna] on the pedestal where he had placed Yasutsuna.

The baby Kagutsuchi already started spreading its wings.

“Pii...”

Kagutsuchi carefully examined the two blades for several minutes, then cried softly and shook its head. Shin understood what it meant even without Mitsuyo’s translation.

“No!! But why!?”

“Piyo...”

“How can this be...”

Baby Kagutsuchi said something else, and both Mitsuyo and Tsunetsugu lowered their heads.

“What did Kagutsuchi say?”

Looking at Kagutsuchi’s gestures, anyone would have understood that Shin’s [Dojigiri Yasutsuna] couldn’t be used. The reason was still unknown though.

“This katana is filled with your magic power, so it apparently can’t be used as a container. Like Munechika, its original body is separate, so the only thing possible is transferring its consciousness for a time...”

“I see. So what we would need is a [Dojigiri Yasutsuna] without anything unnecessary mixed in it, right?”

“Yes, exactly... but where could we find something like that!?”

Mitsuyo, unable to restrain herself, struck the pedestal. Maybe because of her power, the struck pedestal crumbled.

Only part of the pedestal crumbled, so Yasutsuna was still safe. She had not lost control at the point of endangering it too.

“Shin, can’t anything be done?”

The question had come from Tiera. Shin turned towards her, to find Schnee and the others looking at Shin too.

“...there is one thing, that could be attempted.”

“Eh?”

In response to Shin’s words, Mitsuyo let out a rather dazed reaction. All present eyes focused on Shin and his serious expression.

Then, Shin spoke clearly.

“To forge another [Dojigiri Yasutsuna].”

“You can do something like that?”

Tsunetsugu was surprised by Shin’s words, but couldn’t hide the skepticism in his eyes. Creating Ancient-grade weapons was truly difficult after all, that’s why they were so precious and rare.

“Honestly speaking, I am not completely confident. [Dojigiri Yasutsuna] is an event-only item, so its creation recipe doesn’t exist. So I have to start from zero and do trial & error from there. But I have recipes for other Ancient-grade weapons, which I can use as reference; it should help things to a point. Moreover, excluding the fact that it’s filled with my magic power, we have the real thing here. If I analyze this, I should be able to forge something similar right away.”

During the time he was holding Yasutsuna, Shin had already analyzed its composition to a degree.

As he had perceived Yasutsuna’s remaining durability just by clashing against it, until now phenomena unexplainable only with the words “it’s thanks to the skills” had happened, time and again.

Shin wondered what the reason could be, but there was no point in worrying about that now.

“This is my first time, so I don’t know how much time it could take. First, give me a few days for analysis and trial creation.”

“We can’t be of assistance to you for that, so I suppose we will wait while thinking of any ideas.”

“Indeed, we are not weapon specialists, we wouldn’t know what could be useful after all.”

Shin proceeded to materialize Tsuki no Hokora right away and go to the smithy.

Filma and the others, while looking for anything that could prove useful, stood guard at Fuji and its surroundings alongside Mitsuyo and Tsunetsugu.

Schnee instead set out with Tiera for some special training.

“Well then, let us start from grasping your physical abilities, improved by the recent level ups. It will be better to examine your skills, yes?”

“Er... well, m-master, I am sure I could do that by myself, there is no need for you to bother...”

Tiera slowly backed from Schnee while saying this. The sweat forming on her forehead clearly showed her current state of mind.

“What are you saying now? There are many things that need to be ascertained. Let us start with a simple sparring match.”

“Eeek!! Master, wait!! Please waaaaaiitttt...”

Tiera’s voice trailed as she was dragged away. Shin and the others silently prayed in their hearts for her safe return.



“Time to start, then.”

Shin was in the smithy and started with Yasutsuna’s analysis.

First he detached the blade from the hilt, separating them. Then, with a small palm-sized hammer, gently struck the blade. High-pitched metallic sounds rang through the smithy. After hearing the sound resounding through his ears, Shin proceeded to the next activity.

He extracted several ingots from the item box, putting them close to [Dojigiri Yasutsuna], one after the other. Some of the ingots sparkled when close to the katana.

“No durability recovery made me suspicious but as I thought, there really is a small ratio of Scarletite.”

The sparkle of the ingots allowed Shin to know what minerals were used in the blade and their approximate quantity. Finally, he placed [Dojigiri Yasutsuna] on his hands and closed his eyes.

This series of actions, unchanged from the game era, allowed one to obtain a creation recipe.

There were several ways to acquire a weapon recipe: the main methods were buying it, obtaining it from someone, finding it in a dungeon treasure chest, or analyzing the weapon to create it by oneself.

Mysteriously enough, as Shin closed his eyes the weapon's composition and materials gradually appeared in his mind. In the game era, the recipe would have appeared before his eyes, so it seems that things had changed somewhat.

“Hmm, it's still full of holes. Though understanding 60% of an Ancient-grade weapon's recipe so quickly is a success in itself I suppose.”

Analyzing a weapon can not provide a complete recipe. The recipe's holes need to be filled through trial & error.

It's a long, grueling task, which requires the patience of repeating the same steps many times and the financial leeway of using up many items and precious minerals while looking for the correct ingredients' ratio.

“Orichalcum... 60%... no, 62% maybe? Adamantine is... 20%... no, 30... change the values and...”

Shin was throwing ingot after ingot in the furnace, mumbling to himself in the process.

The minerals used were created in Tsuki no Hokora's generator. The ingots in the item box were permeated with Shin's magic power, so they could not be used.

Shin kept following the recipe, filling its holes with his intuition and experience.

Two hours after starting, he finally reached the last step before completion, the final stage.

Shin materialized a [Drop of Erathem] from the item box. The gemstone, transparent yet shining with the seven colors of the rainbow, appeared in Shin's hand.

"As I thought, swords and katana need a coating treatment."

The [Drop of Erathem] was an indispensable item when creating Ancient-grade weapons. Depending on the treatment used on it, the weapon's status changed.

An external coating would make the weapon physical-focused, using it as core or center would make it magic-focused, if it was melted with the other ingredients the weapon would turn out balanced between both.

Shin's [Moonless] and Schnee's [Blue Moon] were balanced, while Filma's [Red Moon] and Shibaid's [Placid Moon] were physical-focused.

Shin submerged the [Drop of Erathem] in a special liquid. As he did, the [Drop of Erathem] melted within the liquid, which assumed rainbow-like colors.

"...looks like it's working fine."

After saying this, Shin took the completed blade and soaked it into the liquid. The liquid's sparkle changed, as if absorbed by the blade: soon after, it returned to its original color.

After confirming that the sparkle had vanished, Shin removed the blade from the liquid and wiped it with a cloth.

As if tempered by this action, the blade now shone with a dull sparkle.

The first test creation had been completed.

"...no good."

Shin looked at the blade and let out a sigh. As to confirm his words, the name displayed by **【Analyze】** was [Dojigiri Yasutsuna – Dull].

He had followed the recipe, so it was at least recognized as a Yasutsuna. But the word

“Dull” after it negated everything else.

“Well, it’s to be expected for the first test to go like this... hmm? The door’s open!”

The knock at the door came with perfect timing. The door between the smithy and the residential space wasn’t locked, so after Shin’s words the door slowly opened.

Then Mitsuyo came inside.

“...did something happen to Yasutsuna?”

“That’s not it, don’t worry. Kagutsuchi said it would last for at least a month too.”

Shin was relieved to hear those words. Thinking that it would be best to start working as soon as possible, he had not confirmed how much time he had.

“I see. So do you need something?”

“Yes, I didn’t want to bother, but... is work going well?”

“I’m at around 60% for now. I have a general idea now, so all that’s left is minor adjustments. Though, that’s what takes the most time.”

What mineral was used, and in what quantity. Adjusting this was the most complex part.

Regarding the crafting process, weapons of the same type shared many similar points. It was thus much quicker than finding the correct ratio of used minerals.

“I will definitely craft it within the allotted time. So please give me a little more time.”

Shin did not actually know if it was possible to re-create the same weapon in this world. Even so, he made his statement. It was to make Mitsuyo feel better and also a little for his own pride.

“...okay, I won’t doubt you anymore. I’m going then.”

Mitsuyo turned around and put a hand on the handle of the smithy’s door. Her expression had no trace of the mistrust she felt at the time of their first meeting.

Just before closing the door behind her, Mitsuyo turned around and whispered softly.

“Do... do your best.”

The door closed as Mitsuyo’s whisper trailed off.

Shin had already turned his eyes back to test creation #1, so maybe she thought he hadn’t noticed.

The smithy, however, was not particularly noisy. The words of encouragement whispered by Mitsuyo duly reached Shin’s ears.

“...let’s do this.”

Feeling even more eager than before, Shin first melted test creation #1 in the furnace.

The special furnace built in the Tsuki no Hokora melted the weapon, which despite being a test creation, was still an Ancient-grade one, and returned the materials used in the craft as ingots.

Only one third of the materials used could be retrieved, but it was still better than nothing. The item box and Tsuki no Hokora’s warehouse still contained a great quantity of materials, but Shin had no idea when they could re-stock them.

Crafting test creations required large quantities of materials. Repeating to himself to save as many as possible, he once again took ingots in hand, to craft the next katana.

He finally succeeded in re-creating [Dojigiri Yasutsuna] two weeks later.

“I... I did it.”

After a never-ending succession of trial creations, Shin finally succeeded in creating a satisfying result. He hadn’t received Kagutsuchi’s confirmation yet, but Shin’s intuition told him that it was perfect.

If someone unaware of the circumstances saw this silhouette, laughing holding a katana up high, they would surely think Shin was at its mental limits though.

“Ehm, are you alright...?”

“Hahaha, I’m so sleepy I could die...”

Schnee had come to check on him, at the best time, and voiced her worry. Shin then changed from laughing eerily to wobbling, unsteady on his feet.

Bags were clearly visible under his eyes; he had been pushing himself as much as he could.

“First, show this to Kagutsuchi. It should, work out.”

“Understood. I understand very well, so please rest!”

Schnee accepted [Dojigiri Yasutsuna], but couldn’t bear watching Shin like that and urged him to rest. Maybe because of her words, or because the tension within him had eased after completing [Dojigiri Yasutsuna], Shin fell asleep instantly.

“Shin, you really work too hard...”

It wasn’t clear if Schnee’s whisper had reached Shin’s ears or not.

His head buried in Schnee’s chest, who had quickly moved closer to support him, Shin was already sleeping peacefully. He had kept crafting, neglecting to eat and sleep, so he was not likely to wake up soon.

“...good night.”

With a small smile, Schnee stood there for a while, affectionately embracing Shin.

Part 5

“Hngh...?”

Feeling the warmth of sunlight, Shin opened his eyes. He understood right away that he was in his room, inside of Tsuki no Hokora.

As he pulled himself up, he noticed something silver next to him.

“Schnee... wait, why?”

Seeing Schnee, sleeping while lying on the bed, fully woke up Shin.

His memories before falling asleep were hazy. He remembered completing [Dojigiri Yasutsuna], but he couldn't remember what happened after. He only remembered the feeling of being buried in something soft.

After a few minutes of racking his brain, he managed to recall having entrusted the katana to Schnee.

“What happened then?”

He was concerned whether [Dojigiri Yasutsuna] could be used as a container. Shin's senses deemed it perfect, but he couldn't be sure unless Kagutsuchi confirmed it.

As there was no other way, he decided to wake Schnee and ask her.

“Schnee, wake up, Schnee.”

“Hn... n? ——!?”

Schnee woke up as Shin called her name and shook her shoulders. She emitted a half-asleep mumble at first, but after noticing Shin was awake she sprang up to her feet.

“Ah, er... how are you feeling!?”

“Just fine, so please calm down. How long was I asleep?”

Staying in the smithy for a long time, Shin had lost track of time. Gradually, he wasn't able to tell if it was morning, day, evening, or night anymore.

“Let’s see, you have been sleeping since yesterday morning, so one full day, I’d say. Kagutsuchi said that the katana you made can be used as a container. They should already be starting the transfer of consciousness.”

“I see... aaah, that was hard!”

With a big sigh, Shin dropped back down on the bed.

Thanks to Schnee telling him what he wanted to know, Shin felt as if a large weight had been removed from his shoulders. As he was now, he couldn’t craft a better version of that katana.

Focusing so completely on blacksmithing made him realize that there were parts of the blacksmith skill that he hadn’t completely mastered.

“It’s just time for breakfast. Will you eat too?”

“That’s fantastic. I’m actually starving.”

Shin nodded while passing a hand over his stomach.

He hadn’t noticed how empty his stomach was while crafting, but now hunger was attacking him in full force. His stomach would start growling very soon.

Shin and Schnee moved to the living room and found Mitsuyo putting plates on the table. As her eyes met Shin’s, she looked away for some reason.

“Er... good morning... right?”

“Yes, that’s right—good morning.”

After that curt greeting, Mitsuyo disappeared into the kitchen. Shin’s head was full of question marks because of this reaction.

“Isn’t she pretty different than the usual?”

“Is she? To us, it doesn’t look like she changed much though.”

Schnee tilted her head to the side, not understanding what Shin could be referring to.

“Ah, Shin! Did you rest enough?”

As Mitsuyo left the room, Tiera came into the living room from the kitchen. The plates she was carrying contained bacon and scrambled eggs.

“Yes, I’m fine. I don’t see Shibaid and the others, though—”

“They’re with Kagutsuchi, to see the consciousness transfer process. Mitsuyo is helping with preparing breakfast. They should finish any moment, I think.”

Shin asked while looking around the living room and Tiera replied. She then added that Yuzuha was assisting the process, so she was with them too.

“I see. I’m sorry for having you do everything here, but can I go there too?”

“It’ll be fine if Mitsuyo helps.”

“I’ll take Shin there then.”

Shin and Schnee headed to Fuji’s shrine, as Tiera saw them off with a smile.

After crossing several forks in the path inside the shrine, they arrived in a room roughly 20 square mel large.

On the pedestal in the center of the room lay two [Dojigiri Yasutsuna]; the one Shin’s party had recovered from the dungeon and the one he crafted.

Baby Kagutsuchi and Yuzuha were on the pedestal too. Around the pedestal stood Filma, Shibaid, Munechika and Tsunetsugu, silently observing the process.

“Piyo——-!!!”

The process seemed to be reaching its conclusion. As baby Kagutsuchi cried loudly, a faint light rose from the tattered [Dojigiri Yasutsuna]. As the small light left, the katana quickly deteriorated and turned into a lump of iron, as if the flow of time around it had suddenly accelerated.

The light slowly floated in midair and was gradually absorbed by the [Dojigiri Yasutsuna] Shin had crafted.

“Piii—-yo—-”

As the light was fully absorbed by the new katana, Kagutsuchi lay down, visibly exhausted. Its ball-like fluffy body was rolling back and forth on the pedestal.

“Kuu, you worked hard.”

As to praise it for a job well done, Yuzuha supported Kagutsuchi’s body to prevent it from rolling around. They didn’t appear to be on especially good terms before, but maybe they found something in common.

“Thus, was it a success?”

“Pii...”

Just as Kagutsuchi cried in reply to Tsunetsugu’s question, something changed.

The new [Dojigiri Yasutsuna] rose in midair and shining with light. As the light dissipated, a black-haired young man in armor appeared in its place, with [Dojigiri Yasutsuna] hanging at his waist.

The handsome young man and his straight, proud posture exuded the atmosphere of a natural born warrior.

“Yasutsuna!!”

“...hm? Munechika and Tsunetsugu? This is... hm, who are those people? What happened to lord Kagutsuchi?”

The young man Yasutsuna opened his eyes after hearing Munechika’s call. He seemed to be perfectly conscious. After confirming Munechika and Tsunetsugu’s presence, he cast a sharp glance in the direction of Shin’s group.

His worry about Kagutsuchi signified that his memories, up until being swallowed by miasma, were intact too.

“Calm down, Yasutsuna. These people are our saviors, they put forth their utmost efforts to save you.”

While calming Yasutsuna down, Munechika explained how Shin’s group explored the

dungeon to retrieve him, how Shin attempted and succeeded in crafting an Ancient-grade weapon to save him.

“Is that true!? I might have been ignorant of it all, but how could I act so disrespectfully to my saviors! My deepest apologies...!”

After hearing the explanation, Yasutsuna bowed his head energetically. Maybe a symbol of his serious personality, his body was angled in a perfect 90 degrees bow.

“Lord Shin, Lady Schnee, Lady Filma, Lord Shibaid, noble divine beasts. I offer you my most heartfelt gratitude for assisting me and my fellows in this endeavor. If you were ever in need of my strength, please do not hesitate to say the word.”

Yasutsuna spoke fervently, his head still bowed.

At that same time, Tiera and Mitsuyo entered the room.

“I see everything went well, I’m relieved.”

“...good grief, don’t make people worry like that.”

The sight of the young man she had not seen before made Tiera realize that Kagutsuchi’s process had succeeded. Next to her, a sullen-looking Mitsuyo let her sharp tongue loose.

“I am sorry, Mitsuyo. I am perfectly fine now. You are lady Tiera I suppose. You have my gratitude for everything you have done for us.”

“I am just glad you are safe and sound.”

Yasutsuna spoke to both newcomers with a smile. He had heard all the names of the members of Shin’s group, so by elimination, he had guessed that the person next to Mitsuyo was Tiera.

“By the way, Munechika, I don’t see Kunitsuna.”

“Because Kunitsuna is not here. I don’t know if you remember, but you two were swallowed by miasma. We’re going to go rescue Kunitsuna next.”

“...is that so. That time...”

Apparently, Yasutsuna still retained memories of that moment. He then spoke with a saddened expression.

“Is there anything I can do?”

“Do not fret. You have just transferred to a new body, you surely are not familiar with it yet. You have to start from mastering your new body.”

Yasutsuna offered to help, but Tsunetsugu dissuaded him. Having just transferred his consciousness, he couldn't move his body as freely as before yet. Tsunetsugu related Kagutsuchi's message, that he needed time to familiarize himself with it.

“Hmm, it is true that it still feels unnatural. I suppose I would weigh you down if I came with you as I am now.”

“There's nothing to worry about. I'm going with them next time.”

Mitsuyo's announcement was followed by Yasutsuna's dejection.

“What are you saying? The one going will be me again, obviously.”

“Munechika, you touched Yasutsuna when he was still tainted by the miasma and are not in your best condition, right? We know that my [Odent Mitsuyo] can be reinforced too, so I will go.”

Mitsuyo's question to Shin a few days before had been caused by her consideration of the possible effects of miasma.

She knew that miasma could taint weapons, so she had been waiting outside the dungeon in case something happened to Munechika and she had to be replaced.

“Kh, now you said it...”

“In that case, this old man will...”

“You stay quiet, Tsunetsugu.”

“My my, they can't take a joke, can they?”

Tsunetsugu's proposal was met by razor-sharp looks from the two, which gave him

cold sweats. Taking a couple steps away from them, he mumbled “S-So scary!”.

“Er... Kagutsuchi seems pretty tired too, why don’t we go eat for now?”

Shin’s proposal directed the group’s eyes to Kagutsuchi, lying on the pedestal as before. They couldn’t just leave it there, so they decided to continue the conversation after breakfast.

Tiera had been a little intimidated by Munechika and Mitsuyo’s aura though.

“So, which one will it be?”

After breakfast, the two finished their discussion and went to see Shin. Though, looking at Munechika’s regretful expression and Mitsuyo’s beaming smile, already gave away the answer.

“I’m going. I’m sorry for my impudence, but I would like you to reinforce [Odentia].”

Mitsuyo’s expression turned serious as she made her request, her head low.

Munechika was still slightly affected by the miasma, but if she transferred her consciousness to [Mikazuki Munechika – Shinuchi], Munechika would be even stronger than before; in addition, Tsunetsugu – Fuji’s most powerful warrior – was still present. Now that Yasutsuna was back too, Fuji would have been safe even without Mitsuyo.

“Got it. I more or less grasped how to do it thanks to Munechika, so just wait a while.”

Shin did not have any objections about reinforcing [Odentia] either. He proceeded straight to the smithy to begin the reinforcement.

Mitsuyo transferred her consciousness to the [Odentia] now in its Shinuchi form.

Mitsuyo, enveloped by light, took human form again. She appeared to have grown a bit.

Her hair was now tied in a ponytail, her appearance resembling a young lady who still retained traces of childishness but was one step from becoming an adult. Depending on her behavior, the impression she gave could change completely.

“W, why...”

Mitsuyo, however, had not grown as much as she hoped. With a hand over her chest, she seemed to be conflicted.

Shin’s ears caught the words she was mumbling to herself: “It’s bigger, sure... it’s bigger, sure, but...!”

Maybe because of her physical growth, her armor had grown in size as well, its design changed too.

Munechika’s armor was very practical, one a general of the Japanese middle ages would wear; in contrast, Mitsuyo was something closer to the cosplay one could find at a convention.

The upper half of the body was sturdily protected, but the lower half was something akin to a skirt; her greaves guarded only her shins and knees. Her rather long socks extended just above her knees, thus charmingly showing her thighs.

“Let me say this to avoid any misunderstandings. I didn’t design your appearance or design of your armor, okay?”

“Uuh... I know that!! My abilities have definitely increased, I’m really thankful! Thank you very very much!”

Shin couldn’t help a wry laugh after Mitsuyo’s somewhat desperate words of gratitude. He then left the smithy and headed to Tsuki no Hokora, trying to calm Mitsuyo down as they went to join Schnee and the others.

“Hmm, I see everything went well.”

“I see, Mitsuyo changed just like Munechika did.”

Tsunetsugu and Yasutsuna commented on the sight of the grown Mitsuyo. The preparations seemed to be already complete.

“I suppose you expected something different, did you Mitsuyo? I have to say, your armor’s shape changed very much.”

“The childishness that bothered her seems to be gone, so I do think what you said isn’t

warranted, lord Tsunetsugu. Hmm, your armor certainly became very... interesting.”

“I didn’t think that I’d become like this either, my legs exposed and all!!”

Mitsuyo noticed that her companions were looking at her legs and tried to hide them as much as possible by stretching the cloth.

Her cheeks were flushed out of embarrassment.

“But is that not a good result? Even without the adult charms Munechika possesses, with that appearance you will surely attract sir Shin’s att—whoops!”

Mitsuyo’s [Odenta] was swung before Tsunetsugu could finish the sentence.

“Tsunetsugu, what might you be saying, all of a sudden?”

“Just a joke, dear. You look very different from before, now sir Shin surely won’t think of you as a child.”

“...I’m sorry, Yasutsuna. I leave the protection of Fuji to you and Munechika.”

“Whoa!? M-Mitsuyo, please calm down!! I apologize, lord Shin. Could you please assist me in soothing her!?”

Mitsuyo’s face had completely lost all expression after Tsunetsugu’s repeated jest. Yasutsuna, who was next to her, hurriedly pleaded for Shin’s assistance.

Mitsuyo’s eyes did not show the slightest hint that she was joking, so Shin grabbed her from behind to restrict her movements.

“Wait wait wait!! Don’t go attacking our biggest defense here!”

“Kh, let me go, Shin!! I can’t cut Tsunetsugu down like this!!”

“You can’t cut him down anyway!”

“There are things you can say and things you cannot... wait, where are you touching!?”

“Whoa!?”

Shin was focused on trying to calm Mitsuyo down, but his face was suddenly attacked by her cranium.

“E-even if I’m wearing armor, don’t just go and touch a woman’s chest!!”

Shin backed away in a hurry, as Mitsuyo shouted at him, her arms crossed on her chest.

Shin didn’t have the slightest intention of doing that. Touching her chest over the armor wouldn’t have made him feel the slightest sensation, as he almost wanted to point out.

“What exactly are you doing?”

“That’s what I want to know too…”

Shin could not find any other answer to Schnee’s weary question.

After the commotion was finally resolved, The group descended from Fuji, sent off by Kagutsuchi, Tsunetsugu, Yasutsuna, and Munechika.



Once the group passed the forest and reached a road large enough for carriages, Shin materialized their horse carriage from the item box.

They then headed due north, relying on Mitsuyo’s detection ability.

Yasutsuna had been found very close, in Fuji’s secret dungeon. However, according to Munechika and Mitsuyo, things were different for Kunitsuna.

“It’s getting cold.”

“That’s right. The nights have been getting rather cold.”

Tiera and Shin remarked at how the temperature had dropped as they headed north. Fuji’s shrine, despite being on top of the mountain, was not too cold.

“I guess it’s similar to Tohoku or Hokkaido.”

“Tohhok? Hokado? What are you talking about?”

Mitsuyo had heard the words mumbled by Shin, so she inquired their meaning as she was looking at the scenery. Tiera also looked towards Shin.

“They’re places in the island country where I used to be. It gets colder as you go north and warmer as you go south. It’s a country similar to Hinomoto.”

He would be troubled by further questions, so Shin gave a very general description of Japan. He added that he didn’t know exactly where it was, to sway the conversation.

“I’ve heard that Hinomoto gets colder as you go north and warmer as you go south, yes. I just heard though, I’ve never seen it with my own eyes.”

Mitsuyo told how most things she knew came from Kagutsuchi’s knowledge. Being bound to a specific area meant that she couldn’t travel freely.

“I want to see that snow you talked about too. By the way, master’s false name is Yuki, a word for snow, right? Is there some connection?”

As if she had suddenly recalled something, Tiera asked her question.

“The name Schnee comes from a word that means “snow” too. I’m not sure of the exact origin though.*”

Shin had not explained to Tiera in detail about support characters, so he answered as if he had heard it from Schnee.

As he answered, Shin noticed how Schnee, who was sitting on the coachman’s seat, reacted through her ears perking up every now and then. He and Tiera were inside the carriage, so their voices would surely reach Schnee’s ears.

Noticing Schnee’s reactions sparked a flame of trickery in Shin’s heart.

“So that’s the reason why master often uses ice magic?”

“She started by training in water magic, which is connected to ice, and lightning magic, after all. Raizar also comes from a word meaning “thunder” it seems. I know it’s weird for me to say it, but isn’t it a beautiful name? I think it matches the color of her hair and eyes.”

Shin glanced towards Schnee as he answered Tiera’s question. Her ears had stopped

moving, but in exchange had turned bright red all the way to the tips.

“That’s true. I think it’s wonderful to have a name with such meaning.”

Tiera was facing towards Shin, so she hadn’t noticed the change in Schnee’s condition; while slightly puzzled at the grin on his face, she agreed with him.

“Hmph”

“Heh...”

The other party members showed different reactions to the scene.

Expressing frustration after understanding what Shin was looking at was Mitsuyo, her consciousness transferred into the newly crafted [Odentia Mitsuyo – Shinuchi]. Her expression clearly showed how she found the situation quite unpleasant.

In contrast, Filma was thoroughly enjoying it all.

She was sitting next to Schnee and fully understood Shin’s intentions; after he finished talking, she gave him a thumbs up, making sure only he could see it.

Shibaid was watching the whole scene with a somewhat jaded expression: finally Yuzuha, her ears pointed at the commotion, was curled into a ball on Shin’s lap.

C h a p t e r 3

引き裂かれた姉妹

THE NEW
GATE

Chapter 3

Part 1

“It’s s-so cold...”

“Put this on.”

Shin took out a fur-lined coat and gave it to the shivering Tiera. On the other side, Yuzuha cuddled closer to her to warm her up.

Thanks to Kagerou’s limitless energy, the horse carriage kept running onward, at a speed surpassing even that of a car. Because of this, they had already traveled a considerable distance.

According to Mitsuyo, they had already covered half of the distance from Fuji to Kunitsuna’s location.

As they proceeded northward, they began to see traces of snow two days after leaving Fuji. Now, a silvery white world spread all around them and the scenery around the carriage became visibly different three days after their departure.

They couldn’t even see the bare ground because of the snow, but Kagerou had no trouble proceeding.

“To think that we had to turn the carriage into a sled...”

“Looks like our destination will be covered in snow.”

Shin had moved to the coachman’s seat and exchanged words with Schnee. Both were wearing heavy, furry coats and thick trousers. They also wore gloves and anti-freezing boots, making them well-equipped for the cold from head to toe.

No matter how resistant the body was to the cold, even if it didn’t hinder movement, the feeling of being cold would remain.

Schnee claimed to be perfectly alright in her normal clothing, but the other party members protested that just looking at her made them cold, so she wore thicker clothing too.

Furthermore, to ride through snowy landscapes without any countermeasures for the cold would make them look unusual in any strangers' eyes; especially Filma with her high ratio of exposed skin.

The inside of the carriage had been remodeled and was warmer than outside, but because of the materials used it still felt chilling. For these reasons Tiera, Filma, and the others wore warmer clothing too.

On the other hand Shibaid, who equipped a low-quality full body armor to hide his identity, simply wore a coat over it.

Mitsuyo, being a weapon, said she would not need anything, but Shin and the others forced her to change her attire and wear a coat. A kimono and winter coats would be an absolute mismatch.

“Oh, a pack of Snow Fangs... just ran off.”

A group of white wolf-type monsters appeared in Shin's detection range, but ran off scared of Kagerou's presence. Their course until now had been a continuous series of such events, as Shin's party proceeded straight ahead towards their destination, without the smallest skirmish.

“Mitsuyo, is this the correct direction?”

“Yes, straight ahead. Is there something wrong?”

“Looks like we need to pass through a forest. Everyone, we're getting off for a while.”

The carriage stopped just before the forested area and the party started walking.

Because of the heavy snow, the party proceeded at a relatively slow pace. From the depths of the forest, from inside the snow, monster eyes were fixated on them. They seemed to understand that they would be no match for the group: after a short glance, they all quickly left.

Among them, certain presences kept following them at a distance.

“We’re surrounded.”

“Yes. They’re maintaining a circle surrounding us. Their presence suppression and coordinated movements are far too good for mere robbers.”

Shin and Schnee, while continuing to walk on, verified the numbers of the group chasing after them.

Filma, Shibaid, and Mitsuyo acted naturally, but were ready to draw their weapons at any time.

“There aren’t supposed to be any villages around here, right?”

Tiera, being sensitive to other people’s gazes, also noticed that they were being observed. Speaking without letting her breathing become irregular, she tightened the grip on her bow.

“There might be something near our destination. Or maybe they’re just a band of thieves. We’ll see when we get there. If we keep going forward like this, there’ll be some reaction sooner or later.”

Reassured by the optimistic Shin, the party continued to walk through the pathless forest.

Their surrounding continued for about another 15 minutes: as they arrived close to a mountain, an arrow struck the snow next to Shin’s feet.

“Looks like they won’t let us go any further.”

“Hmph, if they’re thieves they will just taste our blades.”

“Well, let’s hear what they have to say first. One of them is getting closer.”

After trying to make the hot-blooded Mitsuyo cool down, Shin faced towards the approaching presence.

What appeared from between the trees was a young girl, dressed in black and red ceremonial garb, which Shin felt he had already seen before.

She was also wearing an overcoat on her robes.

Well-defined facial features and animal ears on her head. The young maiden's ears, colored light brown like the hair tied behind her neck, pointed straight up because of her nervousness.



“That’s an “[Immaculate Robe], isn’t it. It’s my first time meeting an Onmyoji here.”

“As I thought, you are not simple travellers who got lost in the forest.”

The young girl wearing black priestess clothing seemed to have heard Shin talking to himself and replied, her diffidence clearly expressed in her tone of voice.

“——Rindou Suzune Level 210 Onmyoji”

Shin’s 【Analyze】 showed the girl’s information. Based on their level, she was probably the most experienced in the group surrounding them.

“We came here to find a certain katana located somewhere ahead. We have no hostile intentions towards you all. Won’t you let us go?”

“A katana?... ah!? Do you mean that your target is that? In that case, we cannot let you pass.”

For reasons unknown to Shin and his party, Suzune took an enchanted charm from inside her robe and assumed a fighting stance.

Her reaction told Shin and the group that trouble was brewing.

“A fighting stance so suddenly? That’s quite aggressive of you.”

“I had predicted that someone would come for Onimaru. But as long as we stand, you will not do as you please!!”

Suzune’s tone became more and more belligerent. Having clearly heard her say the name Onimaru, Shin realized they wouldn’t have been able to avoid having to deal with her.

The surrounding circle gradually grew smaller and smaller. Figuring it was the only way, Shin talked again to Suzune.

“You, could you be from “Black Priestess Shrine”?”

“Do not feign ignorance. Who else would wear robes such as these!?”

“Black Priestess Shrine” was the name of a guild in the game era, hence Shin’s

question.

“I just wanted to make sure. If I was wrong, it’d cause trouble. Let me ask one more thing, then: is Kuchinashi still around?”

“!?! How do you know that name!?!”

Suzune’s expression became even sharper because of her heightened surprise and caution.

The name Shin had mentioned, Kuchinashi, was the name of Black Priestess Shrine’s guildmaster. She was one of the players who had died during the Death Game, so Shin mentioned it thinking that it might be connected to the present situation.

Judging from Suzune’s reaction, it was clear that she at least knew the name.

“For now, we will not go any further than this. In exchange... yes, please report that the master of “Demi Eden” has come with his entourage.”

After finishing his request, Shin took his hand off the hilt of his weapon, showing his lack of hostility. He wouldn’t go as far as put the weapon away, though.

“...fair enough. Ayame, you were listening, right? Go!”

“Should I?”

“I request you to, by my authority.”

Following Suzune’s order, one of the units surrounding the group left towards the direction Shin’s party was headed in.

“Is it okay to just let her go?”

“The Kuchinashi I know wouldn’t resort to violence. Let’s just take a short rest.”

“...if you say so, then all right.”

Mitsuyo saw Shin relax his stance and sighed; she had grown tense for nothing.

“Let me make some tea, so that we don’t get too cold.”

Schnee proceeded to take a teapot and teacups from the item box.

Suzune was surprised to see that, but Schnee paid no mind to her and went on to create an oven with earth magic, then lit a fire to boil water.

Shin took out a table and chairs and the whole party sat at leisure. Only Tiera was still a little tense.

“What is wrong with you people...”

Suzune looked absolutely perplexed at the group’s nonchalance, despite the fact that weapons were still pointed at them.

“I said that we have no intention of fighting, didn’t I? Do you guys want a cup too? I bet the cold is chilling you too.”

“Nonsense! Who would ever accept that offer!?”

Suzune’s retort was almost a roar; she probably thought they were making fun of her.

After about 30 minutes of waiting, the girl called Ayame returned.

“...Really? Understood. Thank you.”

Ayame related her report without letting Shin and the others hear. Suzune thanked her and let her go back to her post.

“Lady Kuchinashi will see you. Come with me.”

Her dissatisfaction clearly visible on her face, Suzune turned her back to Shin’s group and ran off.

“Looks like she’ll be our guide, let’s go.”

“Does this mean that lady Kuchinashi crossed “over here” too?”

“Judging from their reaction, looks like she did. Kuchinashi is a high elf like you, Schnee, so even if she arrived here 100 years ago, it wouldn’t be strange for her to still be alive.”

Shin and the others talked between themselves while following Suzune. She was clearly used to traveling through the forest, as she chose the easiest courses to proceed on.

As they emerged from the forest, the scenery changed completely.

“What is... this...?”

“Looks like the guildhouse never changed.”

Shin reacted plainly to Tiera’s utter surprise at the view before them...

What surprised Tiera so much was that, signaled by a Torii gate, there seemed to be an invisible wall, beyond which the scenery changed completely.

There was not a single trace of snow in the area beyond the Torii, which instead showed an idyllic spring-like scenery.

Production facilities could be seen such as fields and rice paddies, then buildings reminiscent of smithies too. Thanks to it being located at a slightly higher altitude, Shin and the group could see a shrine’s main building and prayer hall in the distance.

“Mitsuyo, what’s Kunitsuna’s direction?”

“Straight this way. Beyond the large building over there.”

Mitsuyo replied while pointing towards the shrine. Shin thought at first that the presence of the guildhouse in the direction they were heading could have been a coincidence, but now changed his mind.

At the very least, Suzune must have known something.

“I see the entrance is still the Torii.”

“They’re also dressed the same as before.”

Shibaid and Filma casually commented after seeing the guildhouse. All of Shin’s support characters, Schnee included, knew the Black Priestess Shrine’s guildhouse from the game era.

“Kuu, shrine, good.”

Yuzuha, whose territory once hosted a shrine, seemed happy at the sight.

As the group followed Suzune through the gate, the stinging cold instantly turned mellow. The winter wear worn by Shin and the group was excessive now, so they all took off their heavy coats and other gear, returning to lighter attires.

“Lady Kuchinashi awaits here. Be sure to show proper respect.”

Suzune had led them to the shrine’s prayer hall, as Shin thought she would.

Only its external appearance was that of a prayer hall, though: the interior was completely different. Being a guildhouse, it contained several facilities such as warehouses, and of course traps to hinder monsters and enemy attacks.

Even under many pairs of watchful eyes, Shin did not miss this opportunity to map the interior of the building.

After turning several corners, following a maze-like course, they arrived in the room farthest from the entrance, the guildmaster’s quarters.

Suzune spoke to the priestess in charge of security, and after a few seconds of silence the door opened.

The room, decorated with Japanese-style ornaments and objects, was immersed in silence. The footsteps and rustling of clothes Shin and the party caused echoed louder than normal.

The room’s owner was sitting at a small table, apparently engaged in battle against paperwork.

“Welcome. I thought it was someone pretending to be you at first, but I see we have the real Shin here. I’m glad to see that your support friends are well too. Two of them I’m not familiar with though.”

So spoke the woman as she wrapped up the paperwork: Kuchinashi, former player and guildmaster of Black Priestess Shrine.

Her waist-length red hair gently waved as she stood up. Eyes black like the night,

resembling obsidian gemstones, looked straight at Shin from behind under-frame glasses.

Looking at her, Shin thought that while she was originally pale-skinned, her complexion was somewhat sickly.

———Kuchinashi Level 255 Purification Priestess

The information displayed by **【Analyze】** was just as Shin remembered.

“It’s been a long time. I did not think I would have the chance of meeting you again. Did you lose some weight?”

“I believe that’s where you ask “Aren’t you more beautiful than before?”, instead.”

Kuchinashi raised her eyebrows and rebuked Shin. Her expression showed that she hadn’t expected Shin to notice.

“Anyway, I know it’s strange for me to say this, but was it alright to let us inside? I think that you know me from when I was in a rather dangerous state...”

“That’s right... concerning when I last saw you. But I knew that deep inside you, there was no hate.”

Kuchinashi’s judgment had been caused by her seeing Shin before and after the change.

“Even if you were an impostor, if you meant to harm me within the guildhouse, you’d need to at least be on par with Schnee, as far as fighting prowess goes. In the current world, it’s pretty impossible for many people of that level to be in the same party. They would become famous in a flash too. And well, my woman’s intuition told me so too.”

Raising her index finger in a told-you-so gesture, Kuchinashi chuckled.

Guildhouse masters’ abilities were powered up inside their guildhouses. Kuchinashi had realized that this Shin was not an impostor thanks to the name and level displayed by her reinforced **【Analyze】** .

Facing a fully prepared guildmaster inside their guildhouse would be very difficult without a large difference in stats.

“So, I heard that you’re looking for a katana?”

Shin knew Kuchinashi and what kind of person she was, so he briefly explained that one of the Five Supreme Blades was supposed to be in the area.

“I see... when I saw the name of the ponytail girl I had a hunch, but in this case, I’ll tell you what I know. In short, we know where it is. But some time ago we made a series of mistakes and... were now undecided about what to do. Now that you’re here, though, we should be able to solve this.”

“Leave it to us. By the way, the girl that guided us here seemed to know about Onimaru too.”

Suzune had mentioned Onimaru’s name, showing great hostility towards Shin. Maybe she was connected somehow.

“Suzune, right. OK, I’ll explain about her too, so will you stay and listen?”

Kuchinashi motioned to Shin and the others to sit down and ordered the priestess outside to bring something to drink.

After the priestess brought tea with sweets and left, Kuchinashi started talking.

“First, we confirmed the presence of [Onimaru Kunitsuna], one of the Five Supreme Blades, around 5 years ago. It was in the depths of “Cadaver Realm”, a dungeon that appeared close to our guild house. It’s a dungeon with an entrant limit, only 4 people are allowed inside at the same time.”

In the game era too, dungeons that could be explored only by obeying specific conditions (limits on party members, weapons, etc) existed. The dungeon where Onimaru was located appeared to be of this type.

Kuchinashi continued by saying that when the Black Priestess Shrine members explored the dungeon, they didn’t know about Onimaru’s presence.

“Shin, do you know the word “Chosen One”?”

“Yes, it refers to whoever has a resurrection bonus, right? The stats change from person to person though.”

“Exactly. The members who explored the dungeon that time were all Chosen Ones. The War Priestess Kotone, especially, had STR and DEX over 700. It was supposed to be a party of considerable fighting power, and yet...”

Despite this, only one member returned alive.

According to the survivor, although they suffered casualties they managed to defeat the boss that wielded Onimaru, but the boss’ corpse released a black mist-like substance, which swallowed both Onimaru and Kotone.

“After that, I chose other members and had them inspect the boss room again; they reported seeing Kotone, Onimaru in hand, standing in the middle of the room. It looks like she has been made part of the dungeon and acts as its boss now. When they tried to talk to her, they were attacked.”

Kuchinashi had ordered the scouting members to come back as soon as anything happened, so they retreated right away.

Defeating her could probably bring her back to her senses, but because of the combination of Kotone’s abilities and Onimaru’s stats, no one could best her.

Kuchinashi could be considered an advanced player, but because of the large difference in equipment, she didn’t have enough confidence to step up to the challenge.

Furthermore, there was also the possibility that what happened to Kotone could affect Kuchinashi too, so many were against the idea of the guildmaster facing Kotone in person.

“Some members tell me that they would like to try to face her, but only 3 of them could be suitable, ability-wise. Suzune, the girl who guided you here, is the most able of the three. Suzune is also Kotone’s younger sister, so she trained desperately to hone her skills, in order to save her...”

“I see. When we were surrounded, she was the only one to show a kind of excessive reaction... so that was the reason.”

Freeing Onimaru meant defeating Kotone. Shin’s party, ignorant of her circumstances, could have dealt with Kotone thinking she was just a monster.

Shin thought that Suzune's concern about this risk had been expressed through her reaction.

"This is all the information I can tell you. And so, there is something I would like to ask you to do, Shin..."

"To recover Onimaru and save Kotone, I guess?"

"Yes, exactly, but I would also like you to bring Suzune with you. She is one of the Chosen Ones with the highest abilities here and can also use 【Dispel Omen】 , so I am sure she can prove herself useful for the rescue."

Being an Onmyoji, she could prove herself useful in various ways, commanding spirits both to locate enemies and in battle. Kuchinashi reassured Shin that, at least against the monsters in the dungeon, she wouldn't be a burden.

"If possible, I would like for all 4 members to be from my group though."

Shin, obviously, then the all-purpose type Schnee, Mitsuyo from the Five Supreme Blades, then Tiera, who succeeded in purifying Yasutsuna. These would have been the best members.

"I thought that the Supreme Blade counted as weapon, though."

"...I wonder. I don't know how that works either. If Mitsuyo is not counted as one of the 4, we can take Suzune with us. After all, someone under foreign control could wake up if a family member calls to them. Thinking about our current situation, I don't think that things like that can be disregarded."

Shin was experiencing a real world created exactly like a video game after all.

No one can tell what might or might not happen. Thus a miracle like that was very possible.

"Let us verify if Suzune can come with you or not first then. If it's possible, we can discuss how to work together later."

Kuchinashi called to someone outside the room, ordering them to lead Shin's group to the dungeon.

The priestess in charge of guiding them, Ayame, exited the guildhouse grounds via a Torii gate located opposite from the one Shin's party used to enter.

Taking a long time just for a confirmation seemed pointless, so they started running and arrived at the dungeon in about 15 minutes.

In the middle of the forest lied a run-down fort. Possibly to contain the effects of the miasma, the trees all around the fort were tied together with votive rope and blessed charms were attached to their trunks.

"If you enter the fort and proceed straight you will find the entrance to the dungeon."

Ayame informed the group in detail about their destination and they headed towards the entrance.

In order to check what Mitsuyo would be classified as, Shin, Schnee, Tiera, Shibaid, and Mitsuyo tried to enter the dungeon together.

"...doesn't look like there are any problems, right?"

"Indeed, it appears lady Mitsuyo is not counted as a person."

Shibaid looked around and answered Shin's question.

They were 5, Mitsuyo included. Yet the dungeon supposedly identified them as 4 people and 1 weapon.

"So this means that we can take Suzune with us too. Well well, let's see what happens next."

Shin mumbled to himself as they traced back their steps out of the dungeon.

The entrance to "Cadaver Realm" remained fully open, as if inviting Shin and the party inside.

Part 2

After confirming the dungeon's situation, Shin and the party quickly returned to the Black Priestess Shrine guildhouse.

"We can bring her. I'd like to talk about how we're going to work together then."

Until now, Shin had been fighting with Schnee and Shibaid, companions he knew very well, and Tiera, who solely focused on rear support, so they never practiced seriously how to fight as a team.

Munechika and Mitsuyo were originally veterans of close combat, so they found it simple to fight alongside others. Shin also knew their fighting styles well, so coordinating with them was not a problem.

The new member, Suzune, was an Onmyouji, a rather tricky job.

They needed to know her fighting style, what she could do and what she couldn't, before starting the exploration.

"I know. Please wait a moment."

Kuchinashi gave orders to summon Suzune, and after a few minutes a knock was heard at the door. After obtaining permission, Suzune stepped inside.

"Lady Kuchinashi, if you summoned me here does it mean that I am allowed to accompany them?"

Suzune saw the members present in the room and understood the reason behind the summoning. Kuchinashi nodded and started talking.

"Correct. I will have you go with them. But you are forbidden from acting on your own."

"I know that well, you do not need to tell me."

"Oh my, what is the young lady who tried to sneak inside just 8 days ago saying now?"

Suzune answered with a grimace, but Kuchinashi's retort struck her down. She had already once done what she was being warned of.

While listening to their conversation, Shin regretted a little to have decided so quickly.

He understood her tendency to run ahead on her own for her sibling's sake. But to act on one's accord in a dungeon would cause trouble to all other party members.

Thinking that he had to make that clear, Shin focused even more and prepared for the discussion.

After doing introductions, Shin inquired about Suzune's fighting style.

"In general, I use one spirit each for attacking and defending. I can also use enchanted charms for support."

"Also, she can also perform "Spirit Possession" for a short time."

"L-lady Kuchinashi!!"

"I understand that you'd rather keep your trump card hidden, but he already knows pretty much all Onmyoji skills, dear. It's pretty much pointless to hide."

Kuchinashi put a hand on Suzune's shoulder, advising her to give up, much to the young girl's dismay.

"Eh, you aren't a samurai?"

"Kuchinashi is the one who told me about them though. I use a katana in close combat, but I can also use magic on par with a mage. You can count on me when the need arises."

"What!? What are you... lady Kuchinashi, they are Chosen Ones too?"

Suzune's disbelief was very natural: what Shin had just plainly stated was something next to impossible in the current world. She, however, quickly realized what it had to mean.

"Well, something like that. Schnee over there is a jack of all trades like Shin too. Mitsuyo is a close combat type, as you can see by her appearance. Tiera, you're a Hunter, I suppose?"

"Ehm, to be precise I'm a Tamer. This is my partner, Kagerou."

“Growl.”

As they were indoors, Kagerou came out of Tiera’s shadow in wolf pup mode.

“That’s bizarre though, I never heard that it was possible to tame divine beasts.”

“I can’t see the stats...”

“Er, he’s a good boy, you know? He won’t get angry even if you do this.”

To Kuchinashi’s surprise and Suzune’s caution, Tiera picked up Kagerou with her left hand and, with her right, moved its front right paw up and down.

Thinking that she was going to play with him, Kagerou licked Tiera’s cheek.

Appearance-wise, Kagerou was just like any puppy dog.

“Your party members are outside the norm as usual, Shin...”

“I don’t think that’s a sufficient explanation though...”

“He’s smart and understands perfectly what we say and mean. I personally mainly support with my bow. Though, I also have some skill with short swords and hand-to-hand combat.”

Tiera described her abilities with humility, but as she had undergone Schnee’s training, she couldn’t possess just “some” skill.

“There is one last thing I need to confirm.”

“What might that be?”

Shin waited for the moment when the conversation ended to talk.

In contrast to the peaceful mood, his expression was now deadly serious as he looked at Suzune.

Suzune unconsciously took a step back and returned Shin’s stern gaze when she noticed his stare.

“I’ve heard that the current boss of the dungeon is Suzune’s elder sister, Kotone. I mean to save her and will move with the intention of doing so. But if it becomes impossible to save her, can you swear that you will not stand in our way?”

Shin did not ask Suzune if she can kill Kotone or not. He didn’t want to force her to kill a family, and there was a large difference in fighting power between Kotone and Suzune.

He thought that either he or Schnee would give her the final blow, in that case.

Hence the question. If it turns impossible to save Kotone, do you swear that you will not attack us from behind?

“...I swear. I will not stand by and watch my sister turned into a monster by the miasma.”

Suzune was completely silent for a few seconds after Shin’s question, then answered, her pupils trembling slightly.

There was still doubt in her heart. So the answer suggested, but Shin replied that he understood and closed the conversation. They would know if Suzune was truly prepared or not only when that moment came.

There was meaning, however, behind asking such a question at that time.

Shin couldn’t know what would happen if she had to face her own sister’s death. But it was important to think about it now.

If Suzune had to face such a situation unprepared and ended up not being able to move because of indecision, her life would be in danger.

“OK, let’s do a sparring match on the training grounds then.”

In order to change the mood, Shin spoke in an overly bright tone.

The group headed to the facility’s training grounds, led by Kuchinashi. The priestess posted before the guildmaster’s quarters also came with them, as an “escort”.

After several practice matches, performed in order to grasp each other’s prowess, the group called it a day.

The next day, the group gathered all information they had about the dungeon and prepared rations and equipment.

As it was possible to use the cheat-level useful ability called Item Box, the preparations were complete in a flash.

They used the remaining time to rest at leisure, to prepare for the exploration starting the next day.

“Well, we’re off. If anything happens on your end, just send a message.”

“Shin, please take care of Suzune.”

“La-lady Kuchinashi!?”

“Understood.”

“Don’t just understand like that!”

Suzune had somehow become a teasing target, and as such reacted to Kuchinashi and Shin’s exchange.

Mitsuyo and Tiera looked at the three, silently wondering what they were doing.

“You’re feeling less nervous now, aren’t you? Kuchinashi’s worried too, you know.”

“Oh my, you found me out.”

“Kh... I understand. I will be careful.”

Suzune was aware that she was feeling nervous, so she looked the other way, her cheeks flushed.

“Kuu, standby, again...”

Yuzuha muttered a lonely sigh while looking at the three.

The guild was equipped with countermeasures against monsters and miasma, but

there was no Kagutsuchi there.

Because of that, if anything happened Yuzuha and her ability to influence Ley lines was vital.

“Sorry, Yuzuha. I’m going to make it up to you when I come back.”

Shin made a promise to Yuzuha, thinking that this time brushing wouldn’t be enough.

“Take care. Come back soon, kuu.”

“Yes, I await good news.”

Sent off by Yuzuha, Kuchinashi, and the escorting priestess, Shin’s group stepped inside “Cadaver Realm”.



“Cadaver Realm”, just like Fuji’s “Depths of Hellfire”, was a cave-like dungeon full of craggy rocks and boulders.

The greatest difference was its lack of steam and heat waves.

The cave’s walls and ceiling were studded with bright gemstones, so lighting and sight were assured too.

“There’s better visibility than I expected.”

Shin and Mitsuyo acted as the group’s front guard, while Suzune and Tiera were in the center and Schnee took the rear.

Suzune activated her spirits as soon as they entered the dungeon. A doll-like spirit around 30 cemel in height floated near her shoulders, while a spirit like a wolf made of origami was next to her feet, keeping track of the surroundings.

About 5 minutes after they entered the dungeon, Shin’s detection field reported the presence of monsters.

The cave was 6 mels wide and 5 mels tall, posing no problems for battle in a team of 4.

The first encounter was with bat-like monsters, always present in cave dungeons.

The monsters' name was Edge Shade.

Its appearance was like darkness in a bat-like shape, with a glowing red core located on the forehead. Its large wings spread to almost 1 mel and its level was also relatively high at 422.

The monster possessed two main methods of attack: slash-like attacks with wings or spells causing abnormal statuses, launched while flying over the player's head.

Its HP was rather low, but unless they were defeated through a spell with wide area of effect they could prove to be troublesome opponents.

"It's not in Invader form. I heard that the whole dungeon is heavily affected by miasma though?"

"It does look like a normal dungeon for now. I suppose it was a darkness-type dungeon originally. The gemstones that sometimes drop are all of the darkness type, and Edge Shades only appear in locations with strong darkness affinity."

Dungeons could have several affinities. "Depths of Hellfire", through its name and interior, was a clear example of a fire-type dungeon.

"The lack of miasma influence is intriguing, but in any case we need to defeat them to proceed. There's a lot of them too, as usual... I'll wipe them out myself."

There were members with low resistance to status effects in the current party, namely Suzune and Tiera, so Shin decided to eliminate the monsters with magic.

The spell he chose was one often used against darkness-type monsters, the Light-type magic skill **【Flash Bomb】** .

As he activated the spell, light started gathering on Shin's palms.

After the light formed a full globe, Shin shot the light bullet towards the monsters' pack.

The light globe aimed straight at the center of the pack, releasing a white visual effect soon after. The transparently white light spread for about 5 mels, erasing the Edge

Shades in its wake.

The light gradually grew fainter and disappeared, but its effects remained: the Edge Shades that charged in before the light disappeared were also erased.

The light would persist for 5 seconds: Shin, who had noticed another pack of Edge Shades beyond the 【Flash Bomb】 , shot another light bullet, which took care of the new pack.

A decent quantity of drops and treasures piled up before Shin's group.

"Item drops...? Wait, this didn't happen in "Depths of Hellfire", right?"

In dungeons, monsters disappear immediately after being defeated and drop items at a set rate.

Shin heard that this rule remained in the current world, but asked confirmation from Schnee about it not happening in Fuji's dungeon.

"Kagutsuchi said that it was because of the miasma. I'm sorry, I heard it while you were focusing on crafting, so I forgot to tell you."

"Aah, I see. Well, nothing changes anyway. It doesn't really affect us now whether items drop or not."

Shin started to not really care, as he was not expecting anything from item drops.

As their exchange ended, Suzune started talking.

"There were no drops here before either. This is just my opinion, but I think that the miasma might be concentrated where my sister is."

"Miasma concentrated? What do you mean?"

"I heard from the survivor that this dungeon's original boss was a menace because of its numbers. Meaning that each unit's strength was not much. As such, I doubt it could generate miasma forever: after my sister defeated it, there was not enough miasma to taint both my sister and the dungeon at the same time."

Shin nodded in deep thought as he listened to Suzune's theory.

Maybe for the sake of preserving the game's balance, in "THE NEW GATE", in case of bosses composed of many units, each unit's strength was not very high. There were also exceptions, but they mainly consisted in the defeated units turning into a boss, not to fight both at the same time.

"My sister is a very strong Chosen One. The stronger one's will is, the harder is it for miasma to taint it. In order to keep her as a boss in place of the defeated one, there wasn't miasma to be spared to affect the dungeon too."

"I see, you might have a point. In that case, if we could get rid of the miasma somehow it wouldn't be impossible to save Kotone too, I suppose."

Shin had seen monsters changed by miasma, but had never known of them becoming dungeon bosses. If there was a chance to save Kotone though, he wanted to prioritize it above anything else.

Shin's group quickly recovered some of the treasures, then proceeded onwards.

"Cadaver Realm"'s structure contained the corridor Shin's group was located in and large hall-like clearings, about 50 mels wide. The halls were connected by a series of corridors like the one Shin and the others were exploring.

Watched from the side, it would likely resemble an anthill.

Every large hall was connected to many corridors, so choosing the wrong path would make it difficult to return to the surface.

"Hey, I'm sure that you know this already, but don't use too much magic power so early, okay?"

Just as Shin thought they were advancing smoothly. Suzune's reprimand came after Shin defeated a 20-strong pack of Black Hounds, wolf-like monsters, in their fifth hall after entering the dungeon.

"Er, what exactly do you mean?"

"I was watching you fight from behind you, but you're always using skills and never arts. You use skills even in close combat, so if you keep using spells like crazy you'll run out of magic power in no time."

Shin was lost, unable to grasp what she meant, and Suzune continued. She was worried about his pace of magic usage.

“I see. But I get back the magic power used via natural recovery, so you don’t need to worry.”

“Whaat? You’re a Human, aren’t you? You’re not a Pixie or an Elf, so if you keep using magic like that there’s no way for natural recovery to catch up to your magic consumption. In dungeons, using skills against bosses or strong enemies only and dealing with weaker enemies with arts, to save MP, is the basic among basics. I thought you were using only skills on purpose during practice, but... this isn’t your first dungeon, right?”

The ratio of magic power recovered naturally depends on one’s max MP.

In terms of races, as Suzune stated Pixies and Elves recovered faster, while Dwarves and Dragnils were slower. Humans and Lords were around the middle, while Beasts changed widely depending on their species.

“I’m telling you it’s alright, so please rest easy. You didn’t know that when someone has high basic magic power, they also recover more? Besides, there are also skills to increase recover ratio quantity and speed.”

The people Shin had met until now also used skills in rapid succession, so he hadn’t noticed how peculiar his usage was.

In addition, another fundamental problem was that Shin couldn’t use arts. Maybe because they were techniques unique to this world, he didn’t seem to be able to learn them as he wanted.

“Just how much magical power do you have? Then, maybe your main job is actually Mage?”

“Unfortunately, my main is Samurai, sub is Blacksmith. I’m going to take care of the small fry from now on, so you keep your magic usage to a level you can take back with natural recovery, Suzune.”

“I will, thank you very much. —just for confirmation, is everyone else in your group like you?”

With a sigh, Suzune stopped supplying magic power to her wolf-like spirit. The spirit changed back to its enchanted charm form, then Suzune put it back in her robe's pocket.

"I'll leave that to your imagination. At the very least, the members here now won't do something stupid like running out of magic power, rest assured."

"Well, if you say there are no problems, then fine."

Suzune looked towards Schnee after Shin dodged the question, but didn't press further.

"You two, chat time is over."

Mitsuyo's voice called to them. A new monster was coming towards them.

They didn't fail to notice the enemy's arrival, though, so they quickly prepared for the encounter.

"Skullface, huh. It's been a long time."

"It looks much more mellow than last time. Its equipment is different too."

Shin mumbled something at the sight of the monster and Schnee also commented, with a somewhat nostalgic tone of voice.

The time when Shin found Yuzuha and also when he reunited with Schnee, he had encountered a large quantity of Skullfaces. That was the reason why they had left a particular impression on him.

The newly appeared monsters were Skullfaces of Jack, Queen, and King variety.

As Schnee mentioned, normally they equipped European-style armor, long swords, kite or tower shields, but these wore gear reminiscent of Oriental warriors. Their weapons were spears, katana and nagamaki-like weapons: they also had changed following the armor's example.

The area Shin's group had reached was directly after one of the halls and was the size of a large field. It was more than 2000 mels long, with the ceiling at about 10 mels height.

It was a wide enough area for even the Skullface Kings' gigantic bodies to move at ease.

Seeing the Skullfaces advance towards them in formation, as if they were in wait, made Suzune's hand unconsciously reach for the spirit charms in her pocket.

"Okay then, their equipment is a bit different than the usual; because of their current armor 【Flash Bomb】 won't have much of an effect. Me and Mitsuyo are going to cut them down, you three give us support."

"My turn, finally. I was starting to get rusty since you destroyed all monsters in a flash with your magic."

Mitsuyo unsheathed [Odentia Mitsuyo – Shinuchi], her eyes glimmering with fighting spirit.

Until this point, they had dealt with all monsters through Shin or Schnee's magic and Tiera's arrows. Mitsuyo, while keeping alert, had just been spectating and was rather fed up with it.

"We have to let you move a bit after all. Don't go overboard, okay?"

"I hope it'll be enough to qualify for a warm-up."

Leaving her words trailing behind her, Mitsuyo instantly sped up.

It happened the instant after she leaned forward. Only Shin and Schnee could see it; even the Chosen One Suzune could only see Mitsuyo's silhouette blur and then simply vanish.

The Skullfaces, naturally, could not register her movements.

Before the Skullface realized anything, Mitsuyo's sword arm blurred.

A silver arc-like flash passed through the armor-clad body of the Skullface King which happened to lead the group.

"!?!"

An instant passed, and both the King and its heavy gear turned to pieces.

Its blade, taller than Mitsuyo herself, and its intricately decorated armor too were cleaved in half. The core inside had also been cut in two.

Leaving the pieces of its armor behind, the King disappeared.



Part 3

“Wow, so fast.”

Tiera couldn't help but voice her thoughts about Mitsuyo's impressive speed. She was simply amazed that there was someone else capable of attaining a speed on Shin and Schnee's levels.

Munechika was fast too, but very few in the current world were capable of such movements.

“It's not a speed humans can achieve.”

Suzune, who was next to Tiera, spoke her opinion too, but her voice contained more concern than awe.

Suzune's sister, Kotone, was in possession of Onimaru. She was afraid that because of this, she would be able to move like Mitsuyo.

Mitsuyo's current abilities were the result of Shin's reinforcement, but as Suzune did not know this, she couldn't help but look sour.

“As expected of a Supreme Blade. These monsters mean nothing to her.”

Unaware of Suzune's feelings, Shin swung his [Moonless]. He wasn't using his full power, but nevertheless unleashed sword slices on par with Mitsuyo's, which cut effortlessly through the Skullfaces.

When Shin had battled a Jack-grade unique monster with a rather low-grade type of katana, he had spent considerable time on a single unit. Now that his weapon was an Ancient-grade one, even Kings could be defeated with one or two sword strokes.

The monsters could have tried to parry with their weapons, or rely on their armor, but Shin's sword could not be stopped.

“Shah!”

Shin cut down a Queen as he stepped next to her, then sliced through another as he returned his blade to the sheath.

A King unleashed a slash attack from behind the Queens, caring little about hitting its companions in the process, but Shin repelled it and even knocked away the monster's katana.

Shin's blade then pierced the monster's wide-open abdomen; its core was still disappearing when the katana moved to the next foe as if dancing.

Thanks to the guidance received from Karin, Shin's swordsmanship had improved greatly. Because of this, the speed at which he defeated the monsters was not inferior to Mitsuyo, who had spent her life pursuing the path of the blade.

Suzune rubbed her eyes while looking at Shin, as if she had seen something incredible.

"This is weird... Shin's movements seem like a blur..."

Shin's group had been routing the monsters until now, but with the emergence of a group of Skullfaces, Suzune thought that the rear guard's turn had finally come and took a fighting stance.

Compared to Shin's party, the Skullfaces were not high-level monsters. Suzune was wary of the additional power the Black Lacquer gear could have given to the monsters.

As the monsters' grade increased, their gear's stats would too, as would their skill with their weapons.

They were not monsters one could look down on as mere Undead anymore.

The way to fight them was radically different than the beast monsters who normally appeared in the area.

Despite all this, Mitsuyo and Shin were exterminating the Skullfaces with inhuman speed. It was a cakewalk not unlike all their previous encounters.

The monsters' armor turned to shreds like paper. Their spears and blades snapped and blew away like twigs. Levels and grades meant nothing. Ending each battle unscathed was the norm. Shin and Mitsuyo continued to bury one Skullface after another, as if they were racing to see who defeated more.

Less than 10 minutes after the battle started, all Skullfaces had been brought down.

“Close combat battles take more time after all. I guess I’ll blow them away with magic next time.”

“I think that’s best, yes. They were so pathetic, I feel even less satisfied after fighting.”

“Ah, er, you two, that’s enough.”

Tiera couldn’t help a wry laugh as she saw Suzune looking flabbergasted at Shin and Mitsuyo’s exchange.

Tiera had witnessed Shin and Schnee’s battle styles, so she understood well how Suzune had to be feeling.

“I finally understand the reason why Lady Kuchinashi was not worried at all...”

Suzune let out an exhausted comment. As a Chosen One herself, she was baffled to see movements far exceeding what Chosen Ones could do.

“Don’t tell that you can move like that too?”

“Master probably can, but it’s impossible for me.”

Tiera firmly shook her head at the thought of being compared to them. Kagerou, the divine beast lying as always in Tiera’s shadow, would be a challenging fight for Shin. In comparison to Shin, though, Tiera was like an average person.

“Shin’s power is far beyond our reach. This is still far from him fighting seriously.”

“You mean that he’s holding back...?”

To Schnee’s answer and smile, Suzune could only react with a long sigh. At the same time, a sort of feeling of security spread in her chest.

If people as strong as Shin and Mitsuyo were available, it was highly likely that they could restrain Kotone even if she went on a rampage.

“Let’s keep going. Different types of monsters will start appearing on the next floor, so be careful.”

After Shin’s words of warning, the party advanced through the dungeon.

Their exploration of “Depths of Hellfire” required mapping the whole dungeon, so it took a long time, but this time they had the map provided by Black Priestess Shrine’s scouts. They knew that both Onimaru and Kotone were in the deepest part of the dungeon, so as soon as they found stairs or passageways leading further down the dungeon, they took them without hesitation.

“Hm? Everybody stop!”

As they were walking down a corridor, Shin suddenly told the party to stop.

Mitsuyo had apparently predicted Shin’s order, so she stopped right way. Suzune and Tiera stopped after a few moments.

“What’s wrong?”

“There are monsters right in front of the exit of this corridor.”

Shin had detected the monsters’ presence clearly. Mitsuyo simply nodded in agreement, without showing any particular reactions.

“They’re not many, maybe 3 at most.”

“Exactly. There’s a high chance to be ambushed. Schnee and I will take the lead this time while concealing our presence. Mitsuyo, everyone, please come later.”

Shin left Tiera and Suzune in Mitsuyo’s care, then alongside Schnee concealed his presence with **【Hiding】**. As they carefully proceeded through the corridor and into the following hall, 2 monsters appeared before them.

“Nues, huh. The monsters are all Japanese-style because we’re in Hinomoto?”

Shin recognized the monsters even before using **【Analyze】**.

Monkey head, tiger body, a snake as a tail; that was the monster Nue. It was a dangerous opponent, known for its venomous claws and tail snake, high attack power and speed.

“The ones in front are a decoy it seems.”

“Perfect for an ambush, I guess.”

Above the entrance connecting the corridor and the hall, hidden from view of whoever entered the hall, another Nue was lying in wait. It was a mystery how it had sensed their arrival, but it was apparently ready to stage a surprise attack on Shin's party.

It probably planned to take out the rear guard or give them status effects via surprise attacks, probably to defend itself against its weakness, long-range attacks like magic spells.

"Schnee, please take out the one above. I'll handle the ones in front."

"Understood."

As per Shin's orders, Schnee ran up the hall's wall.

Many monsters were difficult to ambush while using **【Hiding】**, but Nue was not one of them.

In addition, Schnee's main job was Kunoichi. She enjoyed added bonuses from concealment-type skills, preventing her from being noticed even by monsters with high detection abilities.

Schnee moved behind the Nue, which was waiting immobile, its claws firmly grasping the wall. Her **[Blue Moon]** struck swiftly, without hesitation.

The blade, clad in blue light, cut through the Nue's neck without delay. The monster's head fell shortly after.

Schnee confirmed the disappearance of the monster's body and turned her eyes to Shin, in the exact moment when **[Moonless]** sliced through the other two Nue's bodies, cutting them cleanly in half.

The Nues' monkey faces showed how they had failed to understand what just happened.

As the two monsters disappeared, fur and fang-like items remained in their place.

"Anyway... did Nues always plan ambushes like this in dungeons?"

Monsters never positioned themselves near the entrance of corridors or halls. It was a fact, ever since the game era.

“They were originally monsters skilled in ambushes, so I do not think it is too strange.”

“That’s true too. I still can’t completely shake off the feeling I had in the game era.”

Suzune, who only knew the current world, remarked with a slightly pungent tone that it was normal to expect attacks from any direction in dungeons.

“I have barely explored any dungeon you know.”

While replying with what sounded like just an excuse, Shin wondered if he shouldn’t pick a random dungeon to explore at leisure.

There were many differences from the game era that he hadn’t felt yet. Even though he had Schnee to ask for confirmation, like this time in some cases the game’s experience still influenced his thoughts.

“By the way, your first dungeon was “Depths of Hellfire”, wasn’t it.”

“That was a hidden dungeon, so it didn’t have many floors and it was also completely corrupted by miasma. Instead, here the effects of the miasma might be strong in the deepest floor, but around here it’s like a normal dungeon, so this might be my actual first time.”

“Cadaver Realm”, however, did not possess many floors either. Shin predicted that the area still resembling a normal dungeon would be over soon.

As if to confirm his prediction, the monsters around floor 20 and beyond stopped producing item drops.

“So the area under the effects of the miasma starts here.”

“The appearance is the same, but the atmosphere here does feel ominous.”

Tiera looked at the surroundings, a grimace on her face. Shin also felt his skin tingling.

“I feel the same. Let’s proceed with caution.”

As they started noticing traces of miasma corruption on the walls and ceiling, suddenly Kagerou jumped out of Tiera’s shadow and started howling loudly.

“What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know exactly what, but looks like there’s something lurking ahead.”

Kagerou went as far as showing himself to warn them. Shin and the party advanced with extreme caution, knowing that the possibility of danger was high.

After around 10 minutes, Shin’s nose picked up a smell he had never felt before then.

“...hey, could it be that Kagerou warned us about this smell?”

“Looks like it. We should still be far, but it’s a really foul stench.”

Tiera answered Shin’s question, her face again distorted in a grimace, but for different reasons than before.

Near the stairs in front of Shin’s group, which were leading to the lower floor, a terrible stench filled the air. It was different from the smell of rot, but in the same way it caused nausea and vertigo to the party.

“I didn’t hear anything about foul odors like this.”

“This is weird. I never heard anything either.”

Schnee commented on the situation, her eyes semi-closed in disgust. Suzune answered her, tears in her eyes.

Shin was barely affected because of his high resistance, but it seemed that the extent of the effects varied from person to person.

“Let’s retreat for now. There’s not only the awful smell in the air, but also poison, I think.”

Shin stopped in his tracks to talk.

Maybe because they had only breathed a little quantity, or there was just a small quantity of poison in the air, no one had been affected by status abnormalities yet.

“Poison you say!?”

Suzune covered her mouth with the sleeve of her priestess robes and stepped back.

Even among Chosen Ones, few possessed resistances as high as Shin and Schnee. If they ended up being paralyzed, they would be at the monsters' mercy, so they were much more wary of status effects than Shin and the others.

"It'll be okay if we are this far. I'm going to do some countermeasures now, so calm down."

After reassuring Suzune, Shin pulled out 3 cards from the item box and gave one each to Suzune, Tiera, and Mitsuyo.

What materialized was a rhombus-shaped pendant the color of amber.

"This is [World Tree's Amber] and [Granite Ring], I gave them to you to increase your resistance to all status effects, but not by much. But with this you can have strong resistance against poison and paralysis."

He could have given them an item that nullified status effects, but Suzune wouldn't be able to equip it.

Tiera was the same; if the reason was thought in game terms, it was because they lacked the stats to do so.

When Shin was in Balmel he tried the same thing with Hibineko and Shadow, but they couldn't equip it either. Shin knew more or less the extent of their status, so Shin thought that the reason had to be insufficient stats.

Before entering "Depths of Hellfire", Shin had given Schnee an [Excelsior Ring] which, like his [Hades Ring], prevented status ailments.

A certain "trouble" happened when he gave her the ring, but now the silver jewel, decorated in blue, hung from Schnee's neck, dancing on her chest, tied to a thin white chain.

"For some reason, the smell doesn't bother me as much either."

Saying so, Suzune slowly stepped forward. Thanks to the pendant, her expression changed from crying to only slightly grimacing.

After completing the countermeasures, the party proceeded towards the depths of the corridor.

What they found next was a hall where several swamps of a forbidding poison-like liquid were formed. Purple smoke rose from the swamps, which was thought to be the source of the awful stench.

“Growl...”

Kagerou, who was next to Tiera, growled faintly and submerged again in her shadow. Even if he would not be affected by status ailments thanks to the item, the foul odor must have been too much for his sensitive nose.

He would be out again right away in case of battle, so Shin decided to proceed.

The party proceeded by making use of the small space available between the poison swamps.

At the same time, they detected the presence of something within the swamps.

“There are monsters inside the swamps. They’re scattered all over. Stay on your toes, just in case.”

Tiera reacted.

“Yes, I bet there are. But what do you mean, just in case?”

“Well, situations like these are when Schnee shines. Am I right?”

“Yes, leave it to me.”

Smiling in response to Shin’s proud statement, Schnee stepped forward.

“I will use a magic spell with a wide area of effect, so please do not move unless necessary.”

After warning Suzune and the others, who had no idea about what she was going to do, Schnee slowly raised her right hand.

“Ooh, you sure are something too.”

Mitsuyo commented, impressed, about the quantity of magic power that was being gathered. She didn't know about Schnee's fighting ability yet.

Behind her, Suzune whispered her honest thoughts, her face tense.

"...we have another monster here. What's up with this party, seriously?"

After several seconds, Schnee lowered her right hand and a crackling sound, like breaking glass, resounded at her feet.

Suzune looked at the ground and noticed a white mist arising from the terrain, which had changed color because of the poison swamps. From the cold sensation arising from the ground, she understood that it was chilled air.

The crackling sound was produced by the freezing of the ground and the swamps.

The whole hall was being enveloped in extremely cold air, with Schnee at its center.

"With this there should be no risk of being attacked from the swamps."

The freezing reached deep within the swamps, so the presences Shin had felt seemed to have been frozen too. The map still displayed them, but their hostility markers had disappeared.

"From here, we might encounter things we have no information about."

"I wonder if they detected our presence and are changing the dungeon's interior because they feel in danger? We are a presence that puts their survival at risk after all, so it wouldn't be weird for them to react, I guess?"

It couldn't be said that miasma possessed a will of its own, but if presences that could purify it, like Shin and Tiera, were close, it was possible that it tried to resist. Because of its corruption of Kotone, it was also possible that it acquired some degree of intellect, or so continued Mitsuyo.

"Another possibility is the presence of someone else acting as the brain."

If thick miasma was present, there was always a possibility that it had given birth to a demon.

Shin mentioned that it was worth considering that someone could stand in their way as they tried to rescue Kotone.

With renewed caution, the party proceeded through the hall to the floor below.

The following hall was also riddled with poison swamps, which Schnee froze before they passed.

“Hey, we haven’t encountered a single monster for a while, is this normal?”

After they passed the 7th hall, Mitsuyo asked her question while looking around.

As Mitsuyo had stated, the party had not encountered any monsters since the poison swamps. Shin’s detection field did not register any monster presences either.

“No, monsters always prowl in dungeons. Even if their numbers are reduced, they start appearing from the walls, from the ceiling, even from nothing. Even if they are all exterminated, after awhile they start appearing again.”

Shin answered while glancing at the walls and the ceiling.

This was something he had already verified. Even if all the monsters in a dungeon were defeated, they would either break in through the walls, the ceiling, or even the floor, or magic power would concentrate in one point and create one. It was the same in “Depths of Hellfire” too, so it had to be one of the world’s rules.

“Could they be gathered somewhere?”

“They could have formed a train, as a trap or something. Or maybe something is attracting the monsters on purpose.”

The word “train” refers to the situation when a player flees, drawing more and more monsters which eventually become a pack. The large group of monsters chasing the player is reminiscent of a train, hence the term.

Trains were usually caused by players’ actions, but in THE NEW GATE they also happened for other reasons.

Monsters that called upon reinforcements when receiving damage, because of traps or other causes, received damage and called for help. The summoned monsters would

also receive damage from the trap and call for help themselves, increasing the numbers more and more.

Even outside on the field, rival groups of monsters could continually call for help while fighting, thus causing a train.

This “automatic train” phenomenon was thought to be a bug at first, but was then found out to be intentional. In a dungeon, where escape routes are limited, it wasn’t any different from a monster house.

Monster groups prowl through the dungeon, attacking players on sight. Even if it looked like there weren’t any monsters in the surroundings, lowering one’s guard would be a huge risk.

“The dungeon is changing, so both are possible. If we find a train, isn’t it better to retreat for a time?”

“No problem. Even if we find a train, all we have to do is take them all down. Considering the level of the monsters around here, our killing speed is higher than whatever momentum they might have.”

The dungeon indeed lacked in escape routes, but that also meant that the directions the monsters would attack from were limited too.

With party members like Shin and Schnee, clearly stronger than the monsters, trains were nothing more than a way to accumulate experience points.

“We’ll have to pay special attention whenever we arrive in a place with many entrances and exits.”

Halls not only had stairs leading to the lower floor, but were also connected to many big and small corridors. In halls with many corridors, there was the risk of being attacked from all directions, thus the party had to be especially careful.

Shin’s group proceeded through several more halls.

According to the information provided by Kuchinashi, they were supposed to be less than 3 floors away from the bottom, but even then monsters were still nowhere to be seen. There were only a few units acting on their own; even the monsters which usually appeared in groups were on their own, apparently separated from the herd.

“They’re all packed together one step before the last floor, huh.”

Shin stated this observation, with a tone both jaded and annoyed, on the floor above the boss’ chamber. He had picked up a large number of monster responses at the edge of his perception field.

“It’s really a pain if there are so many.”

Mitsuyo agreed, her shoulders dropping in dejection.

The floor where the monsters were lying in wait, being the last floor before the final one, was rather small and narrow. It was surely filled with monsters to the point of barely leaving any room to stand.

Shin thought that it would be great if they just fought and defeated each other like that.

“This is... pretty incredible.”

Schnee’s perception field also detected the monsters, and the High Elf’s brow furrowed at their numbers.

“They’re way too many for a skirmish before the boss, seriously. It would take forever if we knocked them down little by little in close combat... Schnee and I will blow them away with a large-scale spell, you snipe any survivors Tiera. Mitsuyo, Suzune, I want you to watch our backs and be wary of any surprise attacks.”

“I doubt I’ll have much to do, but leave it to me.”

Tiera knew that dodging Shin and Schnee’s magic barrage was no easy feat. She nodded as she pulled an arrow from the quiver.

“Not having many long-range attack methods is something this party has to work on, I guess. I’ll take the rear this time too, but rest assured that anyone ambushing us will be cut in half.”

“Going overboard like that is kind of concerning too... but I’ll make sure I fulfill my role.”

Mitsuyo and Suzune also had their weapons at the ready.

After making sure that everyone was prepared, Shin stepped into the corridor leading to the floor below.

Maybe because of the high-density monster group awaiting them, a foul stench, a mix of blood and beastly odors, leaked from the other end of the passage.

“Okay then, let’s show them.”

“Understood.”

Monsters were closing in on the group like a torrent of water breaking through a dam.

Quick four-legged monsters led the pack, insect-types crawled on the ceiling, and flying types swooped through the space between floor and ceiling.

Behind them, monsters such as Ogres and Nues could be spotted too.

Towards the phenomenon that could be aptly described with the words “monster wave”, Shin and Schnee calmly raised a hand, their palms facing the horde.

Magic power focused on their hands through their arms, and a bluish-white globe started forming in the center point between their palms.

“【White Cannon】 !”

Shin and Schnee’s voices resounded at the same time. The moment they pronounced the spell’s name, the globe accelerated instantly, flying towards the monsters.

Leaving after-images as it shot forward, the white globe sped through the center of the corridor.

The flying-type monsters probably thought they could easily dodge it, and just tilted their bodies slightly as they kept flying.

After the globe’s passage, however, even apparently untouched monsters burst into flames, instantly turning into ashes.

The burning speed was so fast that rather than “going up in flames”, it looked like they were crumbling from the edges.

“Whoa...”

Suzune couldn't help but voice her surprise and incredulousness at the extent of the spell's power. It wasn't only the monsters flying close to the globe that had disappeared.

The combination-only skill **【White Cannon】** was a white globe of light with an invisible damaging aura all around it. An aura of scorching, searing hellfire.

The aura normally had a small area of effect, but the two casters' magic power had expanded it to an extremely wide range.

The invisible flames had filled the whole corridor, not leaving any room for escape, not even on the floor nor on the ceiling.

The monsters had fallen in utter confusion, as some tried to avoid the impending destruction as others kept pressing forward.

“I'm starting to feel sorry for the monsters...”

“Growl...”

Tiera and Kagerou looked at the screaming monsters with mixed feelings.

“Tiera, Suzune, close your eyes.”

“Eh?”

The light globe continued onwards, incinerating the monsters in its wake. As it reached the end of the corridor and the hall, Shin gave this order to Tiera and Suzune.

They didn't understand what Shin meant, but both had a bad feeling about it and immediately closed their eyes.

It happened the next instant.

Upon reaching the hall, the globe unleashed all the energy compressed within itself.

A pure white flame blazed through the hall, reaching all the way to the corridors. The magic barrier Shin put up in protection turned completely white, and then not a single

monster was in sight anymore.

As the flames died down, Shin released the barrier. As he did, the heat wave he had blocked blew past him, towards the rear.

“Let’s cool down a bit.”

Shin used a water spell to bring down the temperature in the burning hot corridor and hall.

After the torrid air had changed to a cool breeze, Shin and Schnee proceeded forward.

“What’s wrong? Let’s go.”

“Eh, yes, okay.”

Still affected by witnessing 【White Cannon】 and its power, Suzune replied with a shrill tone of voice.

When the flames had begun to decrease, Suzune opened her eyes a little; even after witnessing the party’s fighting style throughout the dungeon, the scenery before her eyes left her completely speechless.

“For Shin and the others, that’s just normal...”

Tiera had felt Suzune’s shock and tried to calm her down, putting a hand on her shoulder. She then added “I got used to it already”, and Suzune felt again that Tiera was a person on “her side” of the world.

“Let’s focus on our goal, together.”

Behind Shin and Schnee, the two girls felt a curious sense of community between each other.

Part 4

Shin briskly walked forward, unaware of what was happening between them. As they entered the hall, they noticed that, just like the corridor, part of the floor, ceiling, and walls had melted.

Shin cooled down these parts with a water skill and secured a path to walk on.

“OK, the real thing starts now. Are you ready?”

Before the heavy door signaling the entrance to the boss’ chamber, Shin stopped and asked this question to Suzune. Beyond the door awaited Kotone and Onimaru.

“I can go anytime.”

Suzune once again evoked the spirits she had returned to the charms and nodded.

She now had summoned a floating straw doll type, a wolf type, and a warrior type wielding two katana.

“I’m opening the door.”

Shin placed his hands on the door and pushed. After moving it a bit towards the interior of the room, the door opened the rest of the way by itself.

The room beyond was a very large hall. Swords, katana, spears, and other weapons were stabbed on the floor, walls, and ceiling, to the point that it was almost difficult to find somewhere to walk on.

In the back of the hall, only one place was not stabbed with weapons, a kind of stage marked with tatami mats. There stood a single silhouette: the boss.

——- 【Rindou Kotone Level 255 War Priestess】

——- Affected by 【Miasma Corruption – Large】

Shin’s 【Analyze】 revealed the silhouette’s identity. As expected of the boss: even if the dungeon had changed, its location had not.

“...Sister.”

Suzune mumbled under her breath.

Sitting on the tatami, with katana in hand, her eyes staring into the void, this was how they found Suzune’s sister, Kotone.

She did not appear to have transformed, unlike the Ogre boss in “Depths of Hellfire”.

Her priestess robes were torn and tattered, revealing her still white skin; her arms and legs did not appear to have changed shape either. If it wasn’t for the aura emanating from her body, she would appear to have been just wounded in battle.

“Pull yourself together!! She’s heavily corrupted by miasma. There’s no time to space out.”

“I know. I won’t hold back.”

As Suzune renewed her focus, the color of the magic power enveloping her spirits became more accentuated. The spirits had been reinforced by the additional magic power poured into them.

“.....”

Maybe because she had detected the increased magic power, Kotone’s eyes went from staring into nothingness to looking at Suzune. At the same time, the atmosphere in the whole room felt as if it was rumbling.

“Her aura changed.”

“Yes, looks like she’s ready to throw down too.”

Shin replied to Schnee and readied his [Moonless]. The aura emanating from Kotone clearly expressed hostility.

Probably in response to this change, the weapons stabbed into the ground, walls, and ceiling one by one floated in midair, gathering before Kotone with sounds of clashing metal.

In a few seconds, a cracked skull-like creature of steel was formed.

——— 【Mad Sword Legion Level 811】

Mad Sword is a monster formed by swords possessed by hateful emotions. When many of them gather in one place, Mad Sword Legion is born.

The highest risk it represents is that its level depends on the number and quality of the weapons that form it. The higher the quality of the weapons forming it is, the higher its level is.

“Wasn’t a Skullface Bushido supposed to come out here?”

“The boss changed, so the monsters changed too, I guess. This one looks stronger.”

As Mitsuyo stated, Mad Sword Legion was far stronger than the unique samurai-like monster Skullface Bushido.

As they had not received any information about the Mad Sword Legion, Shin thought that it was probably born after the scouts’ inspection.

“It’s coming!!”

A few seconds after Schnee’s warning, Mad Sword Legion shot the floating weapons like bullets.

Shin, Schnee, and Mitsuyo repelled them with their own weapons, while Tiera dodged riding on Kagerou. Suzune had the warrior spirit counter the attack.

Both the parried weapons and the dodged weapons, after stabbing the ground, returned to Mad Sword Legion.

“There’s a fair number of Mythology-grade weapons in it. There could be even some Ancient-grade ones too.”

Shin’s assessment was based on the weapons thrown at them. As proof, the katana of Suzune’s warrior spirit, the weakest member among them, was very close to breaking.

“It’s alright! I just need to pour some more magic power and...”

It can go back the way it was. That is what Suzune meant to say, but her words died in her mouth.

She had not lowered her guard. She had not neglected to be wary.

Her focus, however, swayed for an instant. In that opening, less than one second long, Kotone -who was supposed to be standing behind Mad Sword Legion- was in front of Suzune.

She had moved instantly thanks to the Movement-type martial skill 【Ground Shrink】.

Her stats as a Chosen One, the bonuses granted by equipping [Onimaru], and the stat upgrades caused by the miasma, Kotone was much faster than Suzune remembered.

In the blink of an eye. There was no more fitting expression for Kotone's movements.

When Suzune realized what was going on, [Onimaru Kunitsuna] had already been drawn from its sheath, its blade closing in on Suzune's neck.

“!?”

I'm going to die---

The moment Suzune instinctively closed her eyes, the sound of clashing metal reached her ears.

“I'm impressed that the scouts managed to flee.”

When Suzune opened her eyes, a black coat was fluttering in front of her.

“Don't just stand there!! Call to her!!”

Shin shouted while blocking [Onimaru] with [Moonless].

Kotone's equipment appeared to be only the close combat weapon [Onimaru]. Thus, Shin was wary of her, thinking that she wouldn't just stay behind Mad Sword Legion.

Shin, who had reinforced the Supreme Blades Munechika and Mitsuyo, knew that his [Moonless] was superior as a weapon.

However, the miasma-possessed [Onimaru] did not seem to be losing durability, even if locked in a clash against [Moonless].

——— 【Rindou Kotone level 904】

Shin's 【Analyze】 showed information different from before. A player's maximum level was 255; barring special exceptions, only monsters could exceed it.

Apparently Kotone now possessed properties both human and monster-like.

“Shah!”

Mitsuyo attacked Kotone, who was trying to push Shin down, from behind. She had also promised to do whatever she could to save Kotone, and swung [Oodenta Mitsuyo - Shinuchi] after activating the skill 【Nonfatal Blade】 .

The clash of blades resounded again; it was the sound of Mitsuyo's katana being repelled.

Kotone, who had been wielding [Onimaru] with both hands, switched the grip to her right hand, picked up another sword with her left hand and parried Mitsuyo's strike with it.

“Shin!”

“I'm on it!”

Having switched to a one hand grip, Kotone's strength wielding [Onimaru] weakened.

Shin had continued locking swords with Kotone to give Mitsuyo the chance to attack her by surprise; but as now it was not necessary anymore, Shin activated a skill.

“Let's get rid of your weapon first.”

A powerful shock burst between the clashing [Moonless] and [Onimaru].

Shin had activated the Katana-type Martial skill 【Empty Strike】 . This skill had the effect of blowing away the opponent's weapon, rendering it temporarily unusable.

The force of the impact generated between the two katana blew away Kotone's [Onimaru]. As a secondary effect, the movements of the arm Kotone used to wield [Onimaru] became more sluggish too.

“You’re mi—what?”

Shin had rapidly closed in on Kotone, but detected a wave of hostility approaching and swung [Moonless] down on the spot.

The hostility had come from part of the weapons forming Mad Sword Legion. Apparently the monster could control its weapons separately too, so it had sent some weapons to assist Kotone.

“And it was so close! These things are so irritating!”

Mitsuyo too, like Shin, was sweeping away the weapons attacking her.

“It’s attacking us while dealing with Schnee and the others at the same time, huh. I wonder if having good weapons increased its intellect too?”

The monster carefully separated its weapons to avoid Schnee’s magic, deftly moving its large body.

As it was not one large unit, but something made of many small ones, its attack patterns were infinitely varied.

Schnee and the others’ attacks were destroying its weapons, so the monster was less than half the size it was in the beginning, but it would still take some time before it could be defeated.

“Sister...”

Suzune didn’t seem to know what to say to her sister, who was controlling the multitude of weapons in midair.

If Shin hadn’t come between them, she could very well be dead by now. Kotone might have been affected by miasma, but seeing her beloved sister almost murder her had shaken Suzune deeply.

“I told you there’s no time to space out!!”

“Aah!!”

While still pointing [Moonless] towards Kotone, Shin landed a chop on Suzune’s head.

The sudden blow caught her by surprise.

“I won’t tell you not to be shaken, but focus on the battle while there’s still hope.”

“W-what are you...”

“Just look at her face.”

Shin’s blade pointed at Kotone, who was wielding [Onimaru] and another sword she picked up; more precisely, at her left eye. Transparent tears were flowing from it.

“She wasn’t crying or anything when we came in here. She might still be fighting against the miasma. Don’t give up.”

Shin then readied [Moonless] once again and charged against Kotone.

Possibly taking advantage of Shin leaving her side, the weapons in midair flew toward Suzune, but were knocked down by Mitsuyo, who had come closer to her.

“Leave this to me!”

Reassured by Mitsuyo’s words, Shin attacked Kotone.

Kotone used her right hand’s [Onimaru] and the katana in her left hand to block Shin’s slashes. Probably because of the difference in weapon level, however, the left hand’s katana snapped after the second clash.

“—!!”

Kotone stepped back and flung the broken katana at Shin, then grabbed one of the other ones dancing in midair. The new weapon exuded an aura clearly different from the others around it; it was the Ancient-grade katana [Mudou Kanemitsu].

“As I thought, there were Ancient grades too.”

Shin swept away Kotone’s incoming slash and thrust his left arm forward.

At the same time, he activated the Barehanded-type Martial skill 【Water Mirror Impact】 , aiming at Kotone’s chest.

Not even the greatest Chosen One could move quickly if they had trouble breathing. Such a thought prompted Shin's attack, but Kotone managed to parry at the last second, using [Onimaru].

"What?"

Weapons with thin blades like katana couldn't avoid suffering damage after blocking attacks with the body of the blade. Unless the katana was especially sturdy, it was a defense method to avoid at all costs.

For [Onimaru] it was possible, but even so it couldn't be safe to block one of Shin's attacks like this.

Shin was wondering the meaning of this when he saw Kotone's expression warped in pain. The miasma surrounding [Onimaru] grew thicker, and despite Shin not doing anything, a fragment of the katana was broken off.

"Damn, it did it on purpose!?"

When he first saw [Onimaru], Shin was bothered by the fact that it looked pristine and unaffected by miasma. In "Depths of Hellfire", the boss' [Dojigiri Yasutsuna] was in awful condition.

Kotone's actions just now suggested that Shin's theory, according to which [Onimaru]'s good condition was an obstacle for the miasma, could very well be true.

Ancient-grade weapons are originally resistant to miasma. It would not be strange for the Five Supreme Blades gathered around Kagutsuchi to be even more resistant.

"What happens if we purify the miasma without damaging the katana?"

Shin attacked Kotone again. While swinging his [Moonless], he activated a Katana-type Martial skill.

"How about this!"

[Moonless]unleashes a powerful flash of silver light; the miasma wrapped around [Onimaru] was blown away and, at the same time, Kotone's body visibly lost its strength.

The silver flash, caused by the Katana-type Martial skill 【Cleave Omen】 , had the same effect as 【Dispel Omen】 . Once it clashed with [Moonless] as it was shrouded in the skill, the miasma enveloping [Onimaru] would temporarily lose its effects.

Shin once again knocked [Onimaru] away from Kotone's hands, then parried her left hand's [Mudou Kanemitsu] with [Moonless]' hilt.

Before [Mudou Kanemitsu], now flying through the air, returned to Kotone, Shin struck it twice.

Katana-type Martial skill 【Fang Cry】 .

The V-shaped slashes struck [Mudou Kanemitsu] cleanly, and the katana's body broke in three fragments.

Shin had no time to be surprised by the katana's unexpected frailty, because the broken [Mudou Kanemitsu] instantly turned into sand and disappeared. Becoming part of a monster's body had likely consumed most of its sturdiness as a weapon.

“——-!?”

Immediately after Shin's destruction of [Mudou Kanemitsu], an unnatural sound of clashing metal came from Schnee's direction.

Shin glanced in that direction and saw that part of the weapons composing Mad Sword Legion's body was behaving erratically, as if it had lost control.

The [Mudou Kanemitsu] Shin had destroyed was probably one of the weapons near Mad Sword Legion's core.

“Sorry, but I can't let you go.”

Kotone had attempted to flee, taking advantage of the small opening born from Shin's destruction of [Mudou Kanemitsu], but Shin pinned her down to the ground. Tears were still flowing from her eyes.

“You're going to stay still here for a while. Just a little patience is all I need.”

As Shin spoke these words, a seven-colored globe of light appeared over his head.

The red of flame skills, the blue of water skills, the brown of earth skills, the green of wind skills, the yellow of lightning skills, the white of light skills, the black of darkness skills. The globe's colors expressed the elements of all magic spells.

“【Elemental Bind】”

Beams of all the colors of the globe extended towards Kotone and [Onimaru].

The beams, moving as to avoid Shin, wrapped themselves around the possessed priestess and her katana.

In this condition, they would temporarily be unaffected by outside attacks, but could not move in any way. This did not change even if the target was tainted by miasma.

Depending on the caster, the target could break free right away, but if Shin was the caster, even the over-level 900 Kotone could not move.

Divine-type magic was not included, but maybe because the skill included 7 magic elements, it managed to suppress miasma as well.

“If only it was faster, though...”

Shin stopped pinning down Kotone and stood up while mumbling to himself.

【Elemental Bind】 was an extremely useful skill, but the beams of light it released were much too slow; they would definitely miss if used by themselves.

Because of that, in the game era the quick 【Shadow Bind】 and 【Arc Bind】 , which combined both speed and strength, were both used more often.

Shin made sure that Kotone couldn't move and asked Mitsuyo to recover [Onimaru], which was lying on the ground at a small distance.

Thanks to 【Elemental Bind】 sealing the miasma and the effects of “Miracle Drug of Holy Skies”, nothing happened even if Mitsuyo touched [Onimaru].

Turning towards Kotone, Shin saw that Suzune was desperately calling to her.

“OK, the last nuisance is that guy then.”

Shin looked towards Mad Sword Legion, which had become much smaller due to Schnee and the others' attacks.

Shin didn't know how much of a will the main Mad Sword Legion had, but it looked like it was frantically trying to avoid Schnee, Tiera and Kagerou's combined attacks.

If Schnee and the others used their full power, they would have defeated it long ago.

It was still alive thanks to its particular multi-unit structure and because they were fighting in a closed space, so Schnee and the others didn't use wide-range attacks, out of concern of hitting their allies too.

Now that they had captured Kotone, though, Shin wanted to start the purification immediately, so he did not feel like shaving off the monster's body little by little.

"Schnee! Protect everyone but me!"

Schnee nodded to Shin, and he picked the skills he wanted to use.



“【Continuous Casting】 , 【Gun Fire】 !!”

The skill he used first allowed to cast the skill used after it as long as MP allowed; this time, Shin chose the Flame-type Magic skill 【Gun Fire】 .

A great number of fireballs formed around Shin, then shot one after the other towards Mad Sword Legion.

The size of each fireball was about 15 cemel; as they were not very fast, the weapons floating in midair could easily avoid their trajectory.

Just as it looked like they passed by without doing anything, the fireballs suddenly burst, scattering small 5-cemels fireballs all around.

The fireballs exploded all together, filling the space with smaller fireballs and turning the weapons forming Mad Sword Legion into ashes and dust.

It was an attack that targeted friend and foe indiscriminately, but the ice barrier Schnee created prevented their allies from taking damage.

The Mad Sword Legion, the number of its weapons already reduced by Schnee and the others' attacks, now saw all its weapons destroyed; like [Mudou Kanemitsu] before, they turned into dust.

All that was left were the bound Kotone and [Onimaru].

[Onimaru] was tended to by Mitsuyo.

“Tiera! The purification, please!”

Tiera hurried to [Onimaru]'s side after hearing Shin's shout.

“...you should hold her hands.”

Tiera whispered this piece of advice to Suzune as she passed next to her and Kotone, then started [Onimaru]'s purification.

Differently from the “Depths of Hellfire” boss, this time Kotone had to be purified too: thus this time Shin would use 【Dispel Omen】 on [Onimaru], while Schnee did the same to Kotone.

“_____”

The miasma shrouding [Onimaru] gradually disappeared. At the same time, a strained voice leaked from Kotone’s lips.

“Sister! Kotone!”

Kotone winced in pain, and Suzune kept calling her name desperately. She was trying to break free, but Shin’s 【Elemental Bind】 completely sealed her movements.

“Phew, it’s over.”

After some time, Tiera announced she had finished, while wiping sweat from her brow. She was steady on her feet this time: the purification had been less taxing than the previous one.

“The rest is up to you, Shin. Please.”

“Leave it to me.”

Tiera passed[Onimaru]to Shin, who gave it a long, careful look.

Its durability had decreased by about 20%, but compared to Dojigiri it had suffered surprisingly little damage. Shin concluded that the situation wasn’t as critical as last time.

Shin related [Onimaru]’s state to Mitsuyo, and her expression softened with relief.

“Okay then, you’re next.”

Shin entrusted [Onimaru] to Mitsuyo and turned towards Kotone. He didn’t know how the miasma had affected her, so she was still bound.

Shin asked Suzune to step back just in case and checked Kotone’s condition. 【Analyze】 didn’t display her as boss anymore. The miasma’s corruption seemed to be no more as well.

Possibly because she had lost consciousness, her eyes were now closed.

“At first glance, it doesn’t look like there are problems.”

“I can’t feel any miasma anymore, so I think you can release her now.”

Tiera, the most sensitive member to miasma, gave her approval too, so Shin followed her proposal.

【Elemental Bind】 caused Kotone to float in midair, so Shin prepared to support her as not to let her fall to the ground.

“Hn...”

Kotone mumbled, maybe the impact of falling into Shin’s arms had woken her up.

“Are you alright?”

“Uuh... I... am...?”

“Sister!! Koto!!”

Having heard her sister’s voice, Suzune rushed to her side, opposite to Shin’s. No one felt it was appropriate to comment about how Suzune changed the way she called her sister.

“It’s me!! Suzune!! Do you recognize me!?”

“Yes... I do.”

She appeared to have fully regained her senses as she talked with Suzune: a kind smile appeared on Kotone’s lips, to Suzune’s relief.

“Can you stand?”

“I’m sorry, my body is sti...”

“Sti?”

Kotone was hiding her face out of embarrassment, and she stopped talking mid-sentence.

Shin inquired what was wrong, and Kotone’s body started shaking.

“W-w-why am I dressed so shamefully!?”

She apparently had not yet noticed the state her clothes were in.

While she was bound the beams of light hid it, but now that they had disappeared, it was clear that her priestess robe was so torn and tattered that it could hardly be called clothes.

Her current state was thus even more seductive than being naked, prompting Kotone to try desperately to twist her body to hide it.

“Ah...”

“Eh... w-why!?!”

Maybe it happened because temporarily, she was classified as monster.

Or maybe twisting her body gave the coup the grace. Kotone’s robe turned into sand and vanished, just like Mad Sword Legion did.

What was left was just Kotone herself, in her most natural state, still held by Shin.

Shin quickly looked away, but he couldn’t avoid to see Kotone’s ample bosom and curves, which occupied his field of view before he looked elsewhere.

“Use this!”

Schnee rapidly pulled out new clothes and covered Kotone with them.

“Anyone, please, switch with me!”

Shin had turned his neck all the way away in reaction to the sudden situation, but was close to his limits, so he asked for help.

Thanks to Schnee, the front side of Kotone’s body was covered, but her back was still bare. He didn’t notice it when she was still clothed, but now that she was naked the sensation of touching her skin was transmitted vividly to his hands.

Shin let Suzune, who was in front of him, support her sister and immediately backed away.

“Shin, we have to talk later.”

“...I’d prefer to solve this peacefully.”

Schnee’s smile was scarier than the miasma right now.

Despite their mission being accomplished, Shin somehow didn’t feel relieved at all.

The group had succeeded in saving Kotone and recovering [Onimaru], so they headed to the exit of Cadaver Realm. Kotone still couldn’t move well, so she was transported by one of Suzune’s spirits.

“Anyway, good thing the contents of the item box were safe.”

Kotone’s clothes had crumbled to dust, but now she had changed to clothes she had in her own item box. A rare occurrence for an inhabitant of this world, Kotone possessed one too.

“I’m sorry for... showing you... something so shameful...”

Kotone’s face was fiercely red as she answered. She would sometimes peek at Shin, then hide her face out of shame.

“Ah, er... I think it’s better to just forg... whoops!”

He meant to say “forget it”, but was interrupted by the sudden attack of a flying spirit. After dodging it, Shin noticed that Suzune was glaring at him with a certain amount of killing intent in her eyes.

She was walking next to Kotone, hidden from Shin’s view, but moved between them with frightening speed.

“If you even whisper the fact that you saw my sister naked, I’ll come for your head.”

“I’m not saying a word... hey, I couldn’t even if I wanted to...”

Shin answered with a small sigh.

The reason why Suzune was so belligerent was that Kotone, after realizing she had been seen naked by a man, lamented that “I can’t marry anymore now...” and asked

Shin, the cause behind it all, “won’t you take me as your bride?”.

Maybe because she had seen the exchange between Shin and Schnee, while still being embarrassed Kotone showed what appeared to be a teasing side. Suzune, however, didn’t take it as a joke and became extremely wary of them.

The two priestesses were orphans and were each other’s only blood relative. Even if she felt gratitude towards Shin, she wouldn’t accept that her sister married him just because he had seen her naked.

“I’m never letting you marry my sister!!”

“Wait!! I told you that I don’t have the least intention of doing that from the beginning, didn’t I!? I’m getting scary looks already, so don’t say that!!”

Even if Kotone had been serious, Shin wouldn’t have accepted. He was instead worried that Suzune would cause an even bigger commotion.

“You truly are very nice people.”

Kotone looked at Shin and Suzune’s exchange with a peaceful expression on her face.

“If you think so, then please do not trouble Shin too much.”

“I’m sorry. I was just happy that he reacted like that even to someone like me.”

Kotone honestly lowered her head in response to Schnee’s rebuke.

Kotone was aware that, having been corrupted by miasma, she would be shunned. Her expression was somewhat shadowed too.

“Well... in small doses, it’s okay.”

“You will forgive me?”

When Shin saw Kotone naked, Schnee was the one to exude the most frightening aura. Kotone had noticed it, so Schnee’s reaction surprised her.

“I’m going to have him spoil me too a bit in return.”

Kotone was perplexed for a moment by Schnee's reply, said with a very serious tone, then laughed softly.

"Hehe, then I think I'll tease him a little more."

Afterward, Kotone faintly said "You would touch even a body as tainted as mine?", so Shin's position became even more difficult.

"No, well, it's not tainted or anything, isn't it? The miasma has been fully purified, you are totally pure, Kotone. That was something like force majeure... or so I'd like you to think."

Shin looked distressed, as Kotone was looking at him with imploring eyes, transparent teardrops glistening from their edges.

Looking at her expression, Shin even ended up thinking that she could be serious.

"What, my sister isn't enough for you!?"

"Wait, are you in favor or against it?!"

Shin couldn't help pointing out the inconsistency in Suzune's angry words.

"I see you get along well with Suzune."

"He does!? Sister, are you sure you aren't still sick somewhere?"

"I hadn't seen you express your emotions so openly in a long time."

Saying this, Kotone laughed softly.

"Kh, my back feels targeted..."

Throughout this conversation, an extremely annoyed aura emanated from Tiera and Mitsuyo, in the rear of the group.

Even if it happened coincidentally, it was a fact that Shin saw Kotone naked, so he took her teasing in stride.

Mitsuyo and Tiera's annoyed mood was, however, clearly visible on their faces, and

Schnee's smile, completely lacking any intimidation, was the scariest one.

(Why isn't there a teleportation point in the boss room, just like the game...?)

Shin ended up wishing that feature remained.

Shin knew it would just postpone the problem, but he wanted to escape the current situation as soon as possible.

Part 5

“Sounds like it’s been tough, in more ways than one.”

“Yes, well, it was tough for sure.”

Shin’s party managed to exit the dungeon with barely any monster encounters and returned to the Black Priestess Shrine guild house.

Having learned of Kotone’s return, many priestesses gathered in the guild house.

Shin’s party, on the other hand, was in the guildmaster’s room, reporting in detail what had happened in the dungeon.

“It looks like Kotone managed to maintain her consciousness thanks to Onimaru. On the physical side too, abnormal incident like mutated or missing body parts did not occur either.”

“I’m having her checked here too, just in case. I was worried because she was imprisoned for 5 years, but thankfully the doctor said that there’s nothing wrong with her.”

There were many methods of healing in the world, but Arts such as 【Heal】 or 【Cure】 or Potions were not present everywhere. Black Priestess Shrine members also possessed medical techniques not relying on such methods.

Suzune had accompanied Kotone to take her tests, so she was not in the room either.

“Well, I’d like you to tell me the reason not to dispel Onimaru’s bind.”

After the report about Kotone ended, Shin asked this question to Mitsuyo.

In the dungeon, the purification had been completed and Shin thought that Onimaru Kunitsuna would now be alright; yet for some reason Mitsuyo said to wait before releasing the bind, and the katana was still restrained.

“I guess there’s no helping it. If possible, I actually wanted to bring it back like this.”

“No, if there are any problems I’m not going to force you, you know.”

“I don’t mean to say that you or the others did anything wrong. As we are both Supreme Blades, we can communicate through our consciousness, and I’ve already verified that Kunitsuna retains it.”

“So, what’s stopping you?”

“...I’ll let Kunitsuna answer that.”

Mitsuyo didn’t want to answer herself, apparently, so she handed Onimaru, still affected by **【Elemental Bind】**, back to Shin.

There was nothing dangerous behind it though, or so Mitsuyo said.

“...okay, I’m removing the bind then.”

Mitsuyo’s behavior gave Shin a bad feeling about it, but there was no reason to keep the katana bound.

Once freed, Onimaru flashed and assumed human form. It was a female type, like Munechika and Mitsuyo.

Her appearance was about 20 years old. Her eyes were still closed, so they couldn’t tell what color they were, but her shoulder-length hair had a beautiful black luster that did not lose to Munechika’s.

Onimaru was what one would call a traditional Japanese beauty. Within her black hair, two of her bangs -one on the left and one on the right of her face- were bright red. Looking at them, Shin pictured an Oni’s horns.

She was wearing a hakama, but her shoulders and torso were also protected by pieces of armor, forming a rather unusual combination. **[Onimaru Kunitsuna]** was firmly equipped at her waist.

Once she opened her eyes, red pupils -different from any other Supreme Blade- looked straight at Shin.

“Pleased to make your acquaintance. I am one of the Five Supreme Blades, Onimaru Kunitsuna. Allow me to offer you my gratitude for everything you have done for me.”

Kunitsuna then politely bowed her head.

Shin had been prepared for anything to happen, so he felt slightly disoriented.

“I would also like to inquire something. Who matched blades with lady Kotone among you? Other than Mitsuyo.”

“That would be me.”

“Aah! So it was really you, sir!!”

Shin replied, and Kunitsuna walked closer to him, a full smile on her lips. Mitsuyo had stepped in between them, but Kunitsuna dodged her instantly. Shin was surprised by the agility of her movements, but then Kunitsuna took his hands in hers, placed them on her chest and said something he couldn't have predicted.

“I beg of you, please become my master!”

“...what?”

Shin needed a few seconds before he could grasp the meaning of Kunitsuna's request.

“Enough!”

“Ouch!”

As Shin and the others were frozen in place by Kunitsuna's words, Mitsuyo -who had expected them- gave her a light whack over the head. As Kunitsuna's grip on Shin's hands weakened, he took the opportunity to step away from her.

“Mitsuyo, please explain what's going on.”

“Exactly what you heard. Basically she wants you to become her... Onimaru Kunitsuna's wielder.”

Shin asked Mitsuyo, not Kunitsuna, for an explanation, and Mitsuyo obliged with a sigh.

As he heard her reply, Shin finally understood why Mitsuyo didn't want to remove Kunitsuna's bind.

“No one has ever been so rough with me...”

“What are you talking about now!?!”

With no regard for Mitsuyo’s rebuke, Kunitsuna looked straight at Shin. To Shin, her eyes appeared to be almost sparkling.

“Well, that’s an interesting girl if I ever saw one.”

“Indeed. If her body is a weapon, however, to seek the most able wielder is certainly not a problem.”

“You two over there, don’t talk like this doesn’t concern you. If we’re talking about wielders, you two are perfectly good candidates too.”

Shin scoffed and replied to the honestly impressed Shibaid and Filma. In regards to ability, all of Shin’s support characters, Schnee included, possessed more than enough to qualify.

Incidentally, Schnee was whispering “there’s no way Shin will accept”.

“Lady Kunitsuna, I am truly sorry, but I have decided that the weapon I wield is [True Moon]. Thus I cannot be your wielder.”

“Is... that so. That’s a sh—-”

“Good, Kunitsuna’s nonsense is now over, so let’s get on with the discussion.”

Mitsuyo interrupted the disappointed Kunitsuna and urged the group to resume their talks. It was a fairly crude treatment, but probably as they had communicated earlier too, this result had been predicted.

“You’re cruel, Mitsuyo.”

“I told you this would have happened. So, what are we going to do next?”

“Next, hmm. Well, we did everything we had to.”

Shin continued saying that they could go straight back to Fuji, but Kuchinashi stopped him.

“If so, won’t you join our celebrations?”

“Celebrations?”

“There have been casualties among us, but Onimaru was finally recovered from the dungeon and Kotone returned safe and sound. Furthermore, our greatest concern, the miasma, has disappeared. We had to borrow your strength, but it is a great result for us. Everyone didn’t show it, but ever since Kotone’s group failed their mission, the mood had been pretty quite dark, or rather hopeless, I’d say. So, to wipe it away completely, I thought of organizing a celebration.”

If the valiant warriors who had lent a hand to this success were absent from the celebration, the festive mood would be partly tarnished. Kuchinashi thus requested the presence of Shin’s party in the celebrations.

“Personally, I’d like to avoid having my name and face become more well known.”

“I heard what happened in Balmel. To be brutally honest, I doubt there’s any meaning in hiding now. On the contrary, if they knew that “that famous” Shin had done it, everyone would just nod and accept it.”

“Did it really spread that much? Trying to avoid all possible trouble, I haven’t visited the adventurer’s guild once after leaving Balmel.”

Kuchinashi’s argument about it being too late was reasonable too.

On the other hand, going around defeating small fry and clearing miasma-infested dungeons was very different. Shin knew that it was impossible to keep people from talking, but he still wanted to make an effort to lay low.

“Half truth, half exaggerated rumors, though. But even the exaggerated rumors mention things that you could do easily Shin. After all, people of the right trade could track you down right away anyway.”

“Nothing I can do about that, I guess. A number of people saw us head north, so if they gather information they’d easily start thinking that we’re suspicious, too.”

Their movements had not been perfectly concealed by any means, so Shin decided to accept the situation, as sooner or later he’d be discovered anyway.

“I understand. Don’t hide anything and openly say that I did it then. We’ll probably be involved in all sorts of things from now on too anyway, so it’s just a matter of time.”

“Okay, you’ll be at the center then Shin.”

It will be unavoidable for the party members to receive attention too, but Kuchinashi promised to make sure the information spread with Shin at its center.

“Then, about our gratitude, I mean the reward...”

“Reward? We never talked about that, did we? We came of our own will, and you also let us enter into the normally inaccessible Black Priestess Shrine territory too.”

Shin’s group wished to recover Onimaru. Kuchinashi and her followers wished to save Kotone.

The method to accomplish their objectives was the same, so they cooperated.

Shin and Kuchinashi had a friendly relationship, so it was just a matter of form, but since their agreement had been such, Shin was puzzled.

“That won’t do, though. You saved one of our precious comrades, but we let you go without any reward... that would be dishonorable. There are those who know that we tried and failed to clear the dungeon. We need to at least put on “performance” to show that we paid you adequately for your work. Something we both agreed upon, based on a formal contract. Of course, I will keep the fact that we know each other hidden.”

“If that piece of information spreads too, some people could come here, hoping to reach and use you through me.”

Black Priestess Shrine was not governing their territory through their strength alone; they had been entrusted with it through a pact with the Kujou house. Even so, they still had frictions with neighboring territories and could not disregard the diplomatic relations with them, sighed Kuchinashi.

The saving grace was that, as Black Priestess Shrine’s role could not be performed by anyone else, they weren’t normally bothered by their neighbors.

It was the burden due to being the host of many priestesses, as Kuchinashi hinted.

“Well, for the reward, just something formal is fine. But don’t go using us for your diplomacy now.”

“I know that. I’m not that ungrateful.”

Afterward, they talked about the formal reward and the group’s lodging, then Shin’s group left the room.

Kuchinashi was apparently sure that they wouldn’t fail the mission; a few hours before the banquet, Shin knew that she had prepared two rewards: one in case Kotone had been saved and another one in case only purification had been possible.

The hectic preparations continued; being the main event, Shin and Shibaid were forced to wear elegant kimono, to their extreme displeasure. Then, their female companions appeared.

“Oooh... as expected, priestess robes look good with black hair.”

They were wearing white and red, traditional priestess robes, different from the Black Priestess Shrine’s typical uniforms. The first to appear dressed in this outfit was Tiera.

Her golden eyes and the silver streaks in her hair were unusual elements considering the attire, but her long black hair perfectly fit the priestess robes.

Her lightly flushed cheeks, maybe out of embarrassment from being the center of attention, added even more charm to the whole, at least according to Shin.

“Don’t stare so much now.”

“I didn’t mean to. But it looks good on you, you can’t blame me for looking a bit, no?”

“Well, that’s fine... I’m just the opening act for master and the others, anyway.”

While fiddling with the silver tips of her hair, Tiera looked towards the door she had come from.

The next ones to come out were Kotone and Filma.

The black-haired, black-eyed Kotone was exactly what Shin pictured from the word priestess. Her delicate gestures, combined with the robe, gave a perfectly graceful impression.

On the other hand, Filma's stance was almost too proud; she almost looked like a foreigner doing cosplay.

"How do I look? Not too bad, right?"

Used to Filma's usual armor and its high skin exposure, Shin and Shibaid thought that the priestess robe and its low ratio of exposed skin made Filma look more seductive.

"Hmm, as they say, beauties are beauties no matter what they wear, but this is a prime example indeed. I get an impression pretty different than the usual."

"Your usual colors are red and purple, so the red hakama looks really good on you. And like Shibaid said, there's a curious gap..."

Kotone inquired as well.

"If I may ask too, what do you think of me?"

"Honestly speaking, I'd be hard pressed to find words other than "it looks good on you"...you are exactly what I picture when I imagine a priestess, you see."

A beautiful black-haired, black-eyed priestess. The impact of her coy look was incommensurable.

"We're here too, if you care."

"...Mitsuyo and Kunitsuna, why are you wearing priestess clothes too? Well, no, you look good, of course..."

Shin's attention had been occupied by Filma and Kotone, when Mitsuyo and Kunitsuna, also wearing priestess robes, called to him from behind.

They normally wore armor, but picturing different clothes in mind could let them change to a degree, they said. Because of the occasion, they decided to wear priestess robes too.

Maybe affected by the colors of their armor, the sleeves of Mitsuyo's robe had black and golden patterns, while Kunitsuna's were red and black.

"We thought to entice lord Shin with our charms... but I see we have many fierce

rivals.”

“Shut up. And that’s not how it is anyway.”

Kunitsuna held her hand to her cheeks, looking troubled, while Mitsuyo pouted and looked away. The Five Supreme Blades were truly a trove of strong personalities.

“Hey, Shin. The main event is starting.”

Filma called for Shin’s attention. As he turned back, Schnee appeared too.

Schnee had also changed from her usual clothing to a priestess robe; she came walking calmly into the room, her silver hair flowing while following her movements.

Like Tiera and the others, she had applied some make-up after taking a bath, making her smile, a normal sight for Shin, even more bright than usual.

“...beautiful.”

A single word escaped Shin’s mouth.

He could have talked forever, just piling up words of praise. But he felt that it would be all unneeded.

That’s how much he had been charmed by her.

“I knew it... that’s how it always ends.”

“Kuu!”

Along with Tiera’s dejected words, Shin feels a jolt hitting his legs. Back from his charmed trance, Shin looked at his feet and found Yuzuha, in her usual priestess robe, puffing her cheeks. She was still kicking Shin with her thin legs.

“Yuzuha, ignored, no good!”

After coming back from the dungeon, Shin had been busy talking with Kuchinashi and preparing for the celebrations, thus he had found no time for Yuzuha; she thought he had forgotten his promise.

Her growth should have increased her mental age too, but now Yuzuha was back to being a little girl. Maybe she was only acting more mature.

“I worked hard, here! Praise!”

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry, so stop sticking to my face! I can’t see in front!”

Yuzuha, still in human form, jumped on Shin’s head, covering his face.

It was a surprise attack using her over level-600 physical abilities to the fullest. Being still under the effect of Schnee’s charm, Shin couldn’t have avoided it.

When Shin managed to get Yuzuha off him, his hair had become a mess.

“—then, this happens?”

“You had her stay back a lot lately, after all. You could treat her specially at least today.”

Schnee smiled at them.

The celebrations’ banquet hall was already crowded with priestesses.

Shin and the group were led to the main guests’ seats; Yuzuha, still in human form, took position on his lap.

She grinned proudly while holding his arms, laughed and talked excitedly. After growing up, her expressionless face had apparently vanished completely.

“So lovely, may I pet you?”

“Kuu, you may! Shin pet too!”

Her tone was smug, but the fox ears on her head twitched happily. Their movements clearly showed how she wanted to be petted quickly, making Yuzuha even more adorable.

In the main guest seats, Shin was sitting in the seat of honor, with Schnee, Tiera, Mitsuyo, Kunitsuna, Filma and Shibaid sitting on the left side. Kagerou was next to

Tiera.

On the opposite right side sat Kotone, Suzune and Kuchinashi.

The priestesses' eyes were concentrated on Shin's group: the mysterious fox girl being cuddled on Shin's lap, between two beauties such as Schnee and Kotone, attracted the most attention.

"Now, let us begin!!"

Kuchinashi's words brought total silence into the hall. She had used a Wind spell to carry her voice throughout the venue.

The eyes of all present went from Shin to Kuchinashi.

"I am sure many of you already know about Kotone's return. She was saved from the dungeon we have had trouble clearing, Cadaver Realm. Now I will introduce to you the adventurers who saved Kotone and cleared the dungeon."

Kuchinashi's hand pointed towards Shin and his companions.

As they previously discussed, the members who actually went into the dungeon -Shin, Schnee, Tiera and Mitsuyo- stood up. As they did, thunderous applause filled the hall.

Shin was surprised by the intensity of the cheering; he did not expect for the response to be so big.

"Everyone already knows about your feats in the battles in Balmel."

"Is that so."

It wasn't exactly a "set-up", but Kuchinashi had apparently already given some information to the priestesses. Shin felt that it had spread all too fast though.

In addition, the words "That's the Slashing Hammer..." that sometimes reached his ears enhanced his bad feeling.

"Ehm, I keep hearing the words "Slashing Hammer"...what does that mean?"

"You don't know? It's Shin's "new" nickname. He slashes monsters apart with dull

weapons, so people started referring to him as “Shin the Slashing Hammer”.”

“Oof...”

Shin felt a dull blow in his gut, knowing how this nickname had spread without his knowledge. What kind of name is Slashing Hammer... he couldn't help but sigh to himself.

“Tonight we celebrate Kotone's return, the conquest of the dungeon and these brave adventurers!!”

Kuchinashi spoke again after the applause died down.

There was no toast; after another brief applause, all participants freely started to enjoy food and beverages.

“Here you are.”

“Oh, thanks.”

Noticing that Shin's glass was empty, Kotone raised a bottle of Sake to offer him.

Schnee too was paying attention to serving him, but as Shin held his glass with his right hand, Kotone was closer.

“You even have my sister serve you...!?”

“Don't say it like I'm forcing her to!!”

Shin didn't know how others saw it, but Kotone had served him out of her own free will.

“Shin, feed me, feed me!”

Completely unaware of Kotone and Schnee's small war and Suzune's pestering, Yuzuha kept ordering what she wanted to eat.

Shin felt bad about leaving Yuzuha back often lately, so he prioritized feeding Yuzuha over eating himself.

“Can’t help it. Here, say aah!”

“Yummy~”

Shin used a pair of chopsticks and brought Yuzuha’s order to her mouth. Yuzuha took a big bite and showed a large smile.

Shin had younger siblings in the real world; he laughed wryly at Yuzuha’s spoiled attitude, but followed her orders to the letter.

“My, how cute.”

Looking at Yuzuha fed by Shin, Kotone squirmed.

“Then, I suppose I shall do it to Shin.”

“Eh?”

Shin’s chopsticks were busy with feeding Yuzuha. Seeing this, Schnee quickly used hers to pick food from a plate and carry it to Shin’s mouth.

“Here, say aah.”

“Sure, aah...”

Schnee started it herself, but couldn’t help blushing a little.

Shin noticed it and became nervous. The food she had brought him, though, was very delicious.



“My my, there’s no space to fit in between those three, is there.”

“She might be a monster, but she looks just like a child.”

Looking at Shin and those around him, Filma and Shibaid laughed and drank merrily.

Since they didn’t participate in the dungeon mission, they wondered whether they should participate in the celebrations, but Kuchinashi overwhelmed their objections,

saying that it was always a party.

“Won’t you go to lord Shin’s side?”

“Me? Well, even if I went...”

The question to Filma had been asked by Kunitsuna, who was looking at Shin too. He had refused to become her wielder, but as her savior, she addressed him with “lord”.

In reaction to her question, Filma tilted her glass in her hands, a troubled expression on her face.

“Schnee and I, we have a different stance towards Shin... we feel different things.”

“Is that so? I thought that conquering the strong and being served by the beautiful was a gentleman’s way of life. It appears that lady Schnee and lady Tiera fancy lord Shin.”

“Ahaha, anyone would see Schnee does.”

Tiera took another swig, laughing heartily.

“For Tiera, it looks too early for you to say so, though.”

“Women are more sensitive about this stuff... right?”

“Mitsuyo and Munechika are a bit dull, though. Their way of thinking is more similar to a man’s.”

“Hey, Kunitsuna, don’t just insult so casually!”

Mitsuyo, sitting beside Kunitsuna, couldn’t let those words go without reacting. I know that much too, her pouting lips expressed.

“Hmm, as they say in Hinomoto, three women together make a ruckus... I see it’s true even with weapons.”

Looking at Kunitsuna and Filma teasing Mitsuyo, Shibaid whispered this to himself and poured himself another glass.

“My, you won’t ask about my feelings, Shibaid?”

“You are a High Lord, but your heart is similar to a Type Cat’s. Even if I asked, you would not say what you really feel. We are companions under the same master, I do not need to be a woman to understand.”

“Hmph, so that’s what you say to me, huh.”

Shibaid’s words and look seemed to see through Filma; this time it was her lips’ turn to pout.

“There is no need for reservation between us, is there. Lady Kunitsuna, you do not need to hold anything back with Filma. She’s not the type to be concerned by things like that, so speak to her freely.”

“I shall do as you say, then.”

“Do let me add one thing, though. I heard you asked Shin to become your master, but I tell you that asking us will give you the same result. Because we have received our weapons from Shin.”

Shibaid had heard about it from Schnee, so he made sure Kunitsuna let go such thoughts. As Shin had said, Shibaid and the others had more than enough ability to wield Kunitsuna.

“Oh my, did you find out I was aiming at you? Lord Shin has unfathomable prowess, but the same can be said for you all. It might be a strange thing to say but, lady Schnee included, I feel that you all exceed the limits of strength an individual can hope to attain.”

“That’s all part of serving a High Human. I wouldn’t lose to any average warrior.”

“Truly. Were the master to give the order, the servant needs to be able to overthrow even a divine beast.”

Despite her playful tone, Kunitsuna’s speech was serious; Filma and Shibaid gave their answers, each with a slightly different atmosphere.

Only Mitsuyo, who had stayed with them for a certain time and was following their exchange, noticed this small change.

“Kunitsuna, enough with your jokes.”

“I know. I won’t go any further. I apologize, I am afraid I overstepped my bounds.”

“Don’t worry. It happened a lot in the past.”

In the period when the High Human’s abilities were still unknown, the number of reckless players who had faced Shin to test his strength was not small.

As Shibaid and Filma were with him during such battles too, they were sensible to the gaze of who wanted to estimate their strength.

In Kunitsuna’s case, they felt how she was also wary of them, so they released some of the pressure they were keeping suppressed.

“We’re here to celebrate. Let’s enjoy the rest of the banquet.”

They all nodded to Shibaid’s words.

Forgetting about time passing, all present enjoyed the party.

C h a p t e r 4

世界樹の巫女

THE NEW
GATE

Chapter 4

Part 1

Once the banquet drew to a close, the main guests -Shin and his group- went to their assigned rooms inside the guildhouse. They had one room each, but as expected Yuzuha slipped into Shin's room.

"I guess I got a little tipsy."

Yuzuha had curled up into a ball on the bed as soon as they entered the room, and Shin left to take a walk in the guildhouse to sober up.

Shin knew Kuchinashi and her guild from before, so he was also familiar with the structure of the guildhouse to a degree. Given his familiarity combined with the map, he wouldn't lose his way.

Even if he bumped into other guild members, his name and face were already well known, so as long as he avoided any places where only guild members were allowed, there wouldn't be any problems.

"Hm? This presence is..."

Following the presence displayed on the map, Shin arrived in a part of the guildhouse resembling a garden.

The square-shaped garden was about 20 mels wide. The walls hid it from the rest of the building, so it was well suited to practicing with weapons and techniques.

It was already well into the night; the moon and stars were shining gently on the garden's grass and flowers.

"So it was really you, Tiera."

He had felt her presence already, but as the map showed, there was already someone in the garden.

The moonlight was shining on Tiera's silhouette, alone in the darkness of the night. She was looking at the sky, still clad in the priestess clothes she wore at the banquet.

"Oh, you didn't change yet?... Tiera?"

Shin called to Tiera, who was still looking up to the sky, a distant look in her eyes, but received no response.

Shin felt something was off, and called her again; Tiera then finally moved.

Slowly, she raised her arms, then opened them wide. As she did this, she lightly spun on her feet.

Afterward, without stopping, she continued dancing, as if she was playing with some invisible creature.



“Is this Kagura... the dance offered to the gods?”

Priestess robes, a silhouette bathed in the moonlight that felt almost otherworldly, movements apparently lacking any regularity.

Looking at Tiera’s flowing black hair, Shin was reminded of the Kagura, a dance offered to the gods of Shinto shrines, which he had seen on TV in the past.

That Kagura dance was very slow-paced, but he felt that Tiera’s dance shared a similar atmosphere. Her expression also suggested that she had fallen into a sort of trance.

“ ... ”

Without realizing it, Shin had lost track of time, absorbed in Tiera’s dance.

How much time had passed? As if repeating the first movements in reverse, Tiera lowered her arms while spinning, then stopped completely.

She was looking at the sky again, just like she did when Shin had arrived. Her position and posture were also identical; if Shin had not seen her dance, he would think she had just continued looking at the sky all the while.

If something had changed, it was the moonlight, which seemed to shine on Tiera more brightly than before.

“The stars are really beautiful.”

“Hm? Oh... yeah, that’s true.”

When had she noticed him? Tiera turned towards Shin and talked to him.

Tiera’s faint smile gave her an almost mystical aura. As if the person Shin was now looking at was someone else.

“Shin, did you come to look at the stars too?”

“No, I just wanted to feel the night breeze a bit. And... I didn’t mean to peek, but I saw your dance. I’m not going to ask what it was, nor will I talk to anyone about it, so rest easy.”

He was a little undecided first, but Shin then opted to tell her the honest truth.

Shin had decided to wait until she said the word before he talked about her circumstances. Thus he told her that he had no intention of inquiring any further.

“I see. But, I think that it’s alright if it’s you, Shin. It could even be that I called for you.”

Tiera walked towards Shin, smiling to tell him that there was nothing to worry about. At the same time, she said something cryptic.

“You were calling? Can I ask what that means?”

“Wait just a little more, please. Or I can’t explain well enough.”

Tiera extended a hand towards Shin’s cheeks while speaking. She touched him gently, as if handling something broken.

“Tiera... no, you are...”

The feeling Shin had of something being off grew larger and larger. What he thought was just his imagination became reality.

With eyes that seemed lost into space, she looked straight towards Shin. He returned the look, trying to grasp what was hidden deep within her eyes.

Her eyes were golden, but also contained hues different from the color yellow. What her slightly transparent pupils reflected was the black-haired man he always saw in the mirror...? Not this time.

“!?”

Not him, someone wrapped in mist, was looking back at him. As he tried to uncover the identity of that mysterious figure, something soft and warm touched Shin’s lips.

“Hnn... mmh... nnh...”

What had touched Shin’s lips was Tiera’s. All his focus was concentrated on her eyes, and he hadn’t noticed her coming closer and closer.

Her hands, which had been gently caressing his cheeks, were now holding them firmly.

A passionate kiss, unthinkable for the usual Tiera, united the two together.

A single teardrop escaped Tiera's eyes as they were kissing. Her expression, differently from before, was both earnest and charming.

“!!”

The sudden event had stopped Shin's thought process, but after a few seconds it started again.

Thinking that this could not be allowed to continue, he put his hands on Tiera's shoulders and tried to break free.

“Hn...?”

Fortunately, his hands touched Tiera's shoulders just as she had pulled back slightly to breathe. That moment, the light of reason returned to Tiera's eyes.

She seemed to be completely unaware of what was happening and just stood there, frozen. Before her eyes, however, was a long thread uniting Shin and Tiera's lips.

The thread shining in the moonlight was a product of Shin's, or Tiera's, or both of their saliva.

“Ah...? W-why...?”

Tiera seemed absolutely confused and would just repeat “why?” over and over.

If this was daytime, her violently blushing face would be clearly visible.

“I-I... did I really... Shin...?”

She didn't say what she did. Or rather, she couldn't.

Her hands, holding Shin's face.

A distance so close they could feel each other breathing.

The thread hanging between their lips.

Adding all of these elements, it was more than clear what had just happened.

“Ni...”

“Tiera, first of all, hear me ou...”

“NYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHH!!!”

Upon reaching the apex of confusion, Tiera could not hear Shin’s words and ran away as fast as she could. Just like a veteran ninja, she deftly slipped away from Shin and ran off, totally oblivious of her priestess robes.

Her screams echoing through the guildhouse, Tiera ran through the corridors at a speed that would make the average Chosen One grow pale. In just a few seconds she had turned the corner and disappeared.

“What in the...”

Considering what happened, Shin couldn’t just go after her and just stayed behind; for a while, all he could do was just stand there, dumbfounded.



The next morning, Shin took Yuzuha to the breakfast hall, rubbing his still half-closed eyes.

Still sleepy, Yuzuha held onto Shin’s hand, almost dozing off while they walked.

In the guildhouse, breakfast was served at a specific time; Shin’s group would eat it alongside the other members.

As he was heading towards the hall, Shin met Filma and Tiera. Filma greeted him as usual, but Tiera turned violently red as soon as she saw Shin and hurried on towards the hall.

“...hey, Shin. Something happened to Tiera yesterday, right?”

Filma could not fail to notice Tiera’s crystal clear reaction. She could not let it go either, so she pressed Shin, smiling.

“Something happened, yeah you can say that. But I can’t wrap my mind around it either. I wanted to ask her about it yesterday, but she ran off before I could.”

“You did something to make her run away, right? Something so embarrassing that she turned red like that.”

“Don’t say it like I’m the bad guy! I don’t get what’s going on either!”

Filma’s face was coming closer and closer, but Shin pushed her away.

As it wasn’t possible to ask Tiera about what happened, Shin could think of only one person to ask for help. But in that case, he had to explain what happened the night before.

“I can’t just let this go, though... I’d really rather not, but I’ll go talk with someone who might know what happened. I’ll leave Yuzuha to you.”

Shin entrusted Yuzuha to Filma and headed to Schnee’s room. When he passed in front of the room assigned to Schnee, he had felt her presence inside.

When Shin knocked on the door, Schnee came out right away; she was about to go out too.

“Shin? I don’t see Yuzuha with you, did something happen?”

“There’s something I want to ask you about Tiera. There’s still some time until breakfast, will you hear me out?”

“Something happened, I suppose. Do come in.”

Shin followed Schnee inside. The room’s interior was very similar to Shin’s room, with just the furniture’s placement being a little different.

Shin sat on a cushion and told what happened the night before.

About Tiera’s dance, about her looking like a different person, about the person looking at him from within her eyes. Finally, about the kiss.

“...so that’s what happened...”

“She regained her senses halfway through, though. Looked like she didn’t remember what happened, and because of that she ran off before I could ask her anything. I thought you might know something, so...”

Shin talked while avoiding to look straight in Schnee’s eyes.

Schnee’s intimidating aura had vanished on their way back from the dungeon, but her mood didn’t seem to have improved much.

“I see, I understood the situation. I cannot talk in detail about this if Tiera isn’t here too, but I can say that at the very least it isn’t something bad. You could say it’s related to Tiera’s unique nature.”

“Well, just by looking at her you can tell that she’s not a normal Elf. I imagined she came from a special lineage, or something.”

“That’s not a wrong way to see it. Let us let Tiera talk about it herself. Of course, the decision to do so or not rests upon her.”

“That’s all right. I’m just relieved that it isn’t something dangerous.”

Shin drew a sigh of relief. It doesn’t look like Tiera was possessed by something, at least.

Together with the relief, Shin felt his stomach rumble, in perfect time for breakfast.

“Shall we go get breakfast, then?”

“Yes... but, before that...”

“Eh? Eh? What?”

Shin had turned around to exit the room, but Schnee grabbed his hand and made him turn back towards her.

Shin looked timidly at Schnee, fearing that the time for the explosion of her accumulated stress had come. But Schnee’s expression seemed to contain something completely different from his predictions.

“I can’t just let this go without saying anything... do you think that I wouldn’t feel

anything after what you just told me?”

“Aah, er, well... I don’t, that’s why it was a bit difficult to tell...”

Even if he knew what he had to do, actually doing it was a different matter altogether.

Curiously enough, Shin clearly understood that Schnee was pouting, from her expressions and her gestures.

“Considering what happened with Kotone too... Shin, you have too many ‘openings’.”

“I, I’m sorry...”

Shin could not say anything back, except apologies. Schnee never came off so strongly in front of others.

“If you really feel sorry..... p-please hug me.”

After a few moments of silence, Schnee opened her arms and spoke.

“Ehm... is that, enough?”

“I don’t like to be always left out.”

Schnee moved her arms up and down a little while talking. That movement was remarkably similar to Yuzuha’s ears during the banquet, urging Shin to hurry and pet her.

Feeling embarrassed after making such a clear request, Schnee closed her eyes, but her cheeks had turned bright red.

Shin finally embraced her gently.

“Hn...”

The instant he hugged her, Schnee’s body twitched. Then, with some hesitation, she wrapped her hands around Shin’s torso.

The embrace had probably taken away her nervousness, because she started hugging Shin tightly.

A faint, sweet scent reached Shin's nostrils. At the same time, a warm, soft sensation spread on his arms and chest.

"It's so strange... I feel so peaceful now."

"Well, that's... that's good."

Looking at Schnee's serene expression, Shin breathed a sigh of relief.

The "incident" wasn't over yet, however.

"Please, hold me tighter."

Schnee looked peaceful at first, but after some time she expressed her desire for Shin to embrace her with more strength.

Shin wasn't sure about how to control his strength, so he hugged her just a little tighter. With Shin's current muscle strength, even a little difference should have let her feel a significant difference.

"More... more, please..."

It wasn't nearly enough for Schnee, though. The tighter he held her, the more she pleaded him to.

Schnee wasn't an average elf either, so using more strength wouldn't hurt her. But it wasn't possible for nothing to have changed.

Because of their tight embrace, the two soft mounds on Schnee's chest changed shape, the sensation pressing even more clearly on Shin's chest.

In addition, looking at Schnee rubbing her face on his shoulders was robbing Shin of his capacity of rational thinking at alarming speed.

"Do it... more..."

Shin couldn't look at Schnee's face. The words she sultrily whispered to his ears sounded almost like pillow talk.

A warning saying "It'll be bad to go any farther than this here!" resounded in Shin's

head. But despite his thoughts, his body wouldn't move.

"Schnee..."

Shin's feelings overcame his reason.

Shin's hands caressed Schnee's back, and her body responded by trembling slightly, and then—

"(You guys, meal time is ending!!)"

—Filma's voice resounded in their heads.

"!?"

The sudden call caused both Shin and Schnee to leap away from each other.

"Gwah!?"

Shin, who had his back to the door, suffered a spectacularly clean hit on the back of his head. He didn't receive any actual damage, but was struck by a certain self-loathing, wondering what he was even doing.

"I'm sorry. I got a little, carried away..."

"No, I was the same, I couldn't bring myself to stop..."

Their mood had gotten over both of them. Shin and Schnee apologized to each other and headed directly to the hall, after telling Filma that they would be there soon.

"Ehm, Ms. Schnee? May I ask why we are holding arms?"

"Let me linger, just a little bit. I'll have to say it because you don't seem to realize it... but there are too many beautiful women around you, Shin. For me, it means never being able to relax, you know?"

"It's not like I'm gathering them or anything..."

"Keep more distance from them then."

Probably because they were alone walking through the corridors, Schnee protested towards Shin while holding his arm.

Thinking that it was pretty daring behavior for Schnee, Shin searched the nearby presences, but found out that, miraculously, there was no one in the path ahead. Schnee had probably verified this before Shin.

Shin could, of course, forcefully break free of her hold. The soft sensation pressed on his arm, however, won over him.

“Am, I, clear?”

“G-Got it...”

Shin covered before Schnee’s pressure. He understood what Schnee was feeling, so he had nothing to object.

Satisfied of Shin’s answer and nod, Schnee released her hold and walked on. Shin followed her as he wiped his cold sweat.

The breakfast hall was next to the previous night’s banquet hall.

When they arrived, they found that the other party members had all already started eating. More than half of their plates’ contents had already disappeared.

“Oh, that was fast—I see Schnee’s in a pretty good mood, did something happen?”

Filma talked as they took their seats. The second part was spoken in a whisper to Shin, so that Schnee, sitting on the other side of the table, wouldn’t hear.

“Well, I asked what I had to. Tiera.”

“Ah! Yes! W-what is it...?”

Shin stopped Tiera, who had stood up with food remaining on her plate, before she could slip away.

No matter if she wanted to talk or not, he wanted to tell her about what happened the night before.

“I’m going to explain clearly about what happened yesterday. Please wait in your room.”

“Ehm, er, yes, ok, I got it.”

Shin watched as Tiera awkwardly left the room, then ate his breakfast.

Filma and the others, who did not know what happened, were puzzled by this exchange, but did not say anything. Tiera’s behavior was clear proof that something must have happened.

Part 2

After breakfast, Shin and Schnee went to Tiera's room.

As they knocked, Tiera timidly opened the door, as bright red as she was in the hall.

"Shin and... master? You don't mean that—"

"Er, yes, we do."

Tiera seemed to be thinking of something, as seeing Schnee behind Shin surprised her.

"We came to talk about what happened to you last night. Won't you hear us out?"

"...okay. Come in."

With a serious expression completely different to when she opened the door, Tiera let the two inside.

Shin then told Tiera about everything he saw and heard.

"I see... so that's what happened to me..."

"I heard from Schnee that it's probably not something bad. That's all I came to say."

"Wait. The chance is right, it's time for me to talk about what I've been hiding."

Shin had stood up after he finished talking, but Tiera stopped him.

"You don't have to push yourself, all right?"

"That's fine. It's time I stop hiding things from you and the others after all."

She probably felt bad about it. In a way, Tiera felt relieved that she could finally talk.

"Munechika also told me that it's something certain people can perceive easily. Mitsuyo might have felt it too."

"Really? Well then, I'm listening."

“Could you please call Filma and the others too? They’re your followers after all, I want to talk about it with everyone.”

Shin agreed to Tiera’s proposal and told Filma and the others to come to Tiera’s room.

After a few minutes, in addition to Filma and Shibaid, Mitsuyo and Kunitsuna arrived too. Shin asked Tiera if it was alright for them to hear too, and Tiera replied that since she had talked about it to Munechika, it was not a problem for Mitsuyo and Kunitsuna to know too.

“I have no intention of stringing you along, so I’ll say the most important thing first.”

Tiera took a deep breath and started talking, her expression suggesting the importance of the decision she had made.

“I am a priestess of the World Tree. In a clan that has the unique ability to communicate with the Sacred Tree, which has its roots in the Ley lines and miasma purification, I am a particularly special existence... no, I was.”

“Was? You mean that you aren’t anymore?”

Tiera’s words were ultimately in the past tense.

“Yes, I can’t be called a priestess of the World Tree as I am now. Well, that title itself, “Priestess of the World Tree”, is something unique to the village I used to live in, though.”

She didn’t know how those with the same powers as hers were called elsewhere, added Tiera.

“The village that was created when elves gathered around the Sacred Tree, a pseudonym for the World Tree, is the place I was born. My clan, the Lucent clan, was originally a clan with especially sharp senses for magic. The clan members with the highest magic senses were chosen as priestess. I think that by now, the next priestess probably already assumed her duties. That’s what I meant when I said I ‘was’.”

Even among the clan, not all members could communicate with the World Tree. At the time, Tiera seemed to possess the highest potential of all the clan members.

“At the beginning, I just had very sharp senses for magic, but gradually my ability

specialized in communicating with the World Tree, so now I'm a little more sensitive than the average elf. They used to say I have talent, but in the end if they're not close to the World Tree, priestesses can't use much power. The miasma purification I used was possible just because the depths of the dungeon were close to the Ley lines too."

Tiera stated that her sensitivity towards the Ley lines was a remnant ability of her connection with the World Tree. She could use the miasma purification technique only because it was close to the Ley lines.

According to Tiera, she had powered up too when Filma was freed because she had fulfilled her duty as priestess, or so she thought.

"I see, that's how it is. I did feel some sort of aura from you."

"I suppose that the other Supreme Blades felt it too."

Mitsuyo nodded in understanding and Kunitsuna, holding her chin, stated her conclusion.

"Munechika had asked me about this too. She also told me to be careful, as those with power to influence Ley lines could find out about me."

Without any more reasons to hide it, Tiera also talked about her exchange with Munechika.

"Kuu? Purification?"

"Yeah, maybe you already heard about it, but Tiera purified both Dojigiri and Onimaru's miasma."

Shin explained briefly about Tiera's purifications to the puzzled Yuzuha.

"Tiera, amazing! Kuu..."

Yuzuha praised Tiera, the tails poking out of her priestess robe and her ears twitching. Even for Yuzuha, what Tiera did was worthy of praise.

"I'm sorry for cutting in. Is what you said the reason behind your fast growth or the

fact that Scoruas and the demons targeted you?”

“I don’t know about the growth, but that’s probably it for the demons. The World Tree purifies the impurities of the earth, which makes it a natural enemy of the demons. Those human-like demons probably felt the remains of the World Tree’s powers still lingering within me.”

“Its power is still inside you?”

“Because I used to communicate with the World Tree very frequently. In order to communicate more deeply, part of priestess’ magic becomes similar to the World Tree’s magic. Only part of my hair turning silver could have been caused by the World Tree’s magic power influencing the curse. It wasn’t caused by miasma, but the World Tree’s magic power reacts strongly to impurity and curses.”

Tiera continued talking while fiddling with her silver bangs.

However, because of the World Tree’s great powers, Tiera’s position as priestess changed drastically after she received the “Cursed Gift.”

“The priestess, a cleanser of impurity, ended up being cursed. It was an unprecedented situation.”

Tiera’s expression darkened as she was reminded of her past.

“But, it’s weird you know, even after receiving the “Cursed Gift”, I could communicate a little bit with the World Tree. It was different from before though, it was like listening in to someone else’s conversation. I can still remember it clearly.”

Tiera added that the communication was usually just a hazy exchange of thoughts, which wouldn’t express clear words or symbols. The priestess’ task was to translate such unclear thoughts for people to understand.

“I think I heard fragments of words. Though, I don’t remember what they were.”

She wasn’t in the right state of mind to focus on something like that, after all.

“Hey, Tiera. What does it actually mean to communicate with the World Tree? Is it just a translation of the World Tree’s thoughts? That’s not all it is, right?”

Shin tried to shift the topic so Tiera wouldn't focus too much on her expulsion from the village.

"It also depends on what you are good or bad at, but it's possible to control the weather in a limited range, create barriers, scry far away locations, and all sorts of things. It varies a lot from person to person. I heard that one of the past priestesses could even predict the future."

"...it's kind of similar to the 'Star Reader' title."

What the words "predict the future" reminded Shin of were Millie's words, which predicted Yuzuha's danger. The World Tree could probably grant this ability even without a title.

"What were you good at, Tiera?"

Hearing that abilities depended on individual talent, Filma asked Tiera about her particular talent.

"My talent was spirit channeling... to temporarily bring back the spirits of the dead. I'm not sure if I could actually do it though."

During channeling, she would be almost completely unconscious, so she could only learn the results from others.

Tiera added that one of her most important duties was to channel past priestesses to borrow their powers and to recall the spirits of those who died from accidents or disease, so they could say their last words to their loved ones.

"So you were channeling someone that time? It did feel like it wasn't actually you."

"What do you mean?"

"I couldn't see clearly, but when your face came closer, I saw someone else in your eyes, looking at me. Well... I didn't feel any hostility though."

"She came in for the kiss, after all... she wouldn't if she was hostile, right? But it really is weird... why kiss?"

"Don't ask me! But she was crying too. Well, Tiera was the one actually crying, but

those tears were caused by that person's emotions, no?"

Shin took advantage of Filma's interruption to express one of his doubts.

It was difficult to talk about the kiss itself, but he could probably get away with the current flow of the conversation.

"One possibility is that you simply mistook who you saw. Or it was someone you know. I'm sorry to say, though, but that person is probably already..."

"I know, don't worry. That's not something you need to concern yourself with."

Tiera hid her face apologetically, but Shin replied in the most cheerful way he could.

Channeling a spirit meant that the target had to be already dead. Tiera had explained that it was not possible to call upon the spirit of someone still alive.

"That's bizarre though. My ability shouldn't work away from the World Tree. Why is this happening even though I'm not a priestess?"

"Maybe you only think it shouldn't work, and it actually does. Could it be possible?"

"I don't think so, but... like this time, maybe it happened already and I just don't remember."

It was difficult to detect when Tiera's ability manifested.

Even if someone was channeled through Tiera, as long as that person didn't do something unusual, it would be difficult to notice.

"You can't use that power by yourself?"

"I could if the World Tree was close. But I can't even feel its presence around here. I tried in Tsuki no Hokora too, but never succeeded."

Tiera answered negatively to Mitsuyo's totally reasonable question.

"Schnee, do you have any idea what this could be?"

"...no, nothing unfortunately. At least, I have never witnessed something like what Shin

talked about.”

Even Schnee, who had lived with Tiera, answered contrary to Shin’s expectations.

“That can’t be helped. While master trained me and taught me about the store in the beginning, she normally was busy somewhere else, so even if my ability had manifested she wouldn’t have been there to see it.”

Tiera saw Shin thinking deeply and mistakenly thought he was dejected, so she hurried to defend Schnee.

“Hmm? Ah, no, don’t worry, I’m not feeling down or anything. I was just thinking that if it didn’t happen in Tsuki no Hokora, it must have been caused by you coming here.”

Even close to Bayreuth -where Tsuki no Hokora was located- there was Yuzuha’s territory, which had decently sized Ley lines.

That territory had been tainted by miasma, but the mutated monsters had been defeated by Shin before Tiera could come close. Furthermore, the miasma had already disappeared along with the monsters.

Because of that, Tiera -who couldn’t leave Tsuki no Hokora- did not have the chance to go to such an area, as it happened this time, or so Shin thought.

“Is this place that special? I know it’s weird that it’s full-blown winter outside while it’s spring in here, but being a guildhouse, it’s understandable.”

“The earth has been revitalized thanks to the Ley lines. It’s probably due to the power of this guildhouse. Nothing of this degree happened at Fuji after all.”

Tiera presented a theory in response to Filma’s question. Elven senses were even capable of perceiving the earth’s activities.

“That’s incredible... Schnee, can you feel it too?”

“My senses are not that sharp. I can feel something through plants, that’s it. I think this is also related to Tiera’s natural abilities.”

Schnee explained how elves’ senses depended on the individual too. Senses as sharp as Tiera’s were not common by any means, apparently.

“There might be something else, something that not even Tiera herself is aware of.”

“Could it be...?”

Something other than her natural abilities as priestess. Tiera tilted her head, failing to understand what Schnee’s hypothesis could mean.

“What about miasma purification? Isn’t that something you do through the World Tree’s powers?”

Shibaid, who had been silently listening finally spoke.

“That’s the correct way of doing it, originally. But when the World Tree’s power isn’t enough, I use the Ley lines’ power. I revitalize the remaining power in the Ley lines and amplify it within my body. Then I use it against miasma, to make them cancel each other, pretty much.”

“So that’s why it looked like it was taking its toll on you.”

Tiera explained that the thicker miasma is, the more there is, thus the greater the burden on the purifier. With the World Tree’s assistance, the amplification would be done by the tree itself.

“Is that something we can’t do? It would be ideal if we could split that burden, I think.”

“If it’s Shin and the others, I guess I can say it... that’s something only those belonging to a lineage of priestesses like me can do, or so I heard. It’s something different from a skill, so I’m afraid I can’t teach it.”

Tiera answered Shin’s question by explaining that it was something tied to one’s bloodline. As it was not a skill nor a title, it was probably something unique to this world.

“Hmm, wait, now that I think about it, there were skills... rather, abilities that we couldn’t use, abilities limited to NPCs in certain quests... can anyone remember?”

“Hmm, I think I have heard about that before... what was it again...?”

“It was miasma related, right? I remember it was something about defeating people that adored demons.”

Shibaid and Filma tried to recall what Shin was referring to.

“Quest” was just a single word, but its contents were not only numerous, but also diverse. It was difficult to recall a specific one right away.

“The content is a bit different, but could it be the ‘Seven Sages’ Bloodline?’ I remember that it featured a clan with a special bloodline that hunted demons. I think there was also something related to purifying miasma.”

“Ah! Yes! Yes, that’s it.”

Shin felt the haziness disappear from his memories.

The “Seven Sages’ Bloodline” quest Schnee mentioned had the players assist NPCs, set as descendants of the first 7 species that appeared in the world, in their battles against demons.

Working together with the NPCs, who possessed skills effective against miasma and demons -difficult foes for even advanced users- the players had to locate the origin of the miasma and defeat the demon that appeared with it.

Quests were categorized by level of difficulty; clearing one would allow the player to try others with higher difficulty. The rewards, naturally, would increase in level too.

“There was a quest like that, yeah...”

“Why are you getting lost in your memories like that?”

“Well, you see, there was this really annoying elf... this one time I carried her like a doll while I went charging against the demons. My stats were already maxed out when that quest appeared, and the NPCs weren’t much help in battle. The main thing was to fight while protecting them, really. Honestly, I could have crushed the enemies with sheer power at that point, even without the NPCs around.”

While Shin’s actions were possible in a videogame setting, during the death game or in the current world, he wouldn’t act in such a dangerous manner now.

Of course, at the time he was criticized by other players too, who called his behavior “totally absurd”.

“Well, that has nothing to do with this. If it’s as Schnee said, Tiera could be a descendant of the Seven Sages’ bloodline. The demons could have felt the World Tree’s power and the Seven Sages’ aura, or both. Both their natural enemies’ abilities together... it was a great threat to the demons.”

The high-ranked demons Scoruas and Adara’s atmosphere had changed completely when they saw Tiera; it wasn’t something that could be explained simply with the words “natural enemy”.

The way they changed was as drastic as a change in eye color.

“In this case, we need to power up Tiera’s equipment more, to prepare for whatever may happen. Your level increased too, so you should be able to equip weapons and armor of higher quality.”

“The equipment I’m borrowing now seems high-level enough already, though...”

The equipment Shin lent to Tiera was worth a small fortune in this world. Hearing that Shin wanted to power up such luxurious gear, Tiera’s expression stiffened.

“Oh no, please, that’s just the start. Depending on the method, I bet you could even equip Mythology-level gear. If you tell me the exact numbers, I can give you much better stuff even within the same grade.”

“I’m a bit scared to equip it... but yes, please do.”

Tiera nodded to Shin’s proposal, albeit with some hesitation.

In order for Tiera to continue traveling with Shin and the group, improving her equipment was absolutely necessary. Shin’s group was overpowered and clad in Ancient-grade gear, after all.

She didn’t know how strong she would ultimately become, but if she had a chance to improve, she wouldn’t let it go.

“We kind of trailed off in the end, but I’ve said all I wanted to.”

“World Tree Priestess... I thought I was pretty knowledgeable about this world, but I guess I have to think again.”

“Kuu, so many, mysteries”

“Mystery, hmm... well, I suppose it is a mystery.”

After his casual comment, Shin noticed that Tiera sighed while looking at him and Yuzuha.

Schnee was an Elf like her and was already aware of her circumstances, but maybe Tiera feared that we would act differently after knowing the truth, or so Shin thought.

After revealing a secret, no matter what it was, one was always worried about how others would react.

“OK, now we know about Tiera’s situation. Thanks for telling us. Even if you’re a World Tree Priestess, I have no intention of changing how I act towards you, so there’s that.”

“...o, ok. Thanks.”

Shin stated his intentions in a slightly rough manner, but everyone nodded.

Looking at them, Tiera choked a little and thanked them, tears welling in her eyes.

“OK, let’s go back to the topic of Tiera’s equipment. I’ve been choosing it until now, but I’m sure you want to start deciding by yourself, right? With higher stats, you have more options about what to equip. Come with me later.”

“OK, certainly.”

Tiera equipped bows and daggers until now, but the range of available equipment is far wider. Tiera’s main job, Tamer, allowed her to use also whips, rods and throwing weapons.

The range of available equipment is small at low levels, but at her current level Tiera should be able to have more choices.

“What are you going to do, everyone?”

“Can I come with you? I’m curious to see what equipment Tiera will choose.”

“Let’s go together then.”

Mitsuyo was apparently interested to see what weapons and gear Shin possessed. The other Supreme Blade, Kunitsuna, had something to do with Kotone.

“Okay, we’ll just kill time until Tiera decides her new equipment, then. We’ll have to stay here until the day after tomorrow to check on the progress, after all. I guess I’ll take a look around the guildhouse, maybe.”

Filma said she would look around the guildhouse while waiting; today, she planned to visit the buildings other than the main one.

“I have been asked to lead a training session. If anything happens, just contact me.”

Shibaid wielded a halberd, so he was asked to impart training to the priestesses, who used similar long weapons.

“Got it. Schnee, Yuzuha, what about you?”

“Move, body! Play, snow!”

“Then, I’ll keep an eye on Yuzuha.”

Yuzuha had returned to her expressionless face, but pointed excitedly at the silver-colored forest. Schnee then proposed to accompany her.

Via Mind Chat, she also told Shin that she’ll make sure Yuzuha doesn’t run too wild.

“OK, free time until noon then.”

Thinking that everyone needed free time once in a while, Shin and the others went their respective paths.

“If we want to choose items, we need the Tsuki no Hokora. Let’s ask Kuchinashi, just in case.”

Shin’s item box contained a large quantity of weapons and gear, but it had few choices for Tamers. He then decided to open Tsuki no Hokora’s warehouse.

“My, curious to see you three together.”

Kuchinashi was surprised to see Shin, Tiera, and Mitsuyo visit her room.

“Yes, we thought that sometimes it’s good to just act on our own like this.”

“I thought that Schnee would never leave your side though.”

Kuchinashi teased Shin.

“It’s not like we’re together all the time, you know. Today I’m having her watch over Yuzuha.”

Schnee’s feelings towards Shin were apparently crystal clear. If Yuzuha hadn’t said she wanted to go play, Schnee would have probably joined Shin and the others too.

“So, what brings you here today?”

“I wanted to pull out Tsuki no Hokora, so I thought of asking if there is a wide space without people around. I wouldn’t want to surprise anyone, pulling a building out of thin air.”

Different from the former player Kuchinashi, the Black Priestess Shrine members would never think that it was possible to carry buildings like that.

They could have asked other priestesses too, but Shin’s group knew only very few of them, namely Kotone and Suzune. Even if the priestesses knew about them, they couldn’t say the opposite.

In Kuchinashi’s case, they didn’t have to explain things in detail for her to understand.

“I know just the right place. If you’re going there though, would you mind if Kotone and I came along?”

“That’s fine by me, what do you say, Tiera?”

“No problem.”

Shin and Tiera had no objections to Kuchinashi’s request.

“Can we call Kotone first then?”

“That’s all right, but what are you planning? If you’re going to call Kotone, does it mean you want me to temper her weapons?”

“I can’t say I wouldn’t want for you to strengthen our weapons... but if you helped us more, I’m afraid we’d start to rely on you too much.”

Shin asked the question in a casual tone, but Kuchinashi’s expression as she replied looked grim.

“Some other trouble, then?”

“Something like that. Let’s continue the conversation in the Tsuki no Hokora, with Kotone too. The soundproofing here is good, but I want to keep the risk of leaks as low as possible.”

Kuchinashi’s words, which suggested that she did not want even her comrades to know, were slightly different than what Shin had expected.

What she was going to talk about must have been something only a few in Black Priestess Shrine knew.

“Looks like it’s something really serious. I see, let’s go right... wait, let’s call Kotone’s first.”

“Yes, I’ll call her right away, so please wait just a moment.”

A few minutes after Kuchinashi gave the order, Kotone joined with the group. Now she was wearing, unlike the priestess clothes she wore at the banquet, the Black Priestess Shrine’s usual black robes.

“You called for me, milady?”

“Yes, we were waiting for you. We’re leaving right away, so please act as an escort.”

Whenever the guildmaster goes anywhere, generally one or more guild members act as an escort. Kuchinashi called Kotone also for her to take this role.

Shin and the others did not know what Kuchinashi wanted to tell them, but since she called Kotone, it was likely that the latter already knew, or Kuchinashi thought it was something she could tell her.

Kunitsuna, who had some business with Kotone in the morning, was with her too, but that was not a problem so Shin didn’t say anything.

“Shall we go then. I’ll lead the way, follow me.”

Shin’s group followed Kuchinashi through the guildhouse. Strangely enough, they didn’t meet anyone else on the way to their destination.

The place Kuchinashi led the group to was a thicket located right across the barrier delimiting the guildhouse’s territory. The woods appeared to slip through the barrier, but actually the trees were simply growing on both sides of the barrier.

“No one will see us here.”

Shin and Kotone flattened the ground in a clearing without trees, then Shin materialized Tsuki no Hokora.

“We can talk later, so do what you planned on doing first, Shin.”

Judging from Kuchinashi’s words, it wasn’t something they could expect to wrap up quickly.

The equipment selection could be done later, so Shin thought of just collecting the gear first, and went to the storeroom with Tiera.

Kuchinashi and the others said they wanted to take a look around, so Shin allowed them to, albeit with limitations.

“So that’s what this place was. I never saw this door open since I came here, so I was kind of curious.”

Tiera nodded knowingly when she saw which door Shin stopped in front of. She had wondered before about that eternally locked door, which Schnee had never opened either.

“It gives off a kind of eerie feeling, but is it really safe?”

Mitsuyo commented as Shin was opening the door.

“It’s Shin’s weapon storeroom, so there could very well be things that shouldn’t be allowed out in the outside world. Shin can even use cursed weapons without problems, right?”

“L-lady Kuchinashi! Do not leave my side!”

Kotone, shocked to hear the words “cursed weapons”, swiftly stepped in front of Kuchinashi as to protect her.

“Stop talking like this is a den of monsters or something... Kuchinashi, Kotone, the contents of this room can’t be touched anyway, so don’t worry about touching them by mistake.”

Shin’s eyes shot a glare as he explained one of the limitations affecting the warehouse.

“A room chock full of Ancient-grade and Mythology-grade weapons is pretty much a den of monsters, though...”

“They’re just high-quality weapons, all right? Kotone, I’m telling you that no one’s life is in danger.”

“I have my concerns about your word choice, sir Shin... however, is it really alright for us to enter a place that might contain cursed weapons?”

Still worrying about the fact that Shin considered legendary weapons as nothing more than high-spec items, Kotone posed a reasonable question.

“It’s alright, nothing happens as long as you don’t equip them. Plus, if anything happens with one of the weapons here I will take responsibility and melt it down.”

Shin replied with a grin, but at the same time a “thud”-like sound was clearly heard from inside the storeroom.

“H-hey, Shin. I’m sure I just heard something move from inside just now...?”

“I heard it too...”

“Hahaha, don’t worry so much. Some cursed gear was probably a little scared, that’s all.”

“Can you imagine, a blacksmith that can scare weapons...?”

“As a weapon myself, I can’t really laugh at that.”

“Agreed.”

Tiera and Kotone flinched after hearing the noise from inside, but Shin reassured that there were no problems.

Kuchinashi sighed in disbelief, Mitsuyo and Kunitsuna knitted their brows.

Ignoring Kuchinashi’s, Mitsuyo’s, and Kunitsuna’s reaction, Shin finally opened the doors.

Part 3

What the doors opened to reveal was, as Kuchinashi had said, a seemingly endless line of weapons, starting from Rare and Unique up until Mythology and Ancient grade.

“Eh... we have to go in here?”

“W-Wow...”

“Hey, what’s with your reactions?”

Shin was perplexed by Tiera and Kotone’s reactions. For him, the room where he stored his items and gear was nothing more than that, just a storeroom, thus he didn’t view it as a dangerous place at all.

Such a reaction, however, was unique to him: being used to the place, he had not noticed the heavy aura outburst that had come from inside as the doors opened.

At the same time, the magic power enveloping the weapons started to leak out too.

It wasn’t something visible to the naked eye, nor did it have any particular effects. But after feeling it, Tiera and Kotone’s expressions warped all too clearly.

“To be able to act so nonchalantly in the middle of this aura... is something to be expected from you, I should say.”

Kuchinashi had felt it too, and couldn’t help but laughing wryly at how little Shin’s behavior had changed.

“I can feel the presence of weapons just like us...”

“They’re not part of the Five Supreme Blades, but... long swords, spears, there must be several of them.”

Kunitsuna and Mitsuyo felt the presence of weapons that, like them, had turned into human form during events.

“Shin, is this place really safe!? Is it!?”

Tiera, sensitive to magic as usual, had felt the dense magic power filling the room and quickly moved behind Shin's back. She must have felt in danger, as she grabbed his sleeve and wouldn't let go.

"It's alright, honestly. When we were in Bayreuth, Yuzuha came inside here too, you know. Her tails' fur stood straight up though."

"I-If so, I guess it's okay... h-hey, don't just walk away without saying a word!!"

Thinking that he couldn't convince them just talking, Shin walked deeper into the room.

He had moved without saying anything, so Tiera -who was still grabbing his sleeve- almost fell forward.

Mitsuyo followed Shin without a word.

"Uuh... I feel chills down my spine..."

"The name den of monsters wasn't so wrong after all."

"You just need to not pay any mind to it, and it'll be ok. Kuchinashi, everyone, what will you do? It won't take a long time though."

"I think I'll take on your invitation. Come on, let's go, Kotone."

"Eh! L-lady Kuchinashi!"

Kotone seemed to be still unsure, but Kuchinashi stepped in without the least concern. Together with Kunitsuna, she ignored all defensive gear and accessories and went to look at weapons such as sacred swords and spears.

As for Shin, he picked up gear and accessories that Tiera could equip and turned them into cards. Taking advantage of the occasion, he also took some useful tools and items and chucked them into the item box.

"OK, I got what I was looking for. Anything caught your interest, Tiera?"

"Ehm, actually, this one here."

Tiera was pointing towards a ring with a 1-cemel pale green amber embedded within.

The amber emitted a clear glow, very close to a gemstone. In its center, was a seed of some plant.

“I see, the [Celadon Amber Ring].”

Celadon Amber was an item obtained when refining amber via alchemy. The resin used for celadon amber was extracted from the World Tree.

It was an item perfectly fit for a World Tree priestess such as Tiera.

“Anything else? I think there are some more items related to the World Tree.”

“Anything else... no, nothing in particular. I wasn't actually looking, but I just had a feeling about this.”

“I see. So let's put that among the candidates too, then do the rest outside. Kuchinashi, it's time to... wait, what are you looking at?”

When Shin turned to look at Kuchinashi, he found her staring intently in a certain direction.

She was looking at gear used for offense; swords, katana, lances, gauntlets, etc.

In the storeroom all items were separated by category, but only here different types of weapons were gathered together, so they stood out.

“Shin, let me ask one thing, these weapons are for sealing, right?”

“Yes, exactly. I don't actually need them, it's more of a collection than anything.”

Saying so, Shin took in hand one of the katana Kuchinashi was looking at.

Its official name was Sealing Blade [Kusabimaru].

Kusabimaru, a katana 60-cemels long, was completely white. Its blade, hilt, handle and sheath were all the color of snow.

One other thing made it differ from normal katana: transparent spheres were set on

both edges of its hilt. It was a characteristic typical of sealing weapons, and was present in all of them.

The material used to forge these weapons was an alloy; Magic Steel mixed with a small quantity of Orichalcum and Mithril. A particular forging technique would then be used to create the pure white katana [Kusabimaru].

Shin called it a collection because these weapons only found their use in specific events and were normally not useful.

If they were used against normal enemies, 3 slashes against a level 100 Golem would reduce their durability to 0, thus there was no point in using them.

“Was something the matter?”

“Ahaha, well, you see? I wanted to talk to you about something concerning sealing weapons, and here I find a whole collection of them, so I was just thinking, look how things happen...”

Kuchinashi’s expression was an indescribable blend of relief and disbelief.

“Something concerning sealing weapons? These ones are for exclusive use in that event, you don’t mean to say that it appeared?”

“Yes, exactly. But, I don’t mean to say that something has to be done right now. I wanted to tell you everything after Tiera’s business was over, but will you listen to me first?”

“I prefer to hear the bad news first, so that’d be better for me. What do you say, Tiera?”

“I agree. Since I have new equipment to choose from, I don’t want to do it while worrying about what might happen next.”

Tiera also said she wanted to listen to Kuchinashi’s story first, so they all went to the living room for the moment.

On their way, Mitsuyo pulled on Shin’s sleeve.

“Wh-”

“Sssh. Shin, it looks like she’s going to say something really important, but is it OK for

me and Kunitsuna to be there too? We can't normally move from Fuji, so I doubt we can be of any help, you know?"

Shin turned around to talk, but Mitsuyo put her index finger over his mouth and whispered.

"No problem, I'm sure. Kuchinashi knows about the Five Supreme Blades, and I explained too. She would have talked at another time if she didn't want you to hear. Besides, I already have an idea what she's going to say, and I think it's something you should hear too."

"Really? Well, if you say so."

The group arrived in the living room as this exchange ended.

Tiera served tea for all and, after a moment's rest, Kuchinashi started talking.

"Well then... Shin probably guessed already, but what I'm going to talk about now is one of the game's large-scale quests, 'Seven Deadly Sins'"

"So that was really it... this is going to be a pain in the neck."

The "Seven Deadly Sins" quest Kuchinashi mentioned consisted in discovering and sealing, within a set time period, 7 darkness-colored orbs that appeared all over the world.

The orbs fused with monsters in the field or dungeons, forming bosses related to the seven deadly sins. The fusing was limited to animal monsters with a connection to each of the sins.

Once the bosses were defeated the orb would appear; stabbing it with a sealing weapon would count as sealing it.

The weapon used to seal the orb would then signal the general location of the other orbs, so if a player managed to find one, finding the others was only a matter of time.

Players who found many orbs would receive rare items from the game's management, so many players participated in this regularly held quest.

"Do you mean to say that a monster fused with an orb has been found?"

“That’s right. They lost sight of it afterward though.”

The monster had been found by a former player who had participated in the quest in the past, so there should be no mistake, Kuchinashi added.

“Does the adventurers’ guild know about this?”

“Of course I told them. Adventures ranked C and above should have been notified already. The discovered monster is called Ursine Sloth, level 115, apparently.”

“Sloth, is it. When was it found, more or less?”

“About one year ago. I don’t know exactly how the situation is now, that monster’s only talent is hiding, after all. Even when it was found, it ran off somewhere and they lost it right away.”

The monsters governing the seven sins would get gradually stronger over time.

When the monster reaches the level limit, the deadly sins-compatible monsters increase by one, and all monsters’ level grows by 100.

Finally, if the monsters reach level 700, they will transform into devils*. *(T/N: the word used here is 悪魔, which generally means demon/devil; I (tentatively) used devil because the word we translate as demon (瘴魔) is different, using the kanji for miasma and monster)*

Devils, differently from demons, lived in all sorts of ways and did not necessarily attack players or inhabited areas. Their fighting prowess was, however, very high; if the seven devils gathered, then, they would cease acting independently and start attacking people all together.

If that happens, the only way to overcome them is for guilds to collaborate in fighting them.

“In this world there are no ranks or anything after all. Even if they knew that the seals are broken, no one would just go hunt the monsters.”

The seal on the orbs would break one by one.

If the fused monsters were found quickly, even low and mid-level players had a chance

of placing in the higher ranks, so whenever this quest appeared players rushed to search for the monsters and the orbs, which led to a quick resolution.

Because of these reasons, in the game era monsters had turned into devils in very few occasions.

“I’ve only participated the first few times, so I don’t really know it well. Do you remember how often the orbs’ seals broke?”

“I don’t know that either, actually. In the game, it was one or two weeks, but I have no idea if that still applies here.”

If the frequency was the same as the one Kuchinashi recalled, all seals would be long broken, but there were no signs of devils attacking. Kuchinashi thus did not know how much time remained before the next seal broke.

“We can’t just stay still without preparing any countermeasure, so I wanted to ask you to make us some sealing weapons, to be ready whenever one of those monsters was found. We’re researching them too, but skills can’t be obtained as easily as before now and raising them takes a long time too, so results are hard to produce.”

“I see. In that case, I’ll forge some for you. I have the recipes and materials after all.”

Shin would have to give them many weapons made by himself, but sealing weapons could not be used normally anyway, so there was no risk involved even if they were to leak. Forging them was not complicated either.

“Aah... I know that I should be glad that you’re going to help us, but if things proceed so smoothly, I can’t help being afraid that something bad is going to happen...”

“The deadly sins are an unknown for me too after all. I know more or less how they fight, but I have never actually faced one. If we can do something to prepare before the actual fighting begins, we should definitely do it.”

It would be difficult to assist in the search for the orbs. But, unlike the game era, Shin could not just treat the matter as something unrelated to him and move on.

In the current world, the number of casualties would become the number of deceased. A number which could include people Shin knows. The enemy being an unknown existence in Shin’s eyes was just a small part of the reason why he would help.

“This all I wanted to ask of you. I’m sorry for taking your time.”

“No, I’m glad you told us about that. After all, there are still plenty of things I don’t know about this world. I’ll be grateful if you let me know about any such dangers emerging in the future too. I don’t know how much I’ll be able to help though.”

“For me, just having a connection with you is more than enough.”

After conversing a bit more, Kuchinashi left with Kotone.

“OK then, next we just have to choose Tiera’s equipment. Mitsuyo, Kunitsuna, will you stay with us?”

“Yes. That’s the reason why I tagged along in the first place, I’m curious to see what equipment will fit her.”

“If that is alright with you, I would like to stay too, yes.”

Kunitsuna’s business with Kotone had already finished, it seems.

Tiera, concerned about the dangers implied by what Kuchinashi told Shin, made a different proposition.

“Er, before my equipment, I think we should tell Master and the others...”

“I’ll explain later, don’t worry. Besides even if I didn’t, if Schnee and the others found a deadly sin monster they’d go and defeat it right away.”

During the game era Schnee and the others had hunted the deadly sin monsters too, so they were aware of the threat they represented. If they found one, they surely wouldn’t let it escape.

Except for Schnee and Yuzuha, everyone was inside the “Black Priestess Shrine” domain, so there were very little chances of encountering one now.

Just in case, Shin contacted Schnee via Mind Chat.

“OK then, back on topic, let’s do this equipment selection. I tried picking up the highest

quality gear between what Tiera can equip with her current stats. The equipment belonging to a gear set will make your appearance change completely, remember. In some cases the resulting appearance is a bit... peculiar, but... well, try them on. ”

Saying so, Shin handed the cards to Tiera.

“OK, I’ll try them one by one then.”

As Tiera took the cards in hand and concentrated, a blue light enveloped her figure, and the next instant her attire was completely different.

It had happened with Barlux too; when the inhabitants of this world use this equipping shortcut, this phenomenon happened.

“Aaah! Hey!?! W-what’s this??”

As soon as she took a look at her new clothes, Tiera blushed and tried to cover her chest with her arms to hide it from the others’ eyes.

Her current attire included a blue feathered decoration on her head and only a patterned tube top on her upper body. On her lower body, she was wearing light brown bikini pants and a pareo that barely covered her hips.

In addition, she was wearing sandals made of animal leather and a golden ring as an armband. Two daggers rested at her waist, as well as a bow and quiver on her back.

“That’s the Forest Maiden gear set. They also call it the Amazoness series. It’s got good stats and effects, but looking like that, I thought you wouldn’t wear it.”

“I-I didn’t know it looked like this!!”

Tiera was pulling on the pareo with all her might, trying to hide her exposed skin as much as possible.

The skimpy pareo, however, could barely hide her bikini pants. That attempt at hiding thus only increased the sensuality of her current looks.

“Wait a second now, the gear’s design is displayed on the item cards’ front, right?”

As Shin said, the other not-materialized cards clearly displayed how the items would

look on their front sides.

This feature was present not only for equipment, but items and materials as well.

“Uuh, why is something like this here... I can’t wear it in public, can I...?”

“Well, it’s the 2nd best set among the ones I picked, and I did tell you about the appearance thing.”

“That’s true, but...”

Tiera was probably still shocked, or maybe had not picked up on Shin mentioning that some sets could have “peculiar appearances”. He hadn’t said anything about skin exposure though.

Having focused mainly on stats and effects, Shin ended up picking sets with flashy or risqué appearances too.

“So... what are you people doing?”

Shin and Tiera’s exchange was continuing under Mitsuyo’s cold gaze.

“My, could it be that we are in the way?”

On the other hand, Kunitsuna was grinning, thoroughly enjoying the situation.

“Hey, wait. This was just something unexpected, I didn’t have any weird intentions.”

“Really now... that’s not how it looked to me...”

Mitsuyo spoke with a perfectly flat tone. Her eyes were not filled with anticipation as moments ago.

“Well, putting looks aside, even I can see that it’s really high-quality equipment.”

“M-Mitsuyo! Please don’t pull on my clothes!”

“Just a little bit. It feels like fabric to the touch, but even if I pull it as hard as this it doesn’t even look like it’ll rip... isn’t this too tough for Legend-grade equipment...? Kh, look how big they are anyway... I can’t believe it...!”

“Eh?”

Mitsuyo was supposed to be admiring the equipment, but Shin felt that her last comment was directed at something else. She had been pulling on Tiera’s tube top, but then her eyes seemed to lose all traces of light.

“My my, looks like a weird switch was flipped here.”

Kunitsuna chuckled apologetically, but still smiled. She had no intention of stopping Mitsuyo, it seemed.

“Y-you’re going to take it off! It’s really coming off!?”

“Er, first of all Tiera, let’s go back to your previous equipment. Mitsuyo, you calm down now.”

Shin had regained his composure while the two were bickering and told Tiera how to solve the situation.

As Tiera’s equipment turned back the way it was before, Mitsuyo’s hands now grabbed thin air.

“Eh!? What did I do!?”

“Did it concern you that much?”

“...you wouldn’t understand, Shin. I can’t expect to grow physically and when I go back to my main body I’ll turn back into my smaller form! Let me dream a little, at least now!!”

Mitsuyo’s emotions were still fluctuating violently.

“I guess... I can’t understand that, yeah.”

Looking at what Mitsuyo was staring at, Shin understood what her concern was. But Shin, as a man, could not comprehend a woman’s feelings concerning chest size.

“Anyway, let’s see the next one.”

Feeling that delving further into the topic would just lead to danger, Shin urged Tiera

to try the next equipment set.

“O-OK. I’ll take a good look at the design first this time.”

Tiera checked the design displayed on the card’s front side, then changed her equipment.

The new equipment set was a red hairpin, a deep green shirt and mantle, which concealed her whole body, black pants and boots: as far as skin exposure was concerned, it was the complete opposite as the Forest Maiden set.

This “Heat Haze” gear series, once completed, granted the added bonus of making it more difficult to be found by the enemy. Its appearance allowed the wearer to blend in with the surroundings, working a bit as optical camouflage.

As weaponry, it included a Kukri knife on the left side and a knife case with 4 throwing knives on the right.

“That’s a strange blade. I do not see a bow, though.”

“Because this set is made to sneak close to the enemy and attack by surprise. You can hide right away and run easily when needed. You can equip a bow with it too, I think.”

Shin explained in response to Kunitsuna’s comment.

Tiera moved her arms and legs a bit, to see how easy it was to move with that equipment.

“This is pretty good. I’ll keep it as a possible choice.”

After trying some more sets, Tiera decided to pick two and use them alternatively depending on the situation.

One was the first she picked as a possible choice, the Heat Haze set. She chose it because its plain appearance would make it easy to conceal herself and, against powerful enemies, she could hide and avoid being targeted.

The second was a set called “Bow Princess”, focused on sharpshooting. It contained a silver circlet, armor fully covering the chest and gauntlets protecting the arms; on the lower body, armor resembling a mixture between a skirt and leg armor and knee-high

boots.

The weapon was the [Emerald Dazzle Bow]. It was an exquisitely crafted item, which combined usability with decorations meant to represent wind and wings.

The set's greatest characteristic, however, were the 4 long rhombus-shaped half-transparent shields that extended over the wearer's back. They were a bonus granted when the Bow Princess set was completed and parried enemy attacks autonomously.

This defense was a countermeasure meant to cover the fact that equipping the Bow Princess set meant not being able to equip close combat weapons

“Why does this Bow Princess set change your hairdo too?”

“The Bow Princess set is said to be based on the equipment a person called Bow Princess actually used. If she had her hair like that, maybe it changes automatically?”

After equipping the Bow Princess set, Tiera's hair had been tied in multiple braids behind her head. Her normally waist-length hair now barely reached her shoulders.

“I've thought this time and again after joining you, but what's with your weapon crafting abilities, Shin? This is something beyond what humans can do...”

“Mitsuyo, I'm telling you this because I think you have memories of the world before, but I've been living since before the “Dusk of Majesty”. I had obtained these techniques and knowledge then. The people alive before the “Dusk of Majesty” call that period “Game Era”.”

“I suppose that if you hone your skills that long... you can reach these levels?”

Mitsuyo was recalling her memories of that era deep within her trembling pupils.

Memories of the game era were still alive within her. She hadn't remembered about Shin until Tanetsugu pointed it out, but she had absolutely not forgotten.

“...I see, now I remember. A samurai who used magic and wielded weapons with incredibly high quality... that was you, lord Shin.”

Kunitsuna, who had been listening to Shin and Mitsuyo's conversation, nodded in understanding.

“The former world was filled with such techniques... I’m kind of envious of Shin and the others.”

“We couldn’t act as freely as we can now though.”

What Shin used, in a way, was a hidden technique.

“A while ago, I was in pretty much the same situation too.”

“What do you mean?”

“I was afflicted by something called “Cursed Gift”, and couldn’t go outside the Tsuki no Hokora.”

Tiera explained briefly about her former circumstances.

“Something like that happened... so that’s why you travel together now.”

“Now I understand too.”

Mitsuyo and Kunitsuna seemed to think that Tiera traveled with Shin because of the gratitude she owed him.

The next moment, taking advantage of the situation, Kunitsuna whispered something to Tiera, making sure Shin couldn’t hear.

“Considering the situation, Shin would be the prince that came to rescue you? What do you say about that?”

“Eh!? Ah, well, that... I’m, not fit for him, I mean... there’s the master, and...”

Kunitsuna’s whisper had Tiera completely confused. Shin could have listened to what they were saying if he wanted, but he felt the mood wasn’t right and did not activate the **【Listen】** skill.

“How about being his number 2 from the start, then? I’m not completely ignorant about this world either. There is no rule stating that it has to be only one person, right?”

“That’s true, but...”

Kunitsuna did not state clearly what did not have to be only one.

For Tiera, though, she was being clear enough. Tiera, struggling to find words to answer, turned beet red.

“If you keep whispering in front of me, I can’t help but become curious...”

“It’s a conversation between women. Men should be quiet and wait.”

Mitsuyo had no intention of allowing Shin to join in.

Shin continued just looking at them, wondering about the situation. He wasn’t sure when they had become friends, but now they all spoke to each other with familiarity.

Maybe thinking that it would be bad to make Shin wait too long, Tiera and the others finished their conversation after a few minutes. Tiera’s face was bright red up to her ears.

Kunitsuna was smiling, warmly watching over Tiera, but Mitsuyo was looking at her with some envy.

“Mitsuyo, we did what we had to, it’s time for us to go. We have to let these two spend time alone now.”

“...yes, I know that already.”

Mitsuyo sighed and nodded to Kunitsuna’s words. Her expression, though, clearly showed her discontent.

“Even if you say so, we did what we had to do too...”

They had listened to what Kuchinashi had to say and selected Tiera’s equipment, so there was no more reason to be in Tsuki no Hokora. Saying so, Shin looked towards Tiera, who was looking at Shin too, like she had something to say.

“Look, Tiera has something to tell you. You better listen to her well!”

“H-Hey!”

Mitsuyo slapped Shin’s back and left Tsuki no Hokora, dragging Kunitsuna behind her.

“They went away for our sake...”

“Hmm, Mitsuyo did look different from the usual.”

Shin spoke while looking at the door Mitsuyo closed as she went out. He thought he heard someone shouting “I’m such an idiot!!” beyond the door.

“...so, you have something to tell me? What is it?”

“Yes... it’s something personal, so I didn’t say it when Master and the others were present too. Shin, do you remember what happened when we purified [Dojigiri Yasutsuna]?”

“Yes, of course... do you mean, if I saw anything then?”

The voice he heard. The scenery he saw. Shin thought that she had to be referring to that.

“So you saw something too. I’ll say it too, so could you tell me what you saw?”

“OK. I saw someone collapsed in a forest, and a woman shouting something next to them. I don’t know if the collapsed person was a man or a woman, but I’m pretty sure that the person shouting was a woman. I couldn’t make out what she was saying though.”

He had no reason to hide anything, so Shin stated everything he saw. It was not a lot of information, either.

“I see... so you saw something different from me.”

Tiera nodded in understanding.

“What you saw is probably what happened when I was exiled from the village. The person collapsed was... my mother.”

Mother. When Tiera pronounced this word, her eyes became tinged with sadness.

What Shin had seen was Tiera’s past.

“It’s my turn, then.”

Tiera felt that the mood was turning dark, and spoke in a bright tone to change it.

What Tiera saw was a woman lying on the ground and a man embracing her, in some sort of back alley.

The scene ended when the man embracing the woman was about to cut down another man with his katana.

Unlike Shin, she had not seen fragments of the scene; it had been displayed rather clearly to her eyes.

“His mouth was moving, so I think he said something. But I couldn’t hear the words, or any other sound, so I don’t know what he said.”

As Tiera finished to talk, she suddenly mumbled. She looked down, hesitation in her expression.

Shin guessed what Tiera was not sure if she should say or not, so he decided to say it himself.

“The man you saw was me, right?”

“...yes. But I don’t know if it was really you. Because... that Shin, looked like a completely different person.”

Tiera’s voice was trembling slightly. Even if it was just a vision, it had made her feel something.

“I see. I kind of expected it, but you saw that moment then.”

The scene was when Shin had lost his beloved.

It was also the moment when the player called God of Death was born.

“I can’t forget that. I suppose we saw each other’s most painful memory, then.”

“Yes... I think you’re right.”

The memory of losing an irreplaceable person. It was branded in his memory so vividly that just hearing some details about the situation made him recall it very

clearly.

“...listen, Shin. Are you... alright?”

“Alright? What do you mean?”

Tiera spoke without changing her worried look.

Shin didn't know what emotion had prompted Tiera's inquiry.

“When we accepted that escort mission, we were attacked by ruffians, right? Do you remember that, er, I hugged you after we defeated them?”

“Oh, that. Well... I couldn't forget an experience like that.”

Shin replied while scratching his cheek to the blushing Tiera.

Since it happened just after the battle ended, it had left an impression on him. He couldn't forget the softness of Tiera's breasts either.

“Don't try to remember it in detail!! You just need to remember it a little!”

Tiera, getting even redder, shouted to Shin as he was relishing the memories. Her blushing was back in full force, reaching again up to her ears.

“What I want to say is the reason why I did that!”

“What reason was there?”

Shin remembered that Tsubaki too, who was with them at the time, thought it strange. Since he couldn't talk about something like that with Gaien around, he had left the topic for another time, then forgot about it.

“...T... That time, the aura around you was really scary. Not as much as what I saw during the purification, but I felt that it was not good for you to release that kind of aura. So I took what I thought was the best course of action at the time... I was really embarrassed, you know.”

After taking a small deep breath, Tiera explained the reason why she hugged Shin at that time.

Holding her right hand over her mouth in embarrassment, she looked up towards Shin with slight irritation. Maybe because she was still red, she looked more adorable than scary.

“I see, so that’s how it was. Thinking about it, I get the feeling that I had returned to my old self a bit that time.”

Thinking back about that moment, Shin spoke while staring at the living room’s ceiling.

“That was the first time I killed someone after coming here. Maybe that triggered it.”

“The first time... after coming here?”

Tiera showed concern and confusion because of the words Shin uttered so casually.

Something in how the words sounded told her that he didn’t mean that it was the first time he killed someone after coming to Bayreuth.

Shin had literally come from another world; that had been his first killing in this world.

“Yes, now that I think about it... of all the members now, you’re probably the only one who doesn’t know. You told me your secret too, and I think it’s the right timing to talk about myself. Yuzuha is still a child mentally, so I’ll tell her another time, though.”

“What... what are you talking about?”

“The reason why you felt something fearful from me. Imagine that Schnee, in order to crush the people related to this reason, didn’t tell me any information about my former companions, prepared to take any punishment for it.”

“M-Master did something like that!?”

Tiera couldn’t hide her shock after hearing Shin’s words.

Schnee, who never concealed her affection towards Shin, deliberately hid information important for him? Tiera couldn’t believe it.

“...hey, is that really something alright for me to know?”

“I’ll let you decide whether to listen or not. It’s something in the past anyway. In the end, what Schnee feared would happen to me after knowing that didn’t happen either.”

Shin replied with a calm tone.

His past sensations didn’t disappear completely. As Tiera had felt, the emotions of the time when he was called God of Death still remained within Shin.

There was nothing to worry about now, however, just because he reminisced a bit about the past. Something that could influence him would only be meeting with the enemy who murdered Marino, nothing else.

“..”

The decision was up to Tiera. She was silent for a few moments. Her eyes closed, she seemed to be deep in thought.

Her silence continued for a few more seconds.

Looking straight into Shin’s eyes, Tiera answered.

“...please tell me. I want to know more about you.”

“Got it. It’ll be a bit of a long story, but please listen.”

Shin nodded to Tiera’s answer and started telling the story.

—The story of the conquest of many dungeons.

—The story of the death of many PKs.

—The story of he who was called both Hero and God of Death.

—The story of one man.

s t a t u s

ステータス紹介

THE NEW
GATE



Name: **Mikazuki Munechika**

Gender: **Female**

Race: **Weapon Spirit**

Grade: **Ancient**

● **Stats**

LV: 929

HP: 20000

MP: 15000

STR: 929

VIT: 845

DEX: 911

AGI: 862

INT: 200

LUC: 86

● **Battle Equipment**

Head: Silver Whale Helmet

Body: Silver Whale Breastplate

Arms: Silver Whale Gauntlets

Legs: Silver Whale Leg Guards

Accessory: White Magic Decorative Cord
(Prevents status ailments)

Weapons: Mikazuki Munechika - Shinuchi
(Prevents weapon-destroying attacks,
Prevents snatching, HP self recovery [XL],
MP self recovery [XL])

● **Title(s)**

- One of the Five Supreme Blades
- Anthropomorphized Weapon
- Apex of Katana skills
- Magic Katana
- Gorgeous Blade
- etc

● **Skill(s)**

- Penta Flash
- Mountain Cleaver
- Moonlight Slashing Dance
- Swallow
- Divine Flash
- etc

Other

- Trial of Noble Blades (Damage from magic skills reduced 95%)



Name: **Odenta Mitsuyo**

Gender: **Female**

Race: **Weapon Spirit**

Grade: **Ancient**

● **Stats**

LV: 908

HP: 20000

MP: 15000

STR: 908

VIT: 780

DEX: 940

AGI: 907

INT: 200

LUC: 77

● **Battle Equipment**

Head: **Black Lion Helmet**

Body: **Black Lion Breastplate**

Arms: **Black Lion Gauntlets**

Legs: **Black Lion Leg Guards**

Accessory: **Black Lion Decorative Cord Cord**
(Prevents status ailments)

Weapons: **Odenta Mitsuyo - Shinuchi**
(Prevents weapon-destroying attacks,
Prevents snatching, Power-up skill bonus [XL],
Skill boost)

● **Title(s)**

- One of the Five Supreme Blades
- Anthropomorphized Weapon
- Apex of Katana skills
- Magic Katana
- Challenging blade etc

● **Skill(s)**

- Repeated Slash
- Swallow Reversal
- Heaven Slash
- Blade Storm
- Divine Flash etc

Other

- Trial of Noble Blades (Damage from magic skills reduced 95%)



Name: **Rindou Suzune**

Gender: **Female**

Race: **Beast**

Main Job: **Onmyoji**

Sub Job: **Priestess**

Adventurer's Rank: **None**

Affiliation: **Black Priestess Shrine**
Guild

● Stats

LV: 210

HP: 3490

MP: 5509

STR: 209

VIT: 582

DEX: 312

AGI: 347

INT: 593

LUC: 45

● Battle Equipment

Head: Starshine Hairband (MP self recovery [M])

Body: Immaculate Robe (DEX bonus [M])

Arms: Immaculate Bracelet (DEX bonus [M])

Legs: Immaculate Leggings (AGI bonus [M])

Accessory: Red Magic Protective Charm (LUC bonus [S])

Weapons: Spirit Channeling Charm
(Spirit registration, Spirit Power-up [M])

● Title(s)

● Expert of Manipulation Skills

● Instructor of Archery Skills

● Performer of Manipulation Threads

● Creator of Illusions

● Master of Troops

etc

● Skill(s)

● Spirit Summoning

● Spirit Creation

● Spirit Possession

● Incantation Attachment

● Divine Wind

etc

Other

● Chosen One



Name: Mad Sword Legion
Race: Material Ghost
Grade: none

● **Stats**

LV: 811

HP: ????

MP: ????

STR: 721

VIT: 703

DEX: 905

AGI: 126

INT: 238

LUC: 0

● **Battle Equipment**

None

● **Title(s)**

● Master of the Maze

● Union of Vengeful Spirits

● Blood-sucking Cursed Gear

● **Skill(s)**

● Dance of Cursed Blades

● Sweep of Cursed Lances

● Crunch of Cursed Axes

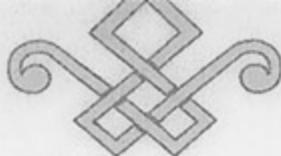
● Lament of Cursed Staves

● Rumble of Cursed Armors

etc

Other

● Fusion of Ancient-grade weapons



Name: Ogre Invader
Race: Ogre
Grade: King

● **Stats**

LV: 723
HP: ????
MP: 4300
STR: 800
VIT: 722
DEX: 403
AGI: 449
INT: 91
LUC: 0

● **Battle Equipment**

Weapons: Dojigiri Yasutsuna (Miasma corruption)

● **Title(s)**

- Miasma Corruption
- Master of the Maze
- (False) Master of Magic Blades

● **Skill(s)**

- Metal Skin
- Power Impact
- Terror Howl
- Spot Quake
- Madness
etc

Other

- Mutated Unit



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