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# マジックユーザー 2

Magic User II

TRPGで育てた魔法使いは異世界でも最強だった。

Mayoeru Yosoji no Kenkokuki

~Joushiki ga Jama de Ore TUEE Dekinai~

Arc 2

by Mikawa Souhei

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# Chapter 29: At the Magician Guild

Let's think about what Claura just said.

No matter how I mull over it, the only interpretation that I can come up with is that she'll wait for me to chant three spells.

It's almost as if I am going to march into an enemy camp..... Does Claura perhaps expect the Magician Guild to be hostile towards me?

I mean, all I want is to establish a cooperative relationship to oppose anki. And well, to ask if they know anything about The Guardian.

"..... Well, there's never any harm in being extra careful....."

My perspective is clearly still based on the values of modern Japan. This time, let's just obediently accept her advice.

First off, [Detect Enemy]. Anyone who possesses hostility towards me will be glowing in my eyes, that's the kind of spell it is. To be honest, I feel a certain amount of resistance against using this. Though it is detecting hostility, anything that peeks into or manipulates someone else's mind seems, for the upright member of society that I am, like a form of cheating.

Furthermore, in normal TRPGs, the player side spamming this spell causes the mastermind to be easily revealed and thus wrecks the scenario, so GMs greatly frown upon this spell. Well, that's not relevant here though.

After also casting [Invisible Demon] and [Emergency], all my preparations are complete.

Uh-oh, that was longer than 30 seconds.



"Well then, let us go."

Standing outside is a cool Claura who is looking like nothing had happened.

Seeing me emerge, she starts off towards the hall on the top floor.

The hall is circular and about the size of a gymnasium. The color scheme is based on black, just like the exterior of the building, so there is a definite sense of pressure. The domed ceiling is inlaid with stained glass, and the walls are decorated with woven works depicting what appears to be magical characters.

There are already three magicians seated at the table.

The one in the middle stands up.

“Welcome to the Magician Guild. I am the Lelis Branch Leader, 1<sup>st</sup> Seat Heldol Sairam.” (Heldol)

He is a man with a lot of ornamentation on his robe. Mid-thirties, I’d guess? With his blond hair all swept back, he cuts a rather fine figure. In one of his hands is a staff engraved with the sigil of the Magician Guild. Full of self-confidence, sociable expression, open attitude. He is giving off the exact same vibe as those young CEOs looking to sell off their start-up companies.

“Wizard of Jiiteias Castle, Gio Margils. I am deeply honored by this invitation.” (Gio)

While offering the statement that I am beginning to get used to, I bow once. Being able to attach “of Jiiteias Castle” makes things so much easier. It’s wonderful that I’m no longer without a fixed residence.

“Please, the honor is all ours.” Heldol

“Yoroshiku onegaiitashimasu.” (Gio)

(T/N: The most formal way to say yoroshiku there is.)

The people beside Heldol also offer their greetings in turn. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Seat, which means the Vice-Leader, is called Yahman, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Seat names herself as Nasaria.

Behind Branch Leader Heldol is a male and female wearing black uniforms and holding spears. I am given no explanation about them, so they’re probably guards.

“Come, no need to be reserved. Please take a seat.” (Heldol)

Thankfully, no one has lit up due to [Detect Enemy]. Yet.



I take a seat at the round table, facing the magicians. Claura wordlessly sits next to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Seat lady.

While (pretending to) calmly leaning back into my beautifully etched wooden chair, I survey them.

The only one with a relaxed expression is the Branch Leader. Everyone else looks stiff with tension. Claura is expressionless.

“I’ve heard that you hail from a faraway place. What do you think of Lelis?”  
(Heldol)

“The townscape is beautiful, and the people are full of liveliness. I think it a wonderful city.” (Gio)

His starting move is small talk, huh. He is clearly not the type who is only good at research.

“Lelis is famous for its waterways, Great Water Gate, and Senjoumai (Boat-Top Dancing). Please take the time to enjoy them all.” (Heldol)

Senjoumai (Boat-Top Dancing)? Sounds interesting.

“Branch Leader, maybe it’s about time.....” (!)

“Fumu, you’re right.” (Heldol)

As the trifling conversation goes on, the Vice-Leader whispers to Heldol. The number 2 who pours water on the exchange with the very important (or should be) guest, huh. This was most likely staged. If it wasn’t staged, that would mean there isn’t much to expect of the Magician Guild as an organization.

“I’m sorry, but we should go to the main topic at hand. To jump directly to the point, what is [wizardry]?” (Heldol)

A question that I’d expected. It is time to put to use the line that I had puzzled over on my way to Lelis.

“I shall grant you an answer. Wizardry is the technique to, using one’s own heart as the channel, call forth the energy of chaos from beyond the world and

utilize it to reform the very laws of reality.” (Gio)

“ “ “ ..... ” ” ”

The three magicians have all fallen silent. Is it as I’d feared, that anything beyond their common sense could only be received with suspicion?

But before long, Heldol opens his mouth with an honest expression on his face.

“Magic is the technique to manipulate the power hidden within the natural. In other words, it only functions within the laws of reality.” (Heldol)

The reason why arrows of ice and walls of wind are possible is because such things already exist, huh. As I’d surmised, it is indeed the absolute opposite of wizardry.

“Margils-dono. We beg your patience, as the only thing that we are sure of, as of now, is that you have no magical power. However, according to Claura’s report, as well as information from the Carbanera Knight Order and the Adventurer Guild, there is no doubt that you have used magic powerful enough to defeat an entire army of anki.....” (Heldol)

Which reminds me, I was told that Arnogia and Sedam also came to Lelis to report, Arnogia to the city’s Council and Sedam to the Adventurer Guild. Seems like the organizations are all sharing information properly. On this issue, at least.

“We are unable to react with anything but surprise. At the fact that there is another useable system of magic completely different from anything thus far, that is.” (Heldol)

“I find myself in the same state. For me, it is wizardry that is the norm, and magic the astounding new system.” (Gio)

“Is it so for you as well?” (Heldol)

“Indeed. There is much that I wish to know about magic. If your interest in wizardry is the same, then I shall endeavour to answer any questions you may have to the best of my ability.” (Gio)

When the other side is wary of you, it is a good idea to be the first to express

willingness towards cooperation. I offered my words while praying that I'm emanating a "I wanna be on good terms with you~" aura.

To my relief, all of the magicians, beginning with Heldol, nod deeply in response.

"We are delighted to hear this. In which case, may we immediately take you up on your offer....." (Heldol)

"You wish to first see a demonstration of [wizardry], yes?" (Gio)

Presenting myself too humbly would only encourage them to take advantage of me in the future. For what it's worth, I also nod self-importantly.

"Turning people into stone and calling down meteors, was it? ..... Is it really true?" (Nasaria)

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Seat, Nasaria's question was posed shyly.

"We beg your pardon. It is not that we doubt you..... It's just that we really wish to be able to confirm with our own eyes....." (Yahman)

The Vice-Leader, who looks to be the oldest among them, hurriedly adds to what Nasaria said.

Well, it's not like I don't understand him.

Not many people would intentionally antagonize someone who they think can drop a meteor anytime, after all.

"As per your wishes, I can demonstrate, but I think a more appropriate spell would be good." (Gio)

I nod in what I think is my friendly smile.

"Ahhh, apologies. We heard from Claura that you also can create dragons and anki. May we see that then?" (Heldol)

"Fumu..... very well." (Gio)

"Furthermore, may we do some observation as it happens?" (Heldol)

"Naturally. I do not mind." (Gio)

"Thank you for your cooperation. We shall start then....." (Heldol)

The Branch Leader jerks his chin at the male and female behind him, who I now notice with a second look are no more than teenagers. They wordlessly approach me and each take out a crystalline medal from their breast pocket. The Vice-Leader offers me an explanation while wiping off the sweat on his forehead.

“Th-, those are tools that can detect even the most miniscule of magical power. They are incapable of causing any harm whatsoever.” (Yahman)

Guess they still have some doubts.

There is no reaction from [Detect Enemy], and the spells I’d cast as precaution should be able to get me out even if this is a trap.



“Without further ado.” (Gio)

I intentionally leave my Wizardry Staff leaning against the table as I stand up.

Imaging myself in the Inner World, I make my way through the Door of Wizardry. In front of my eyes in the real world, there is no change in the medals held out by the boy and girl. I can tell that aside from Claura, all of the magicians are holding their breaths.

My Inner World self heads towards the chaos down the spiral staircase, stopping at the 9<sup>th</sup> floor Spell Archive. I lay my hands on the book I’m looking for and release the power of chaos stored inside.

“By means of this spell, may a single Baby Red Dragon be created and be under my control for 30 minutes. [Create All Monster].” (Gio)

“Ohhh!?”

“Hiii!?”

Right after the chant, chaotic energy materializes as a torrent of crimson that converges in the center of the hall and turns into a red dragon.

Though this Baby one is smaller than the Small one that I had made before, it is still the size of a bull, which makes it more than enough as a performance.

“Gyuuooohhh!”

It roars once, then prostrates itself as if it is trying to convey the fact that it is under my control.

“..... O-, oi. Any reaction from the detectors?” (Yahman)

“There is no reaction.” (Girl Guard)

The voice of the young girl who answered the Vice-Leader was also shaking.

“Truly marvelous! So it really is possible to do this without the usage of magical power! If we can explain this mystery, the history of magic development will jump forward a thousand years in one leap!” (Heldol)

So said Branch Leader Heldol while exaggeratedly clapping his hands.

“That sounds delightful indeed.” (Gio)

In contrast, my own mood is, contrary to my words, quite gloomy.

The reason is because the figure of Heldol, through my currently [Detect Enemy]-enhanced eyes, is now glowing ominously.

# Chapter 30: Experiment

“[Detect Enemy]~. Alright come on, is that noble actually on my side?”

“Tsk. Why do you doubt people so quickly? As fellow humans, why do you not try the thing called ‘trusting each other’?”

“Stop stalling and just tell me the results of the spell already, GM~”

“Fine, fine. ‘In Gio’s eyes, the figure of the noble is glowing.’ You satisfied now?”

“I knew it! Now I know he possesses hostility against me, but the question is how much? Is he just miffed? Or does he really want to kill me?”

“Hah! Who knows~~”



Damn, a conversation with my GM from long ago just replayed inside my head.

[Detect Enemy] does indeed detect hostility, but it does not indicate the degree. It means that worse case scenario, Heldol could just lose it and come lunging at me right here and now.

In the midst of such thoughts.

I hear a hard-sounding noise like kata kata close by. It is the sound of the clattering teeth of the boy and girl who had been holding those magical power detectors. Their faces are also pale.

They are most likely frightened by the Baby Red Dragon sprawled next to me. Although it is just a Baby, its mouth is still big enough to tear off a human’s head with a single chomp, so being afraid of it is only natural. When I look towards the magicians, I notice that both Yahman and Nasaria also look very worried about being attacked.

“Apologies about having caused a fright.”

While trying my best to sound calming, I use [Magic Dispel] on the Baby Red Dragon. The large red figure fades and blurs to nothing, causing the two to breathe out loudly in relief.

“So you can both summon and dismiss it at will. Truly impressive. Even if it was an illusion, it would still be worthy of commendation.”

So says Heldol after gesturing with one hand for the boy and girl to return. He is smiling, but there’s no fooling my spell’s effects.

“I can bring it out again, if so needed. But with this, I hope that there is no more doubt as to whether [wizardry] exists or not, yes?”

“Aah, indeed. With that clarified, however, I now have another question of extreme weight.”

It’s that one that Claura asked me before, right? Whether wizardry is a personal ability that only I possess, or whether it is a set of techniques that other people can also learn and master.

..... How am I supposed to answer a question that even I don’t know the answer to?

Going by appearances, it seems that Heldol is hoping for the latter. But for now, let’s try having this conversation.

“Is it whether my wizardry can be relayed as a set of techniques?”

“That is exactly it! We of the [Subjugation Faction] hold magic as a tool granted us by the Creator for the purpose of fighting against anki. When there is an opportunity to strengthen that magic, it is the duty of all magicians to spare no effort in embracing that change.”

Nn? ‘Subjugation Faction,’ and ‘Creator’? Not good, more words that I don’t know. Let’s remember to ask Claura later. But well, magic being for the purpose of fighting anki goes right along with my goals.

“As for the answer to that question, even I know not. However, what I am able to do is explain how I became able to use wizardry.”

“Ohhh~”

Delight comes over the face of Heldol and the other two top seats.

But unfortunately, his hostility still remains.



Several tens of minutes later.

“I see. What an astounding mystery it is.”

“Unlike the magic board and magic characters, which naturally show up in our vision, you have to actively dive into your heart, is it?”

I have just finished giving the magicians a complete explanation of ‘the settings behind wizardry.’ To think that it was worked out to such a level of detail—even I am amazed. Of course, I did not tell them the important parts, such as how to train to see the Inner World, about the Door of Wizardry, and about ‘charging.’

Despite that, it seems the magicians are still suffering from quite a bit of culture shock. To be honest, when I think of how they’ve spent years polishing real techniques, and how all I have to offer are the details of a game, I feel slightly unpleasant.

“If what Margils-dono is saying is true, then does it mean that just like magic, learning wizardry would be difficult if training does not begin at a young age?”

“I suppose.....”

The Vice-Leader and Branch Leader begin furiously whispering to each other.

It’s not like I can’t enhance my hearing to listen in or just outright read their minds, but..... the sense of virtues of a modern Japanese person that I still can’t seem to abandon, as well as the guilt I feel in regards to these magicians’ efforts, both stop me from doing so.

“What do you think, Margils-dono?”

In the midst of my inner struggle, Heldol cheerfully raises a suggestion.

“As a start, what do you think of an experiment or two?”

“Experiment, you say?”

“Indeed. How about an attempt at teaching us the very basics of the basics of

wizardry? I believe this method would be the fastest way to find out.”

“Well..... you have a point. But it will take time, you understand.”

If, after several years of training, the conclusion at the end is that Sedia people cannot use wizardry at all, I wouldn't even know where to start apologizing. But before even that, I'm still not sure whether I should teach them how to use wizardry. At the moment, I am leaning heavily towards “that is a very bad idea.”

“Actually, this branch is managing a magic school. That place currently applies a new method of teaching magic that I devised myself. For that purpose, I have gathered a lot of talented individuals. I wish for you to try teaching them wizardry.”

“Heldol! I mean, Branch Leader! Surely you are not.....!”

For the first time since this meeting started, Claura butts in. Apparently unaffected by her sharp voice, Heldol displays a cool face.

“If it is on those ‘magic soldiers,’ feel free to do as many experiments as you like.”

So saying, Heldol gestures towards young boy and girl in black uniform.

# Chapter 31: Magic Soldiers

According to Magician Guild Branch Leader Heldol's very proudly delivered explanation, details regarding the existences that he refers to as 'magic soldiers' are as follows.

Normally, there are four stages to the training and maturation of a magician. The first is to sense and control one's own magical power. The second is to become able to see the phenomenon called the 'magic board.' The third is to understand the meaning of the magic characters that show up on the board and to utilize them. The last is to know how to group the characters and release magic power according to one's image.

Those who clear Stage 1 are apprentices. Stage 2, novices. Stage 3, trainees. It is only after attaining Stage 4 that the practitioner can be called a real magician.

As can be guessed from the naming, Stage 2 is the minimum requirement for entrance into the Magician Guild. It takes most people 2 to 5 years to progress through one stage, so the shortest predictable time for an absolute beginner to become a magician is still 8 years. Furthermore, only 1 out of 10 people who reach Stage 1 has the necessary qualities to achieve Stage 2.

"Due to this, I decided to completely change my way of thinking—if all we want is just battle potential against anki, then we don't actually need full-fledged magicians. Even if someone can't see the magic board, as long as they can use one or two simple spells, that would do the job."

The magic board that appears in magicians' eyes are crucial to their practice, so he must have thought really hard to come up with a way to circumvent it. As a result,

"It turns out that as long as someone has magic power, this idea can be realized by forcibly planting the needed magic characters and imagery into the person! Re-grouping characters and learning new spells would both be

impossible, but as a [soldier], this is more than enough! Above anything else, the short training time means we can mass produce them! Magic soldiers are the greatest weapon against anki!”

In game terms, he is talking about foregoing a crucial step like [magic control] and forcibly mastering only a single spell, like «Ice Arrow». In theory, it sounds like an idea that might have merit, but seeing Claura and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Seat’s shameful faces, I surmise that there is much more to this story.

“During the anki outbreak 10 years ago, the city of Lelis suffered enormous damage. The Carbanera Knight Order that we’d been relying on turned out to be useless..... Thus it dawned on me that Lelis needs to have a fighting force of its own, one that would be effective against anki.” (Heldol)

“The magic soldiers begin training at 8 years old at the earliest, so they should also be receptive of your wizardry training. All credit for this wonderful idea belongs to the Branch Leader.” (Yahman)

So says 2<sup>nd</sup> Seat Yahman with an ingratiating smile.

From 8 years old?! Training 8-year-olds into soldiers is just mad. But..... what if this is considered normal in Sedia?

“They start at such a young age? How do you gather them?”

“Naturally, by accepting applicants. The children of nobles and wealthy citizens similarly grieved by the defenseless state of Lelis who wish to protect this city with their own hands come to us of their own accord.”

“..... Though it seems that of late, the ticket window has widened quite considerably.” (Claura)

“That’s, well..... the numbers are important, after all.” (Yahman)

Yahman wipes his sweat while nervously answering Claura’s barbed question. The whole thing is sounding more and more suspicious by the minute.

But wait, in the first place.....

“If it’s the anki nest, I already destroyed it a few days ago. The situation is no longer one where you have to go to such lengths to acquire fighting potential, is it?”

“..... Dear oh dear.”

“Nests have appeared numerous times already. The past ten years were just exceptionally peaceful—a new one can pop up tomorrow and it wouldn’t be strange.”

Now not only Heldol, but the other three magicians also look exasperated. I guess at least this is common sense here.

If something like that can appear anytime, then even I can understand why they want to amass fighting potential.....

“..... So those two are magic soldiers? May I ask them something?”

“Of course, of course. You two, answer whatever Margils-dono asks you.”  
(Heldol)

“ “Yes, sir!” ”

The young boy and girl respond with a clack of their heels.

“Fumu..... Why did the two of you want to be magic soldiers? Wasn’t the training hard?”

The boy opens his mouth to answer me first. He has a well-featured face and looks like an intelligent kid.

“Sir. As a Lelis noble, it is my duty to be of use in the protection of the city. The training was very strict, but under the guidance of my instructors, I was able to learn everything I need to be a magic soldier.”

“I also applied because I want to protect my family and the people of this city..... Also, as a magic soldier, I earn a salary.”

The young girl, who answered after the boy, has earnest and pure eyes. Naturally, neither of them are being lit up by [Detect Enemy].

“Aahh, these two are from the 1<sup>st</sup> Generation, and are fully completed magic soldiers. The ones that we want you to teach are from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gen, who are still undergoing training at the magic school.”

“Uumu.....”

I cross my arms and hmm.

Somehow, the conversation has become completely different from what I'd expected. As before, the light of hostility is still shining from Heldol, but it appears that his hostility is not the kind where he wants to kill me on the spot. However, as [Detect Enemy] is reacting to him, I don't think it's something on the level of him being vaguely annoyed.

In other words..... it is likely the kind of hostility where he wants me to teach the magic soldier trainees, and then steal the curriculum and know-how and dispose of me.

It is a simple thing to just reject his proposal. Right now, even if the magicians and magic soldiers attacked me together, I've made preparations that enable me to get away.

With all this in mind.

Should I really decline?

In moments like these, adults calm down and carefully weigh the merits and demerits.

Firstly, the merit of accepting are two-fold: earning a favor with the Magician Guild, and the possibility of increasing my fighting forces if the experiments go well. Demerits are also two-fold: the possibility of being bound for an extended period of time by the experiments, and a high possibility of the Magician Guild turning on me even if the experiments succeed. Well, there is also the possibility of the experiments failing, so that is a demerit too.

On the flip side, the merit of declining are..... not having to shoulder any unnecessary problems. That's about it, I think. As for demerits, there would be a high possibility of the Magician Guild turning hostile against me, and the lost opportunity for Lelis to increase its fighting strength. Well..... it might also sever the relationship that I have with Claura, which I suppose I should also count as a demerit.

Furthermore..... it would also mean turning a blind eye to those kids being recruited to fight against Anki. By my own set of common sense, this is a huge demerit.

"..... Have you reached a decision yet?"

As my silence stretches on, Claura prompts me again impatiently. She seems to be in a bad mood, but I don't understand why. I wonder which answer she is hoping from me.

No helping it. Let's handle this the adult way, then.

"This is for the sake of defeating anki. We wish for you to accept." (Heldol)

"How is it, Margils-dono?" (Yahman)

When I raise my face, both Heldol and Yahman lean forward.

"I wish to favorably consider it, but given the complexity of the proposal, I need several days to think about it."



As I was about to leave, Heldol suggested that I see the magic soldiers' strength for myself. He said that the purpose is to help me decide by giving me a reference, but all I could see was him wanting to show them off.

Consequently, the boy and girl are currently facing humanoid-shaped targets lined up in the Magician Guild's courtyard, standing with their spears at the ready.

"Commence attack!"

" "Yes, sir!" "

At Heldol's signal, the two hold their spears vertically. With a second look, I notice that a part of their spears have complicated designs that look like words (those are probably the magic characters) etched in.

"Fire Lance!"

"Wind Lance!"

A lance of fire and wind emerges from his and her spear, respectively, and cleanly pierces through a target each. His target goes up in flames, while hers is sliced to bits.

"Hou....."

I haven't had much opportunity to see magic, but I'm at least sure that their attacks were more powerful than Jyagul's.

However.

"Haa, haaah....."

"Uguh."

The two magic soldiers are completely out of breath, desperately clinging to their spears to remain standing. It is as if they've just dashed several laps at full speed.

"It is because they're using magic without the magic board. The consumption of a certain amount of physical and mental strength is unavoidable. With the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gen, we have implemented various changes to the training curriculum to improve on this."

Even while seeing the state of the two, Heldol remains unfazed.

"The consumption looks quite severe..... Are you two alright?"

"W-, we're fine."

The boy painfully straightens his back, and the girl forcibly rouses herself.

"Are you sure? You're not just forcing yourself?"

I grab the boy's shoulders and peer into his eyes.

"!? I-, I'm fine!"

Surprised, the boy shakes off my hands, but for the split second I saw his eyes, I noticed that they were definitely red.

"Unfortunately, those who make it to this level are extremely few in number. But with your help, we can produce these magic soldiers at even lower costs and in higher numbers..... no, I believe that we can produce ones of even higher quality. We await a favorable response from you."

So says Heldol with that sociable smile he had on at the very start. Every single one of his words bother me somehow, and he's still glowing with the light of [Detect Enemy]. Being able to hide his real thoughts so well actually impresses me a little.

Heldol, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Seats, and the magic soldiers all head back into the guild building, leaving me alone with Claura.

“Turns out I can’t stay at the Magician Guild after all.”

“Because you declined.....”

“Claura, may I ask for your advice again? What do you think I should do?”

“My wish is aligned with that of the Guild’s.”

“With that Branch Leader’s?”

“I, too, lost several family members in the fight against the anki ten years ago. The reason I became a magician is to gain the power to protect what is important to me from the anki. On that, at least, my thinking is the same as his.”

“But, to turn children so young into soldiers.....”

“If there was another option, I would have chosen it already.”

Claura’s words sounded obstinate. I guess this is territory that I, someone who’s come to this world only less than a month ago, cannot yet step into.

“Well, give it some serious thought. However..... just do not ever forget the first warning that I gave you.”

If the Branch Leader gets serious about disposing of me, would she also turn into my enemy?

The way I am right now, even if I would gladly use [Telepathy] on the Branch Leader, I simply cannot bring myself to use it on her.

“Mora must be so bored with waiting around now, yes? Hurry up and go to her already.”

“Umu. Indeed, such is my intention. It’s just..... I don’t know the way.”

“HAH?!”

Mora said her house is on Commerce Avenue or something like that, but..... in the first place, I don’t even remember our way here. Which may make me sound like a failure of a salaryman, but in my defense, I’ve never walked through a medieval-style city before.

“Oh well, I can probably make do somehow by asking passersby for directions.”

“Seriously! This person!”

After shooting a sidelong glance at the me that is embarrassedly muttering to myself, Claura briskly starts walking. But she stops almost immediately and whirls around to face me.

“What are you doing?! When the sun sets, the Inner Gate will close and we won’t be able to go through anymore!”

# Chapter 32: Senjoumai

(T/N: For those who forgot, Senjoumai means 'boat-top dancing,' and is one of the touristy things that Lelis is famous for. I will continue calling it Senjoumai, because I think proper nouns sound better in their original language. But for those who want to know, Senjoumai is not a real Japanese word. It is a made-up word for a made-up attraction in a made-up work, so don't bother Googling it.)

While following behind the back of the Claura who is currently huffing with peevishness, I survey the Lelis citizens that we pass.

There are markets with lines of shops that look like stalls, and shopkeepers negotiating with such zeal that I can see saliva flying. Craftsmen strictly admonishing their apprentices at their storefronts. Young people and children delightedly stuffing their cheeks with sweets and fruits and grilled meats. Of course, the plaintive cries of beggars crawling on the bare ground, as well as angry voices from ongoing fights can also be heard mixed into the din.

I didn't really pay it much attention earlier, but there is indeed a canal running through the city, spanned by arch-like stone bridges. Ships of a huge variety of colors are going to and fro, carrying both goods and people.

Because the talks dragged on so long at the Magician Guild, it is now almost sunset.

"Could it be that that is the aforementioned Senjoumai?"

"Eh? Ahh, yes it is."

While walking alongside the canal, which is so wide that it can almost be called the artery of the city, I notice several heavily ornamented boats slowly proceeding in a line, like a parade. There are large numbers of people crowding both banks and the bridges, staring transfixed at the dance stages set on top of the boats.

Lent an almost fantastical air by light sources similar to the Japanese andon, the stages are occupied by dancers veiled in red and white who are dancing serenely. Some of the ships also have musicians on board. Though calm, the tone color of their music somehow feels melancholic.

(T/N: Andon: fixed paper-enclosed lantern / paper-covered wooden stand housing a(n oil) lamp ~Akebi dictionary)

Because we are looking down at the boats from the bank of the canal, when all the dancers turn in unison, their dazzling costumes look like vividly brilliant fireworks all going off at the same time, leaving a deep impression with me.

“..... It really is beautiful, but isn’t it a bit subdued for a centerpiece of a festival?”

Claura sadly answers my thoughtless comment.

“Today’s programme is a requiem. For those sacrificed to the anki.....”

“..... I see.”

This is a thought that had also risen up when I was fully appreciating the splendor of Sedia’s nature while travelling on the royal highway—this really isn’t a game world, but one with real people living inside.

“.....”

“What are you doing?”

I naturally brought my palms together. This gesture might be incomprehensible for those in this world, but I don’t think it wrong to pay respects to those who have gone before us.



After crossing several stone bridges, we are back in a street close to the city gates.

It is a street with rows of merchant houses hanging out elaborately ornamented signboards. This is apparently Commerce Avenue.

“Irudo’s..... I mean, Mora’s house is that one over there. After coming this far, you won’t get lost anymore, right?”

Fumu. Does that mean that Clauro intends to turn back here? Well, this city is her home, so there's no particular reason to have her stay, I guess.

"Thank you, Clauro."

"What is it? All I did was just show you the way."

"No, it's just that I'd forgotten to thank you properly for everything up to now. Really, thank you very much."

"..... I, I was just fulfilling my duty, that's all."

"Even if so, I am thankful. You are my benefactor."

"Benefactor of a 'Great Wizard'? So, I can look forward to quite a few benefits in the future?"

So says Clauro sarcastically while shrugging her shoulders.

"Uu, that's a bit, um....."

I've begun to grow a bit more used to the mask of a Great Wizard, but I still find it very heavy.

"I'm just joking. I know full well that you are a kind person."

If I had heard those words from a young woman while in the area around the pleasure quarters of modern Japan, my mind would automatically translate them into "I have no interest in you whatsoever." I wonder whether, in this world, if I can consider them a compliment or not.

"However..... this is a world where anki can appear at any moment and kill anybody and their family. If there really is a true hero who can change that reality, I....."

"Ah—....."

"I don't know what choice you will pick, but I'm sure that it will be a good choice. But well..... whether or not I will be able to support it is a different matter altogether. Either way, fare you well."

While I'm standing stunned, she gets up and walks off jauntily.



“Truly, your presence is such a huge honor!”

“Gio-san, please eat a lot more!”

After safely reaching Irudo’s house—mansion, more like—I was greeted with a grand welcome.

Irudo, Mora, and many of the servants continued lavishing thanks on me.

A huge feast was lined up on a splendid table, and after hearing that Mora had also gone into the kitchen and pitched in with the cooking, I felt like I would get punished if I didn’t eat it.

First order of business, I asked Irudo whether his cargo, which was stored in the storeroom at Jiiteias Castle last I heard, had been properly returned by the Carbanera knights, and he confirmed that it had been done without any problems. Mora did get a bit huffy though, saying “But I was supposed to go retrieve it!”.

Next, Irudo offered to exchange the IOU that he’d given me for the remaining 3,000 gold coins that he was supposed to pay me—in Sedam’s and his party’s stead—for rescuing Mora from the mountain bandits that had abducted her. I was thinking that I should just obediently accept the money, but then a brilliant idea occurred to me.

“In exchange for that 3,000, I want to entrust you with a job.”

“A job worth 3,000 gold coins? What is it you would have me do, what manner of job is it?”

“The Order has given me ownership over that fort. But well, it’s quite inconvenient if I’m the only person there. I want you to find me trustworthy servants, as well as someone can see oversee them.”

Irudo slapped his knee and responded immediately.

“I see. Duly acknowledged. Am I correct in assuming that their deposits and preparatory costs are all to be covered with this 3,000?”

“Yes, that is correct.”

“Do you have any particular preferences?”

“Let me see..... well, generally speaking, if it is someone that you can trust, then I won't have any complaints. But there is a one in a million chance that they might get caught up in my circumstances, so I would be grateful if they can protect at least themselves and are able to move quickly.”

“Understood. I shall find you the finest personnel there is.”



“Dat'sh why I 'old 'em, Wishard-shama!”

One hour later, the earnest, intelligent merchant and father has already left us.

Right now, the person who is leaning on me and exhaling alcoholic fumes into my face is a completely different person who just happens to also have the name Irudo.

“Being frugal on the Senjoumai is—Idiots!—but den dat bashtard Dishlict Chief .....”

Apparently, the boats and dancers and musicians for Senjoumai are procured as a joint effort by all districts of the city. Irudo wanted to gather more donations for the cooperative, but was stopped by the person in charge of this district. So I hear for the 10<sup>th</sup> time now.

After hearing the heavy story of how he had personally raised Mora by himself after the death of his wife to anki ten years ago, I accidentally poured him too much to drink, so I suppose this state of affairs is partly my responsibility.

“I-, I'm so sorry, Gio-san. Father is weak to alcohol..... He usually isn't like this though.....”

Mora, who had been really high-strung during the banquet, has calmed down and is the one now looking mortified.

“Oh, don't mind it. All men have moments when they want to get drunk and just grumble over their cup.”

“Is that how it is?”

“You over dere! No flirting in front of the farder! Mora ish only fourteen

yearsh old y'know~”

“Father!”

“Hah. Hah. Hah. Irudo, it seems that you haven't had enough yet!”

“Ohh, donchu know it! Ash espected of Wishard-shama!”

Irudo begins drinking straight from the bottle. In these situations, getting the drunkard to drink himself to unconsciousness is the fastest way. Of course, I carefully pace him so that he doesn't get acute alcohol poisoning.



“Fuu.....”

“Gugohhh.....”

True enough, Irudo blacks out several minutes later. The servants, who still look afraid of me calling down a meteor at any moment, fearfully carry their master off to his bedroom.

I, too, have apparently had slightly too much to drink, what with so many worries tumbling around in my head.

“I'm really so very sorry, Gio-san. Father was so eager to meet and repay you, he got a bit carried away.....”

So says Mora while pouring water for me.

“Ahh, thank you. And I keep saying this, but there's really no need to be that thankful.....”

“Why wouldn't I be!”

Mora now sounds slightly angry.

“Saving me from the mountain bandits, doing in such a huge number of anki, destroying a nest..... you've done so many amazing things for us!!”

“Well, that's..... true, but.....”

In comparison to me, who had been merely living casually as a single guy in Japan, Irudo had been working his butt off as an entrepreneur all while raising a daughter all by himself. Isn't he even more awesome?

“Because Gio-san was there, I, and everyone else, was saved!”

I suppose from an objective point of view, that’s true.

In the end, the power of wizardry is something that was only lent to me. It is the height of folly to think myself awesome or strong just because of it. However, on the other hand, not doing something that can be done with my power also cannot be called right.

“Is the reason why Gio-san is so stiff because you’re actually just a normal person?”

“Uu.”

..... Now that I come to think of it, I had been 100% my bare self when the two of us first met. There’s no way this intelligent girl didn’t already figure it out.

“Um, that’s, I don’t really understand all the complicated stuff. All I know is that even if Gio-san is a normal person, you’re amazing, and amazing, but also really kind. And I’m sure you’ll help a lot more people from now on!”

With her cheeks dyed crimson after that declaration, Mora bows with great force, then turns to leave.



“To tell me to change my life at this age.....”

I take a sip of the water that Mora had poured me. Someone must have also squeezed some fruit juice into the jug, as it has a refreshingly sour tang.

Protecting the world, huh. Saving children that I’ve never even personally met, huh.

Such a heavy burden for a salaryman who had already fallen off his career track and had no more hope of promotion.

“If I’m really to do this, then I’m going to have to form an organization actually capable of subjugating anki. And if possible, I would also need to identify the reason behind the outbreaks, and sever it at the source.”

Both are things that the people of this world spent centuries trying to

accomplish, all to no avail.

But what would happen if a salaryman with the power of a Great Wizard joins hands with them?

“Let’s take up the challenge, why don’t we.”

Guess laid-back retirement life has now officially been relegated to the back burner.

It’s time to start taking this Great Wizard thing seriously.

# Chapter 33: To-Do List

Next morning.

I am having breakfast while cradling my head, which is currently throbbing from a hangover.

Despite the headache, however, my mood is not bad at all. Rather, I even think I feel vitality welling up from inside myself at having gained 'a job to do.' I thought I'd gotten sick of that salaryman's mindset already though.....

Mora is trying her hardest at table servicing, but Irudo is already not here.

As a merchant who has several groups of caravans to manage, he apparently has a lot to do early in the day. What vigor he has, in spite of all that drinking last night.....

"Not only that, I think various customers have also started coming in the morning....."

So adds Mora, her face telling me that she doesn't fully understand all the details.

Well, it's good timing. While eating, let's take this time to let's straighten out our thoughts.



First of all, I want to protect people from anki.

Of course, there are a lot of other problems in this world, not least of all war and poverty. However, I am not so full of hubris that I think myself capable of solving it all.

But anki. Anki is the one thing that cannot be tolerated.

I know this because I've seen and fought them first hand. Their existence is a wrongness on the cosmic level. They are an 'evil' that must be taken care of,

even if it requires using irregularities such as myself.

To that end, what steps do I need to take?

Anki can appear at anytime and anywhere, which makes coming up with countermeasures extremely difficult. And even I do not have the capital to maintain the necessary military strength for an extended period of time. Watching the Carbanera Knight Order fret about paying its knights their wages has taught me this.

I can only think of two viable countermeasures off the top of my head.

First is for all countries to openly share all information on anki, and form an allied force whenever the need arises. The other is to found an anti-anki organization that has full authority to cross national borders.

I should probably also help with each country's internal anti-anki measures. If I handle the fighting myself, I think I can win against any anki force. However, I can't be at several places at the same time. Children soldiers like the Lelis Magician Guild's 'magic soldiers' are definitely out of the question, but I can probably help raise each country's fighting capability with my technical knowledge and wizardry.

On the memo pad inside my head, I note down the two large items of 'Establish an anti-anki military alliance' and 'Found an anti-anki organization.'

Next, I write out the sub items that I need to do in order to achieve those big items, such as 'Strengthen the weight of my words to conduct negotiations with various countries' and 'Gather staff members.'

When I line them all up like this, the whole thing starts to look like a really large undertaking.

"Muu..... I also need to create a place to develop magic items at my base....."

"Gio-san, you're not tasting any of this food, are you?"

Seeing me begin to vacantly gnaw on a loaf of freshly baked black bread, Mora's mouth twists into a ^ and she glares at me.



After finishing breakfast, I'll go out..... or such was my plan, but Irudo came

back.

“Please pardon my disrespect last night, Wizard-sama. It seems that I caught you as you were heading out. If it is for business, is there anything that I can help you with?”

There is not even a hint left of last night’s disgraceful behavior.

“I’d feel bad, asking something of you on top of last night’s discussion.”

“Whatever your request, please just say the word.”

He responds immediately with the very definition of a serious face.

“Can you arrange for me to meet with the person closest to the Council within your personal connections?”

“That’s..... what would be the meeting for?”

Irudo’s face twists into a frown. Muu, is the request a bit too difficult?

“I want to ask about the anti-anki measures that Lelis has in place. And to offer my strength if it is needed.”

Hearing my harmless, inoffensive answer, Irudo does a 180 and brightens up.

“Is that so! Actually, I’ve been bombarded with a stream of emissaries since early this morning.”

“Emissaries?”

“Indeed. They must have already sniffed out the fact that Wizard-sama is staying at my house. They hailed from various Guilds and nobles, and even the Temple..... most of what they had to say involved a request to me to help arrange an audience with you so that they can their greetings.”

Oh wow, so that happened. Makes me feel like I did him a bad turn, good timing though it is.

“Seems I have caused you trouble. So, among those emissaries.....”

“You can rest assured. The very first emissary was from Braus-san, Branch Leader of the Lelis Merchant Guild and Chairman of the Lelis Council. I shall immediately coordinate with his side’s schedule and arrange the meeting.”

“I-, is that so. Very well, I’ll leave it to you. It’ll be a great help.”

“Speak nothing of it! It is for my daughter’s great benefactor. Furthermore, after hearing your purpose, it is also my duty as a citizen of Lelis to help out.”

“I shall endeavor to answer your expectations. Oh, one more thing..... do you have any paper that I can write memos on?”

# Chapter 34: Visualizing My Work

After being seen off by the unexpectedly cooperative Irudo and Mora, I went out.

In my breast pocket are the scrolls of blank white parchment that he gave me.

My physical description must have already circled around, as I see people surrounding me at a distance. Though not to the level of the fevered reception that I got the day I arrived, their gazes are still filled half with respect and half with awe. Well, the eyes of the villagers back in Yuule were more heavily colored with fear, so I suppose this is still better.

“Alright, let’s just get going.”

I try my best to look full of confidence by straightening my back and walking composedly.



My destination is the Magician Guild. Yes, I remember the way now.

“Have you come to accept our offer from yesterday?”

The only person who comes out is the Vice-Leader of the Lelis Magician Guild, Yahman. Oh well, I suppose he’ll do for today.

I tell him that I want to see all the records that this branch has on anki, and that I want to sit in on an actual training session of the magic soldiers.

“Umm..... But showing the guild’s records to outsiders is.....”

““Outsider’?”

I exaggeratedly repeat what he said back to him and look straight into his eyes while putting strength into my abdomen.

“Though it is important to stick to every single word of every single rule in effect, this investigation is indispensable for my consideration of the offer from

the other day. Are you unable to help me?”

If I go about this like my usual self, I would deprecate myself a bit more. However, as a ‘Great Wizard,’ I can’t very well go around bowing left and right for merely this level of negotiation.

“N-, no, I am not saying that you are an outsider..... Y-, you’re already at least a, um, consultant! Yes, I shall make the necessary arrangements immediately.”

“Glad to hear it. Convey my greetings to Heldol-dono for me too, will you?”



Before anything else, I need to know more about the anki.

Inside the Guild’s large library, I pulled out every single book and scroll that had the word ‘anki’ in its title.

“Uohh, my back.....”

After several hours of concentrating on the records, I realize a dull pain and let slip a moan.

On the inside, Gio’s Constitution stat is 16, so this level is supposed to be a walk in the park, but I guess it just means that’s how long I’ve been away from deskwork for.

“But still, based on all this, it seems that almost nothing is known about anki.”

So I grumble to myself while gazing at all the information that I’d compiled.

Although there are a lot of books about anki, they had almost no information to offer that I didn’t already know. Anki do not found countries nor societies. As soon as they are born from a [nest], they continue assaulting humans until they are killed..... If I had to say, they sound more sci-fi than fantasy.

However, I did learn a few things. First is the term Bleed.

It refers to ‘a mass outbreak of anki.’

When they occur, they are catastrophes on the continent level that can easily wipe out a country or two. So far, there have been two Bleeds.

On the parchment I got from Irudo, I have noted down ‘Year 815: First Bleed occurs.’ By the way, the calendar is based on Shulendal’s founding year.

The current year is apparently Year 1300, so this was almost 500 years ago. During the incident, the entire eastern half of the continent was destroyed.

How this Bleed was pushed back is not clear, but there are three main reasons that people raise: humans discovering magic, an existence called 'heavenly soldiers' allying with the humans, and 'heroes' going around and destroying a large number of anki nests. Heavenly soldiers and heroes..... The location of the nest that birthed this outbreak—the source of this Bleed, in other words—is apparently a place called the [Valley of Earthly Calamity].

Next on my notes is 'Year 1134: Second Bleed occurs.' This is the incident where the Carbanera Knight Order played a huge part. It originated from a cave called the [Jaw of the Earth]. Although it was only about half the scale of the first Bleed, it still wiped out all of the countries and cities in the central part of the continent, and was the impetus behind Shulenda's break up.

This time, an allied force of humans, elves, and dwarves ultimately met, and broke, the anki host at the Plains of Dawn (now called the Plains of Twilight). At the same time, several parties of extremely skilled adventurers successfully infiltrated the Jaw of the Earth and destroyed the nest inside. Compared to the first Bleed, records of this second one are more numerous and detailed. Whereas the first is 'legend,' the second is 'war history'—that's the feeling I get.

Ever since the second Bleed, anki nests have been appearing in various locations around the continent at the pace of one every few years. So it was right that the last ten years of peace was unnatural.

"If the legends are included, it would mean that there were two previous allied forces."

So I muttered to myself while doing stretches to loosen my back. Having precedents, that is good.

"There was also an unexpected discovery."

On my note-taking parchment, there is now also a copied down map.

On top of it is the title 'Continent of Sedia, Central Area.'

Indeed, with Liuus Lake as the center, there are 4 countries all around, one on each of the cardinal directions. In light of this positioning, it makes sense how

the Liuus Union, of which Lelis is a part, is prospering so much through commerce. With this, I can now visualize the relative positions of all the places that I've heard about, including the Plains of Twilight, which is now a haunt for undead, the Valley of Earthly Calamity, the Jaw of the Earth, and even a few other new places with ominous names that sound right at home with the fantasy genre.

“Yagi used to draw ones like this all the time in his kanji practice notebook, didn't he.....”

I inadvertently look off into the distance while reminiscing about my school days. Then I slap both of my cheeks with my hands and rouse myself.

Because this is not a game, but a real world that I am planning to save.

# Chapter 35: Magic Soldier

After wrapping up my research in the library, I headed off to inspect the magic school.

Aside from my two large goals, I had also planned on supporting each country's anti-anki measures.

Though it did sound a bit shady, I needed to fully understand this new experiment that is the magic soldier. The possibility that they truly prove to be a viable counter against anki was not completely nil, after all.

The magic school was on a small island in Lius Lake reserved for the Magician Guild, so I had to take a small boat to get there.

Proceeding down a canal while sitting on the bench of a small boat turned out to be a pretty pleasant experience.

It would have been even better of an experience if only there wasn't an old guy even older than me sitting next to me the whole trip.

Yahman is a sociable person, but his mouth just wouldn't stop chattering from beginning to end. It also didn't help that the content of his words was almost all bragging.

Apparently, he is the leading authority in the field of potion production, and therefore even gets called in as a consultant every now and then by the Healer Guild. His bragging was noisy, but I had an interest in this world's potions and magic items, so I lent him an ear.

It turned out that those who are capable of producing magic items and potions are only a select few magicians who possess the natural aptitude. For those magicians, the magic characters for [Creation] and [Life] appears in their magic boards. It is apparently not possible to choose which characters appear in one's magic board.

I wanted to ask about the production of magic items in greater detail, but Yahman quickly—"The potions that I make are good enough to sell, you know? But then I'd feel bad for the Healer Guild. So that's why I go to the trouble of selling wholesale to them first."—changed the topic to him bragging about his financial means.

"I see, that sounds impressive."

And other such interjections were all I said though, so well, I suppose I didn't have much right to complain.

All that aside, I further learned that the functions of most magic items in Sedia are not as crazy and far-out as the ones that show up in D&B. This is especially true for magic items with infinite uses—these are apparently pretty much nonexistent in this world.

"..... Which means I'll also have to take vested interests into consideration....."

"Sorry, did you say something?"

"Ah, no, it was nothing."



The magic school itself turned out to be a splendid building that looks like a city hall. The training facilities for the magic soldiers, however, were another story altogether.

Upon reaching the island, Yahman did not lead me to the center of the island, but to an out of the way corner.

"So you're the 'wizard' or whatever?"

When we arrived at the Magic Soldier Training Facility, we were greeted by the person in charge, a man by the name of Griad who took no pains to hide his disdain for me. Incidentally, the buildings of the training facility were clearly constructed in a hurry, but well, they looked alright for a hurried job.

"Y-, you! Did you not receive the directive from the Branch Leader to show respect to Margils-dono!?"

“I am showing respect. But just in my own way, of course.”

He was apparently the type to not believe in anything that he hasn't seen with his own eyes. But well, if I entertained every single person who doubted me, then I wouldn't have time for anything else.

“Apologies for taking up your time in spite of your busy schedule. Can we go straight to observing an ongoing training session of the magic soldiers?”

“Of course, of course! Griad-kun, I trust you've made the necessary arrangements?”

“..... This way. It's nothing interesting to look at though. Just saying.”



We are currently on our way to the training grounds, with Griad taking advantage of this time to explain the training received by the magic soldiers.

The concept of the magic soldier was first thought of after the war against Anki 10 years ago, when the Magician Guild was searching for a way to build up its own fighting power.

The training to produce a magician, which normally takes about 10 years, can be shaved down to 3 years by removing all content that can be removed. After that is 2 years of normal military training.

It was Branch Leader Heldol who came up with the original idea. Griad is charged with staying on-site to guide the project as needed.

What I hear next absolutely floors me.

8 years ago, there were almost 50 applicants when they were recruiting for Gen 1, almost all of whom hailed from noble or upper-class families. In the end, however, those who managed to acquire everything needed as a magic soldier numbered only 2. All the others either quit because they couldn't bear the training anymore, were forced to quit because of injuries caused by the training, or literally just dropped dead. As a result, there were only 10 applicants for Gen 2, of which only 1 made it to the end.

“..... messed up beyond even what I had imagined.....”

“What is?”

“No, nothing. So, what about the current batch, Gen 3?”

“The batch currently undergoing training is Gen 3. As we have to gather numbers, starting from this Gen, we have begun accepting applicants from common families and farming families who live outside the city. With the new policy of paying out remuneration to applicants, we managed to secure 80 people for Gen 3. Furthermore, we have drawn from the data gleaned from the two earlier batches and introduced large improvements to the curriculum.”

In other words, they couldn't gather any more applicants after the training was revealed to be highly dangerous, so they have turned to recruiting the poor. Don't tell me they're dabbling in human trafficking.....?

As I moan inside, Griad informs me that we have arrived.

..... It's just a giant, empty piece of land.

“These are the meditation rooms.”

“Say what??”

I inadvertently blurted out my first thought. What Griad is indicating towards is a few lines of pits about 2m deep dug into a corner of the the open field. Each one has a ladder installed for going up and down and a lid.

There is one magician who is supposedly on watch, but he's just standing in place looking extremely bored.

“In order to use magic without the aid of the magic board, the user must have a powerful mental image of the spell. In order to train for that, this kind of place where the trainee can be isolated from all five senses is the most effective.”

The trainees are instructed to take a certain herb that induces a relaxed state, then hole themselves up in one of these pits to focus solely on searing the image of the magic spell into their minds.

“We have also established that rather than just meditating in the darkness, using an aid like this helps make the images stronger.”

What Griad is proudly showing off to me is a copper plate engraved with the likeness of a magician whose staff is shooting out a lance of fire. If I understand him correctly, tracing one's fingers over this scene repeatedly will cause the

user to have a much clearer image of «Fire Lance».

“U—n? I..... see?”

The theory behind my own wizardry is just a bunch of settings thought up by TRPG otakus who happened to be students with too much free time on their hands. Because of that, I don't have the right to argue against the logic that was just explained to me, no matter how much I disagree with it. However.....

“Excuse me, may I ask one question?”

“What is it?”

“Is the strength of magic spells truly dependent on the caster's mental image? Because if it is, then would it not be even more effective to let the trainees watch a real magician shooting the spell, instead of relying on a mere engraving?”

Un, this point alone I cannot let slide.

Upon hearing my question, a ‘what is this guy saying?’ look comes over Yahman's and Griad's face.

“..... That's..... If such a method is to be employed, then we'd have to take on infants and show them magic every day.”

“A-, also, all magicians are taught from day 1 in magic school to never show their magic so easily to others. If we truly brought up that suggestion, we'd be branded as heretics.”

“Fuumu.....?”

The reasons that they lined up both sound quite unconvincing to me, but what Yahman mutters next is on a completely different dimension from what I had expected.

“In the first place, if it was that easy to learn magic, then where would our standing be.....”

KA—N, KA—N~

The high-pitched ringing of a bell rouses me from my shell-shocked stupor.

That must be a signal, as immediately the lids covering the pits are opened

from the inside and young boys and girls looking thoroughly exhausted start crawling out one by one.

“Well done. 3 hours of rest.”

So says the instructor haughtily towards the children, all of whom are sprawled over the ground.

And then.

“..... Tack! Tack!!”

One blond girl has gone beside a pit other than the one she came out of and is trying to wrest the lid away while shouting with alarm in her voice.

There is apparently a pit that, despite the signal, has yet to be opened. In other words, there is a trainee who has yet to come out.

The other trainees gather around the blond girl and manage to open the lid and drag out the trainee inside.

“Tack, hold yourself together!”

“..... a.....”

The young boy who was pulled out lies limp in the blond girl’s arms. His eyes are vacant.

“Tch, he broke? Leave him aside! I’ll give him treatment later.”

“Instructor! Tack is just tired. He should be fine after just a few days of rest.”

“Who has the spare time to look after someone like that! There’s no knowing when the anki will appear!”

“Allow me.” (Gio)

“Ah.”

Seriously unable to watch any longer, I gently take the young boy from the blond girl’s arms.

His body temperature is dangerously low.

I quickly take out the Potion Server from my sling bag, pour out a cup of Healing Potion, then bring the cup to his lips.

“Hang on. Drink this. I’m begging you, please drink it.” (Gio)

“..... a..... uu.....”

Almost half of the light pink-colored potions spills onto his chest, but his throat properly moves and drinks down the rest.

According to D&B rules, Healing Potions not only heal all injuries that cause a decline in hitpoints, but also removes one abnormal status, such as Poison or Panic.

“..... hah..... uu..... eh.....?”

As the young boys and girls watch on with bated breath, the color of life gradually returns to Tack’s face, and light returns to his eyes, weak though it is.

I entrust Tack to the blond girl, then turn towards the instructor.

“U-, umm.....” (Instructor)

“As you see, he merely needs a bit of rest, after which he will be perfectly able to resume his training. It seems that this is all thanks to your training, instructor.” (Gio)

“Ah..... y-, yes of course. Thank you very much. Oi, take this one to the dorms!” (Instructor)

The instructor is shooting Yahman, who is his superior, frequent glances while giving out instructions.

The young girl and a few other trainees lend their shoulder to Tack, who is still extremely weak. But before that, all of them give me a quick bow.

“Goodness. Apologies for stepping in unnecessarily, Yahman-dono, Griad-dono.” (Gio)

“What a curious person you are.” (Griad)

“No, no, no, no, of course it was not unnecessary! But still, well, how generous of you to use such a high grade potion so freely.” (Yahman)

Watching Yahman frivolously smiling his ingratiating smile made me want to punch someone for the first time in a long time.



The place we are brought to next is at the outer edge of the island.

The beautiful lake and sand gives the place a bit of a resort feel, but.....

“Your feet have stopped! Keep walking, keep walking! The moment a soldier stops walking is the moment he dies!”

The scene is one of young boys and girls shouldering timber and knapsacks and being driven into marching by buff-looking soldiers.

Although it’s true that a lot of the children look more muscular than normal kids in their age group, but the sight is still not a pleasant one to watch.

“It’s marching practice. These Gen 3 trainees have already completed the 3 years of the magic curriculum. After 1 more year of military training, they will be deployed to the Magician Guild as magic soldiers.”

“..... If I remember correctly, you said that you gathered 80 people for Gen 3. How many are left at the moment?”

“18 have successfully withstood the training up to now and are developing favorably. We are already seeing the effects of the improved curriculum.”

I don’t even want to ask what happened to the 62 who didn’t manage to hold on.

Before I came to this island, I was quite conflicted as to how to respond to the Guild’s request for me to teach the magic soldier trainees. But now? Oh, I’ve already made up my mind quite a while back.



“Teru! It’s you bastard again?! Stand up!”

As I watch over the ‘training’ with my arms crossed, a noticeably small-bodied boy at the end of the line squats down. The soldier next to him yells into his ear, but he shows no sign of moving.

At that, a large-bodied boy from the front of the line makes his way over.

“Teru, there’s only a little bit left, so hang in there. The rest of you also put more effort into it!”

The big one lends his shoulder to the small one and resumes walking. This

scene must be an oft-repeated one, as the soldier seems to be giving tacit consent. In response to the big-bodied boy's shout, the others go "Oohh!", so he must be the leader of the bunch.

"That one is called Log, and is the most excellent trainee among Gen 3. He is going to be more powerful than both Gen 1 and 2."

While listening to Griad's introduction, I closely scrutinize his—Log's—face.

Somehow still managing to bear the training by some stroke of fortune..... is a description that has nothing to do with him whatsoever. In his eyes, which are glaring straight ahead, I see a burning will even more powerful than that of many adults.

So even among these children from poor families who were most likely gathered with money, there exists someone like him.



"After this, it is time for combat training."

"I have another question. You said that their training has been improved from the one applied to Gens 1 and 2. Specifically what has been changed?"

"Gens 1 and 2 were comprised mainly of children from noble and influential families, so we couldn't apply more strenuous items to their training. Of course, we have also added other touches, like the copper plate from earlier."

I see.

There is absolutely nothing to be expected of any future 'improvements' to this project.

"Now I have a proposal. How about I lend a hand with that session of combat training?"

"What?"

"I can create servants with around the same strength as large and small demons. I am offering to do so for the trainees to practice against."

I'm sorry to Claura and the Branch Leader, but I cannot allow the Magic Soldier Training Facility, in its present state, to continue any longer.

Yes, I know, I'm an outsider. You guys have poured a massive amount of time and effort and expense into this project that you thought would grant you the strength to stand up to anki—I get that. Outsiders have no right to interfere? That's true.

But so what?

'Great Wizard's exist for the sake of kicking such truths to the goddamn curb.

# Chapter 36: Young Boys and Girls

I, Yahman, Griad, and 18 young boys and girls are currently on a military training ground that is merely an empty piece of land with a surface hardened by frequent usage.

The magic soldier trainees had just finished an intense session of training, so this is after they have had a break.

At my suggestion, the trainees are equipped with the spear and armor actually in use by full-fledged magic soldiers.

Almost all of their faces are filled with unease and fear. Except for one..... the black-haired young boy at the front, the one who was pointed out to be the most outstanding of the batch. Log, I think it was? His eyes are only filled with challenge.

“Actually creating anki would be.....” (Griad)

“Shh! He’ll hear you! Well, we can just watch.....” (Yahman)

While ignoring the two ossan magicians behind me who are furiously whispering to each other, I proceed to stand in front of the trainees.

(T/N: Ossan: uncle / middle-aged men)

“.....!”

I can see all of them stiffening with nervousness. Goodness, what kind of introduction was given about me?

Back in Japan, I’ve stood on a stage in front of new hires going through their induction training..... if only those guys had been this serious.

“Ahem..... I am the wizard Gio Margils. I think of you all as nakama that share my desire to protect people from anki.”

As I say this while lowering my head, their eyes all grow round with surprise. A

buzz of whispering among themselves springs up, but I quieten it by slightly raising my staff. As expected of those who've received military training—the buzz immediately dies.

“I fully understand how seriously you all have taken your training. As such, though it may be presumptuous of me, I have taken it upon myself to provide all of you with the opportunity for live practice against existences that possess roughly the same strength as anki.”

“.....?”

Beginning with Log, several of the boys—and girls too—sharpen their eyes. The other trainees also begin to fidget around. It seems that they think I'm belittling them. I can also feel Griad's cold gaze boring into my back.

“By means of this spell, may 18 goblins and 1 ogre be created and be under my control for 10 minutes. [Create Monster].”

The moment my chanting ends, a crowd of goblins, which possess the characteristic small horns and large ears, and an ogre appear, tearing apart the uncomfortable silence.



“.....That's enough.”

The training itself ended very quickly.

Upon merely laying eyes on the goblins and ogre, a majority of the trainees fell into panic, and Griad just fainted. It turned into quite a commotion.

It probably needn't be said that not much proper fighting took place. Unlike [Create Ogre Platoon], [Create Monster] can create almost any monster without a special ability. In exchange for the versatility, however, the duration is only 10 minutes. I was slightly worried as to whether a conclusion would be reached in that time, but the trainees ended up not lasting even 5 minutes, with the goblins and ogre pinning down every single one of them.

The goblins and ogre were all bare-handed (of course, I also instructed them to hold back), but aside from Log and the blond girl from earlier taking out one goblin each with their magic, I saw nothing else that could actually be called

‘fighting.’

I command the monsters holding them down to step back, then I approach them.

“Is anyone injured? Please tell me, there’s no need to be reserved.”

“..... I’m sorry, it seems that this guy hit his head.”

“Is that so. Sorry about that.”

It was Log who spoke up, while holding in his arms another trainee who is cradling his own head and groaning. As I feed that trainee a serving of Healing Potion, the blond girl, whose name is Daya, glares at me.

“..... I-, it’s because all of them are still in the training stage. There’s no way they can actually fight against such anki. In the first place.....”

Griad, who has woken up but still looks ashen, calls out to me, but I shake my head to cut him off.

“In any event, I have seen enough of the Magician Guild’s boasted-of ‘magic soldiers.’ I shall convey my decision to Heldol-shi at a later date. I’m sorry, but can the two of you make your way back first? I wish to speak to the trainees.”



To be honest, there’s no justification for my rejection of the Magician Guild and magic soldier trainees. It is completely uncalled for.

These people are simply trying to stand up against the absurdity that is anki, using what they know within the boundaries of their reality. As such, even when death or tragedy occurs as a consequence, that too is simply another part of that reality.

If my eloquent lip service turns out to be enough, then great. But what I am prepared to do is a method that will fully utilize the absurd power and assets of the being called Gio Margils.

If it comes to that, then that’s fine too.

Pushing through the impossible and forcing reality to swallow it is the duty of absurd existences such as myself.



I walk towards the trainees, who are mostly still sprawled on the ground, then sit down on the ground.

“The discussion that all of you and I will now have, I will never let leak to the Magician Guild, unless I have your express permission. This I am saying ahead of anything else.”

As I begin talking to them quietly, they sit up one by one. Of course, there’s nothing but unease in their expressions.

“It is fine to honestly speak out whatever you’re thinking. Firstly, do you all actually want to fight against anki? I’ll say this so that there will be no misunderstanding: real anki are several hundred times scarier than what you just fought.”

At my question, almost all of the trainees cast their eyes downwards. But among them,

“I will get revenge for my Father!”

“Me too!”

Only Daya and Log boldly return to my gaze and assertively declare so. Several others nod along, seemingly in agreement with them.

“Among those of you who want to fight against anki, are there any who really want to be a magic soldier at any cost?”

Everyone looks perplexed at that question.

“I-, it’s not like it has to be a magic soldier..... But this is about the only place that would provide us combat training.....”

“Here, they give us enough food so that we don’t die, and we get a place to sleep too.....”

Log and another young boy answer me haltingly. As I’d thought, they must be orphans.

“Are there any here who actually want to go back to your parents?”

Now several people raise a hand. However, I can tell from some of their faces

that they might not be welcomed if they actually went home.

“After everything that I saw today and the explanations that I’ve heard, I have determined that it will be extremely difficult for you magic soldiers to put up any significant resistance against anki..... Actually, I’ll be honest—it’s not difficult, it’s outright impossible.”

They have endured this training with their lives on the line in spite of this. Log and Daya bite their lips and glare at me. Though I feel sorry, I say what I have to say in no uncertain terms.

“After this, I will go to the Magician Guild and negotiate for a temporary closure of this Magic Soldier Training Facility. If there are those among you who wish to return to your parents, I will personally visit them with compensation money while returning you. If there are those who have nowhere to return to, I shall help you find a work stay..... or at least somewhere to go. And lastly, if there are those who still wish to fight anki, then I will arrange for you to join the Cabanera Knight Order. Of course, you may be starting as a servant.”

I’m afraid I’ll have to rely on Irudo’s help again to find them employment. The thing about the Order is just an empty promise right now, but well, those guys owe me a huge favor, so they shouldn’t be able to decline, especially if I even pay for the children’s living expenses for the near future.

While I’m still fleshing out this plan inside my mind, Log slams the ground with both of his fists.

“W-, what, you! I mean, Wizard-sama! Didn’t you come to teach us the wizardry that you’d just shown us? Teach me wizardry..... please!”

Then he immediately lowers his black-haired head.

“Even if I teach you, the possibility that you can use wizardry is very low. Furthermore, it would take years before we know the results.”

Although there is a small part of me that wants to do this kind of ‘experiment,’ I answer him honestly.

“It’s fine however many years it takes! It’s fine if I have to start as your servant! I don’t have a dad nor a mom anymore anyways. Also.....”

Within Log's eyes, which are looking up at me right now, I see something aside from a powerful hatred of the anki.

I find myself overwhelmed by his pure and strong will. The Japanese me might have already ran away by this point. The reason why I'm still standing here resolutely may be because I, too, now have a powerful will inside of me beyond what I've ever had before.

"Also, Wizard-sama is also aiming to exterminate anki, right? Let me help with that. Rather than becoming a magic soldier or becoming a knight, I can do so much more if I'm with you. My intuition tells me so!"

"I want to be a knight, but..... wizards seem so much stronger than knights....."

"I want the same thing Log does....."

"I was just left on the roadside to die anyways....."

Seemingly infected with Log's zeal, Daya and several other trainees also begin to entreaty me for the same.

"Muu....."

I have clearly underestimated their resolve. But I don't really want to do the same thing the Magician Guild was doing.

"..... just have to do it differently then."

"?"

I stand up and brush dust off my pants while murmuring to myself.

All that's left now is to talk to Heldol.

Finding fault with their anti-anki forces is one thing. Getting them to let go of the project would be something else altogether. But well, if the standard is their current method, then I believe I can think of something even better as 'compensation.'

I feel slightly sorry towards Heldol, but he is going to have to give up and acknowledge that the absurdity that is me is preferable over the absurdity that is anki.

# Chapter 37: Golem

“.....In their current state, I cannot see them being of any significant help in a real battle. The Magic Soldier Training Facility should be discontinued immediately.” (Gio)

“.....”

I am currently in the audience hall of the Magician Guild, speaking to the Lelis branch top brass.

Branch Leader Heldol, 2<sup>nd</sup> Seat aka Vice-Leader Yahman, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Seat Nasaria. I also recognize 5<sup>th</sup> Seat Claura and the two magic soldier guards, but today the 4<sup>th</sup> Seat is also present, a man by the name of Tashin.

Having their ten-year long project openly slammed is causing all of their faces to be twisted..... or not.

Heldol and Yahman, definitely. Especially Heldol—he is trying really hard to keep a smile on his face, but it’s obvious that he’s grinding his teeth. On the other hand, Nasaria and Claura are frowning but nodding. Tashin just looks interested in hearing what I have to say next.

“Though it may be true that the fighting strength of the magic soldiers may be insufficient at the current moment, it should increase with the research and improvements from here on, right?” (Yahman)

Yahman is looking back and forth between Heldol and me and trying to intermeditate. The children that die or suffer injuries due to that ‘research’ of his must not even register in his eyes.

“That increase is pretty difficult, isn’t it? The whole concept is to mass produce soldiers capable of using weak magic, right? Mass producing soldiers that use powerful magic would be a different premise altogether.” (Tashin)

Tashin retorts in a slightly high-pitched voice while readjusting his glasses.

This guy, he's the type that can't read the atmosphere..... but this is good going.

“Then how do you propose the Magician Guild gain fighting strength?! Are you suggesting that we gather normal soldiers??” (Yahman)

“Isn't the only alternative to focus on quality over quantity in our magic soldier production?” (Claura)

“Anou, in the first place, wasn't the whole point of asking Margils-dono here to have him help with the strengthening of the magic soldiers by teaching them wizardry.....?” (Nasaria)

It feels like it's been a while since I've heard Nasaria's voice. I had anticipated that question.

“I've had a good look at the training being conducted at the Facility..... if a trainee becomes capable of using only one or two spells after going through all that, then it can be said that it will be nigh impossible for them to learn my wizardry. And even if they could, it would take 5 years for them to use the most basic spell only once. Furthermore, only 2 students can be taught at any given time. I, for one, do not think it practical at all.” (Gio)

The first half was a forced excuse, but I'm serious about the second half. Either way, I have to make them give up on the very idea of trying to make the magic soldier project work.

“But.....”

“I am fully aware how hard this must be to swallow for all of you have who cooperated on this project for so long. However, one must not look away from the truth.”

“.....”

“If we terminate the project now, it will void everything that we've spent on it up to now!” (Yahman)

Heldol is just staring at me with his mouth shut.

After the contention that Yahman voiced in his stead, Claura opens her mouth.

“It is easy to just say 'terminate.' But do you have any thoughts about it? Do

you know of a way to produce higher fighting strength than magic soldiers but at lower cost?" (Claura)

"That's exactly right. If you do, we would love to hear it!" (Yahman)

"..... I do." (Gio)

At my declaration, Heldol's shoulders jump.

I take out a few magic items and toss them out.

Along with a dull sound, six lumps of metal the size of a fingertip roll around the floor.

"What..... are those.....?" (Yahman)

"Oh loyal soldiers, arise." (Gio)

After I chant the command phrase, the magic items 'Soldiers of Bronze' activate.

The six lumps expand with a pulsatory motion and, in the blink of an eye, transform into six life-sized soldier statues.

True to their name, the statues are completely made of bronze, equipped with shield, spear, helmet, and armor in the fashion of Roman heavy infantry.

"Such a thing....." (Yahman)

"This is amazing.....! Although no magical power was used..... Margils-san, are these golems?!" (Tashin)

"That is correct." (Gio)

Actually, sorry. They're just magic items and not real golems. But the usage is the same, so I'm using them for this demonstration.

"What I'm offering to the Magician Guild is the method to create golems. These..... the explanation is long, but in short, the process has absolutely no relation to magic power and relies purely on crafting technique, so anyone can learn it, as long as they put in the time and effort." (Gio)

The technique to create golems falls under 'Monster Construction Techniques,' a section that gets added to the D&B rulebook upon reaching super rank.

According to the rules, the prerequisite experience and cost for golem production are all fixed, but there aren't really any profession restrictions. As proof, there were even several NPCs who were famous as golem creators but weren't wizards. If The Guardian had reproduced even that part faithfully, then the people of this world should also be able to learn.

As such, as long as there are the needed materials and technique and time, golems can be mass produced without limit. When they break, they can just be fixed, and don't incur labor costs. Although there is the demerit of always needing a command from someone, their superiority over magic soldiers as mere fighting strength is clear to see.

And there is one more advantage to them.

“Do you have evidence that those golems are stronger than magic soldiers?”  
(Yahman)

“You only have my word to go off on, but I assure you that one of these golems can take on 10 fully trained magic soldiers. If we are to think in anti-anki terms, that translates to 30 small demons, or one or two large demons.” (Gio)

“Testing..... clearly is not necessary. But it would surely have been a sight to see.” (Tashin)

Tashin looks completely engrossed with the golems. Heldol and Yahman look sick.

“Is there any likelihood of us learning these golem creation techniques?”  
(Claura)

“There is indeed. Rather, the likelihood is quite high. If it is the weakest version—the wood golem—that we're talking about, it will take around a year and a half. However, since I will have to teach at least the first batch myself, I would need a bit more time to make the necessary preparations before I begin.” (Gio)

“How much would it cost to make one of those Wood Golems?” (Claura)

“I estimate that it will cost somewhere in the vicinity of a thousand gold coins. Certain unique materials will be needed, the gathering of which might be slightly troublesome. However, for soldiers that need no rest nor salary that can

be repaired after being damaged, I believe the price well worth it.”

“How wonderful! By all means, please impart these techniques onto me!”  
(Tashin)

“Wait wait wait wait. How on earth can we ever explain this to the nobles and citizens who’ve supported the magic soldier project up to now?! The Guild would completely lose all face!” (Yahman)

Tashin eagerly leans forward, but Yahman pulls him back while wailing.

“I do feel apologetic towards the applicants and their families.” (Gio)

I lower my head towards the two standing behind Heldol whose faces have frozen stiff. I must think about their futures too.

“As for the 18 current trainees, I plan on taking custody over them. Of course, if the 3 graduated magic soldiers wish so, I can also take responsibility and find them places to go.” (Gio)

Despite my words, the magic soldiers’ faces do not relax. I guess it’s only natural.....

“And although it is indisputable that the ‘source’ of the golems is myself, if we make it so that only the Magician Guild can ‘produce’ them, that should help the Guild maintain its influence, yes?” (Gio)

“.....”

Heldol still remains silent, but I can see the anger in his eyes slightly wavering.

“You yourself will not produce any golems? Even though you can create your own army of golems?” (Yahman)

“Well, I may make a few as my own guards, but I do not have the time to produce enough to be of much significance in the larger scheme. That, I will leave to the Magician Guild. If the technique is shared with all of the Guild’s branches and not just this one, then it can turn into a rather reassuring fighting force, don’t you think?” (Gio)

“..... The Guild as a whole, huh.” (Heldol)

“I merely wish to defeat the anki..... and to protect people from them. From

my standpoint, having the Guild bear the full brunt of the golem production is actually a welcome thing.” (Gio)

By now, Heldol’s expression has softened quite a bit. It must be because he’s understood that we share the same stance on anki.

“T-, this must not be, Branch Leader! Relying on outside techniques to maintain our influence..... Even the Council has provided us a significant amount of financial support!” (Yahman)

This Vice-Leader. He normally just acts like Heldol’s hanger-on, why is he being so resistant now of all times?

“Vice-Leader?” (Claura)

“Wha-, what is it?” (Yahman)

Although she had remained silent for a while, Claura is now calling out to Yahman with a troubled look on her face.

“If the funds we received from the Council bothers you so much, I suppose I can be the one to go to the Council and give them a clear breakdown of how their money was used, complete with the exact numbers.” (Claura)

With those words, a lightbulb goes off in my head and the thought “adults sure are dirty” rises unbidden.

“D-, don’t say unnecessary things! I’m the Treasurer!” (Yahman)

“I have a few personal connections within the Council, so I can.....” (Claura)

As Claura mutters with her characteristic (feigned, definitely) troubled expression, Yahman’s face twitches.

In short, he must have been embezzling or somehow misusing the money that the city had put towards supporting the Magic Soldier Training Facility. No wonder he doesn’t want it to close down.

“Why are you two talking about that? It’s not related to the discussion at hand though.” (Heldol)

Heldol does not seem to have caught the meaning of Claura and Yahman’s side conversation.

“Oh, please pay it no mind, it seems that I said something forward of me. Of course Vice-Leader is the most apt person to explain to the Council.” (Claura)

“Tha-, that’s right..... If, if the project really does become terminated, I’ll take responsibility and explain to them.” (Yahman)

In contrast to her words, Claura’s eyes look sharp enough to stab. Like a deer caught in headlights, Yahman could do nothing but nod while breaking out in a cold sweat.



“.....”

“Anou.....”

While Heldol closes his eyes trying to get his thoughts in order, 3<sup>rd</sup> Seat Nsaria, who had remained quiet up to now, raises her hand hesitantly.

“I think that Margils-dono’s proposal is indeed wonderful. The only worry that I have though, is whether an army of golems would be too powerful. Would the Magician Guild be exposing the world to a new danger?” (Nsaria)

“Ue, there’s no need to be that worried, is there?” (Tashin)

“N-, no, that’s a definite worry.” (Yahman)

This woman has accurately hit the heart of the matter.

“I have also considered that point. The usage of a golem requires setting a unique command word or phrase. If the Guild and the city both know this key, and if even guilds in other countries all share the same key, then there will be no need for any worry on that front.” (Gio)

“Hou..... indeed, it is a good idea to make them unusable against other humans.” (Heldol)

Another way of putting it is that golems would be absolutely useless in wars between humans. This is the other advantage to using golems.

“If there is still any suspicion, set in place a regular inspection by the city. But well, I doubt the Guild will ever get to a point where it loses so much trust with the city as to warrant such a thing.” (Gio)

“My question has been fully answered. Thank you very much.” (Nasaria)

Nasaria smiles while respectfully bowing to me. Then she turns towards Heldol.

“Branch Leader. I believe that we should accept Margils-dono’s proposal.”  
(Nasaria)

“..... I do as well.” (Claura)

“Naturally, I too.” (Tashin)

“I-..... I’ll support whatever Branch Leader decides.” (Yahman)

“.....” (Heldol)

Heldol slowly rises from his seat. The first thing he does is turn to the magic soldiers behind and lower his head.

“Please accept my apologies, you two.” (Heldol)

“B-, Branch Leader!” (Magic Soldier)

“It’s our fault for being so weak!” (Magic Soldier)

The young boy and young girl kneel down with their heads hanging low. Their voices are also quivering.

“Margils-dono.” (Heldol)

According to [Detect Enemy], his hostility towards me still has not disappeared. However, he nods decisively.

“We shall thankfully accept your proposal. The Lelis Branch of the Magician Guild thanks Gio Margils-dono for his friendship.” (Heldol)

# Chapter 38: The Fog of Malice (Part 1)

In the end, the talk with the Magician Guild was concluded with the following terms:

- The Magic Soldier Training Facility shall be temporarily closed down.
- Heldol and Tashin are to continue research on the 3 graduates from Gen 1 and Gen 2. If it becomes clear that there is substantial hope for the increase of the project's safety and efficiency, then the reopening of the Facility may be considered.
- The 18 Gen 3 trainees shall continue staying at the Training Facility's dorms for now.
  - Among them, the ones who wish to return to their parents or go independent shall be paid compensation money and let go.
  - Among them, those who wish for it will be accepted into the Cabanera Knight Order or introduced to a local merchant house. It is also possible to transfer into the official magic school.
- Gio Margils shall instruct applicants from the Gen 3 trainees and any person(s) to be dispatched by the Magician Guild in the techniques for golem production. Instruction must begin within the next 6 months.
- In the case of the Magician Guild commencing golem production, the command key must be shared with the city authorities.
- From now on, Gio Margils and the Lelis Branch of the Magician Guild shall continue cooperating on matters of anki countermeasures.



"I've relieved that we somehow managed to settle everything. Thank you for

your help too.”

“..... I merely gave my input as a member of the Guild’s brass.”

After the talks lasted until twilight, here I am being seen off by Claura again at the main door of the Guild.

Despite having gone so far as to suppress the Vice-Leader’s input by threatening him with his corruption, she is still acting as usual.

“You are indeed a lady dedicated to her professional duties. I suppose that’s why you’re looking after someone like me, even though.....”

Even though an incomprehensible ossan such as myself must cause you so much trouble—is what I was about to say before being cut short by her sharply raised eyebrow.

“I.....” (Claura)

“Actually, forget it. All I wanted to do is tell you that I’m very grateful to you.”

When you make a lady mad, there’s no point in putting up tactless excuses. Putting out the fire speedily is important.

We’ve already had this conversation a few times before, mostly with her shrugging her shoulders and say “Seriously, because you’re like this.....” and ending the conversation.

“I.....”

Abruptly, Claura gets down on one knee before me and lowers her head deeply.

“Wha-..... What?”

“I, Claura Andel, display deep respect towards the wizard Gio Margils’ immense magic power and noble spirit.”

“O, oi.....”

Both her posture and fluent words were delivered without a single flaw. In contrast, it is taking everything that this mere middle-aged salaryman has to not prostrate myself in the same way as her.

Seriously, how am I supposed to respond to this?

In my more than 20 years of being a member of society, I've never had the experience of a beautiful lady expressing respect towards me through a knightly bow(?), and neither did the manner book I owned give instructions for this kind of situation. The Claura that I had felt close to as a nakama up till split second ago now suddenly feels terrifyingly far away.

“.....”

Fortunately, after Claura shoots me a glance and sees me opening and closing my mouth in shock, she stands right back up.

“Wh-, what was with that, all of a sudden?”

“Nothing much. I merely expressed my honest feelings, not as a high-ranking member of the Magician Guild nor as a noble, but as a single individual.”

“I, I see..... Thank you, I guess?”

“Why do you sound so unsure?! In spite of the fact that I just offered you my respect!”

“Ahh, umu. You're right.”

“Seriously..... So, what are you going to do now?”

“Well, I'm returning to Irudo's mansion.....”

“Not that! I'm asking if you plan to continue fighting against anki from now on.”

“Uoh.”

Claura reaches out to pull my earlobe, but I manage to evade it by ducking. What happened to your respect, woman?!

“..... Ahh. Rather than fighting against anki, I intend to protect people from anki. Though it's something that I set my mind on only recently.”

“..... Is that so.”

For a split second, Claura's green eyes widened slightly.

“Ultimately, I wish to form an alliance for the sake of fighting against anki. Well, there is still a lot of preparations that I need to make. And also, if.....”

Yes, the people that I really want to add as my staff are Sedam and Claura. Though it can be said that they're the only people I know.....

“Please do not finish that sentence. What I just said was merely my own feelings. As a magician, I..... I am merely a member of the Guild.”

So says Claura in almost a mutter while looking down. Being level-headed about these kinds of things is one of the reasons why I find her trustworthy.

“That's true. Apologies. However, as the Magician Guild's Claura..... I expect we'll be cooperating with each other from now on, yes?”

“.....”

Claura squints as if she wants to say something, but eventually just sticks out a hand without any words.

The two of us exchange a firm handshake then each go our own way.



“Waah, thank you Gio-san!!”

Mora is currently in high spirits due to the baked sweets that I'd bought for her on my way back to Irudo's mansion. These refreshing cookies that have fruits buried inside go extremely well with the Shil tea that she's poured for me.

“Margils-sama. About the meeting with the Council Chairman, how does tomorrow morning sound? Apparently the other side also wishes to meet you as soon as possible.”

So says Irudo while munching on the same cookies.

“Ahh, no problem. That helps.”

“Duly acknowledged. I shall send them our response. On a different matter, it would be strange for Great Wizard-sama to traverse the city on foot, so I shall arrange for a carriage. I apologize for not having thought of it early today.”

“N-, no, you're almost too thoughtful already.”

“Thank you for saying so. About the employing of servants for your castle, negotiations are still going on. Please give me a bit more time.”

“Ahh, that matter is not of any particular urgency at the moment.”

“..... Speaking of which, there is something that needs to be brought to your attention.”

“Brought to your attention”—it’s always been me saying that phrase, to presidents of our client companies. Same as what Claura did earlier, being treated in all these ways that I’m not accustomed to really makes me conscious of my current standing. Well, it’s not like I have any other option but to get accustomed.

“It seems that there are people sniffing around in regards to Margils-sama. Although they haven’t come into direct contact with the shop or mansion, they have been sending others in to do some probing, interviewing people in the vicinity, and other such.”

“..... Is, is that so.....”

Trying to investigate me, most likely.

“Father, who is it that is looking into Gio-san?”

“No idea. After all, I’m sure that every single person of influence in Lelis has their full attention on Margils-dono at the moment.”

Which means that the entire city is suspect. I suppose anyone would be curious. If they’re just investigating, then I don’t really mind, but..... There is now a certain tension in the air different from one during the fights I’ve had against anki.

“Could it be that you’re also being tailed?”

“Hmm, not that I’ve noticed.”

“Is that so. With consideration also for tomorrow’s schedule, should I arrange a few escorts for you?”

Exactly how resourceful and thoughtful is Irudo. Is this the standard for merchants in Sedia? I remember hearing that he’s at least successful enough for his name to be worth something in the Merchant Guild, so I’d like to think that his ability is above average. Back when I was in my company, how easy things would have been if I had a subordinate as exceptional as him—or not. I might have ended up being the one who falls out of favor with him.

“No need. It would be better not to do something unnecessary that others might interpret as provocation. After all, I’m Lelis’ ally. This issue should be resolved as long as I properly get that message across to the Council Chairman tomorrow.”

Another way to look at it is that if the surveillance and/or interference persists afterwards, then it means I have a real enemy. Enemy..... huh. That would mean another human being, wouldn’t it.....

“Gio-san, are you sure you’ll be alright?”

“There is no need to worry about me. Rather, it would give me more peace of mind if Irudo and Mora take precautions just in case.”

“Naturally we will.”

Depending on the case, real danger might actually befall the two of them.....

Guess I’ll also take a few measures on my end.

# Chapter 39: The Fog of Malice (Part 2)

During breakfast the next day.

Anyone would be curious upon hearing that a person capable of crushing anki armies or nests with meteors has suddenly showed up and is just wandering around town.

All the more so for the city's powerbrokers.

Which is why the mountain of requests for a face-to-face that have been flooding Irudo's place is only natural.

The best method to handle this kind of situation is to proactively offer information from my side to convince them all that I pose no threat to the city.

"..... and that's what I think. How is it?"

"..... It is exactly as you say."

After listening to me, Irudo mulls over it for a bit, then nods.

"I really doubt there's anyone looking to bring your wrath down on themselves. There's also the report that I delivered, so I agree that there is no need to react in an extreme manner."

In comparison to me, who has knowledge even less than that of a child in regards to this world's common sense, Irudo's judgment is way more reliable. Especially in matters such as these.

"But it still feels wrong, doesn't it?" (Mora)

Mora's mouth does her usual ^ thing. She is right, of course.

And although I know this sounds terribly unrealistic, but her words seem like the harbinger of bad things to come. I don't want to say this, but yes, it sounds like a flag.

"Well, I don't think anything will happen, but just in case, I'll lend these to you

two.”

So saying, I hand over two magic items—a ring for Irudo, and a pale green mantle for Mora.

“Amazing, this mantle is so light! .....Eh?”

“Wha-! Mora?!”

As soon as Mora put on the mantle, her lovely figure vanishes. It is the D&B basic magic item Elven Mantle.

“Calm down. Mora is still there. That’s a mantle that makes the wearer invisible. She can return to normal just by taking it off.”

“Really.....? Ah, I’m back!”

Mora’s figure reappears in her previous location.

“Normally, you can keep it folded up and bring it along.”

“Such valuable items..... we are not worthy of them.”

“Are you two not among my small number of collaborators and friends? I would be greatly troubled if something truly befell you two. Irudo’s item is called Genie’s Ring. When you rub it, a spirit of wind, called a genie, will appear and grant you three wishes of anything you ask. I say ‘anything,’ but it’s restricted to combat or physical labor.”

The genie is a relatively strong monster, clocking in at level 12. If it’s Irudo, he should be able to use use it well.

Irudo reverently holds the ring in both hands and bows. Mora also deeply lowers her head.

“Thank you greatly for your regard. These items, we shall hold onto them with the utmost care.”

“Th-, thank you very much, Gio-san!”

“Please keep these secret, alright?”

As a further precaution, I cast [Invisible Demon] once on each of them. The demon summoned by this spell can only obey one command, and would retaliate if the words of the command are not chosen with great care. The

upside to this spell is its long duration. The command I gave the demons this time is “If anyone attempts to cause Irudo (Mora) harm, restrain that person for 1 hour.”

I also summon one more demon for myself and give it the same order, add [Detect Enemy] and [Emergency] for good measure. For the immediate future, let’s make sure to always have these three activated.



Several hours later, I am swaying inside the carriage that Irudo had prepared for me, on my way to the Council Hall.

The purpose is for a meeting with the Chairman of the Council of Lelis, Zatou Braus-shi.

While watching the bustling streets of Lelis flow by on the other side of the carriage’s windows (not glass windows), I mentally sort through the information that Irudo had provided me.

The area around Lius Lake used to be the territory of the Kingdom of Lius, which was vassal to Shulendal. When the kingdom crumbled due to internal strife and civil insurrection about 40 years ago, influential merchants and nobles in Lelis advocated for autonomy. Their success gave birth to the present-day independent city-state of Lelis.

Lelis is currently being managed by the Council’s conferences. The criteria for becoming a Council member is to either be the head of the Lelis branch of a Guild (and also an extremely affluent merchant), or be a member of one of the noble families that helped with the struggle for autonomy. The merchants and nobles have formed factions and are constantly fighting to wrest power from each other. Well, that’s only natural, I suppose.

The current Council Chairman, who I will meet soon, is also concurrently the Head of the Merchants Guild. Although he has reigned for a long time as the top of the merchants faction, he is one of the few people capable of thinking about the city’s benefit as a whole (according to Irudo).

Therefore, he is the most suitable person to explain to that I am harmless to the city of Lelis—that I can rather be of great benefit.

In the midst of my thoughts, the carriage stops in the wide, open plaza in front of the Council Hall.

The entrance of the grave, solemn building that seems to weigh on anyone who approaches is decorated with two statues: one of the God of Commerce, who is this city's guardian deity, and the Goddess of Winter, who protects all people from anki.

“Are you the Great Wizard, Gio Margils-sama? We have been expecting you. Please, this way.”

The city official that had been standing ready at the entrance escorts me to the parlor without delay.



“You are most welcome, Great Wizard-dono. I am the Chairman of the Council of Lelis, and go by the name Zatou Braus. Please pardon my rudeness for having you come all this way.”

The Council Chairman is a man in the prime of his life with a splendid beard. There is absolutely zero sense of servility from his deep bow of respect.

“I am the wizard Gio Margils. Your invitation brings me great honor. I, too, beg your pardon for being so late in giving you my greetings.”

The hand grasping the Wizardry Staff is slick with sweat. Braus' aura is one that would not lose to the professional politicians and businessmen that I had met as a salaryman. In order to not become overwhelmed, I have to keep telling myself “I am a Great Wizard, I am a Great Wizard.”

With the greetings done, I am gestured towards an extravagant chair. We both sit down, now separated by a table in between.

“I have heard of your great exploits from Arnogia-dono and Sedam. For destroying the anki nest, I offer you thanks on behalf of all citizens of Lelis.”

With his second bow as a signal, a secretary pushes a handcart in, on top of which sits a small chest. The secretary directs it towards me and opens the lid, revealing the gold coins and precious jewels packed tightly within.

“Our gratitude cannot be fully expressed with gold coins, but please accept

this for now.”

“..... I merely fulfilled my duty as a wizard. I shall accept your feelings with thanks.”

My normal self would never have had the nerve to accept such a large amount of money. However, I was cautioned by Irudo beforehand that “Among powerbrokers, exchanging gifts is as natural as exchanging greetings. Not accepting would rather come across as an insult.” so I have no choice but to just nod along.

“How wonderful. With this, a burden has been lifted from my shoulder.”

So says Braus while smiling mildly.

As he gives the bell on the table a ring, a maid enters while pushing a service cart with a tea set.

“.....”

“Some good Kanel leaves came in the other day. How about a cup? Or would you prefer wine?”

So says Braus upon seeing my eyes involuntarily turning to follow the maid. No, I’m not displeased with the tea, I’m just a bit engrossed, as it’s my first time seeing a real life maid.

She is a young woman with her chestnut brown hair done up. Her simple outfit is composed of an unadorned, black longskirt and shirt, white apron, and gloves. Her elegant and flowing movements in merely filling the tea set with hot water gives off a high sense of professionalism.

“Which reminds me, are you not in search of servants? If you so wish.....”

“..... Thank you for the offer, but there is no need. I have entrusted that task to Irudo-shi.”

This is bad. I must have stared too long at the maid and caused a misunderstanding.

“Irudo is a young leader within the Merchant Guild from whom we are expecting great things. The fact that he and you have gotten close is something that we are greatly thankful for. This too must be Ashuginea’s favor.”

“Ahh, he has been such a huge help. But with that said, I’m afraid that I myself can’t be of help with his work.”

“Goodness no, hoping for so much would be akin to courting Ashuginea’s wrath.”

Though this exchange flowed quite harmoniously, Irudo’s advice also came into play there. He said that “There might be some who misunderstand that I’m planning on using my close relationship with Margils-dono to climb up in the Guild. This matter should be on Council Chairman’s mind as well.” That’s why I was trying to say that I have no intention of being involved in Irudo’s business. Going by Braus’ expression, I guess I handled it with at least a passing score.

“Sorry for the wait.”

The maid places high class porcelain cups filled with tea onto the table. Sure enough, this tea gives off a richer fragrance than the Shil tea that Mora usually makes for me.

“These leaves can only be harvested from the Kanel province in Shulendal. While staying in Lelis, please enjoy the large variety of specialty products from various locations throughout the continent that come through here.”

“Ahh, I’ve already had the pleasure.”

Braus brings his cup to his mouth first, as if to prove that the tea is not poisoned. I’m not particularly on guard though, so I sip the light tea-colored liquid and hold it in my mouth.

“..... Mu.”

“Oya, is it not to your taste? In comparison to Shil tea, this one’s flavor might seem a bit strong.”

“That’s not it. I was just surprised at how delicious it is.”

To be honest, this tea..... is not as delicious as I’d expected. But Braus looks like he’s really enjoying it, so I don’t want to throw dirt on his face, and neither do I want to be perceived as a country hick who doesn’t ‘get’ the taste of high class things, so I persevere and take a second sip.



“As such, I believe that you will soon receive a missive from the Magician Guild in regards to golem production.”

“I see. That information is truly of great worth to our city. No matter how much we thank you, it would never be enough.”

“Anki are the enemy of all mankind. If it’s for the sake of protecting people from them, I will continue lending however much strength is needed.”

“Thank you for your heartening words. When I convey them to the other Council members and Guild heads, I’m sure they will all be greatly delighted.”

While engaging in small talk, we exchange information like so. In Japanese society, this is the territory of politicians much more than of salarymen. Kudos to Braus for earnestly going along with my school arts festival level of word choice.

“If there is anything in regards to the city’s protection that I can help with, please do not hesitate to tell me.”

“Fumu..... Such welcome words one after the other. However, I cannot make this decision by myself, so after I consult the Garrison Commander, I.....!.....”

“Is something the matter?”

I stand up to take a better look at him as his elbows slam onto the table. His face is rapidly turning blue.

“Uguh.....”

“O, oi!?”

Braus finally vomits, then falls over.

This, could this be..... Poison?! Oh, what am I saying, it’s poison no matter how I look at it.

I lift up his collapsed body and look around the room, but of course, the figure of the maid is nowhere to be seen.

## Chapter 40: The Fog of Malice (Part 3)

The intelligent and steady Council Chairman Braus-shi that had me overwhelmed the entire time since I first walked in is now lying prostrate on a table and groaning.

This development seems like something straight out of a drama, but the only explanation that I can think of is that there was indeed poison mixed in with the tea from the province of Kanel that we had been drinking.

When I look all around, the figure of the maid who had poured us the tea is of course gone, and one of the windows is standing wide open.

“Uu.....”

“Are you alright?”

While asking a question that even I think ridiculous, I support Braus’ body and stroke his back for him. It would be terrible if he chokes on his vomit.

Wait a second, wasn’t I also drinking from the same pot?

“Ma-, Margils-dono, a-are you, u-unharmed.....?”

“So it seems. I suspect my poison resist roll must have gone well.....”

Exactly. If my body has the same specs as the level 36 wizard Gio, then no normal poison should be able to affect me, due to my level-dependent resistance values.

“Uwah?!”

My face shoots up at the shout, and I notice the secretary from before standing ashen-faced at the door.

Mu. Is this the plot development where I get suspected of killing the Chairman with poison? But in spite of that, I am shockingly calm. Guess I’ve been poisoned in a fantasy world already a few times too many. Anyways, the

answer as to what I should do now has already been decided in my mind.

“D-..... Don’t raise a f-, fuss..... Let no, no one near..... Ma-, Margils-dono, th-, this is a frame job.....”

“I’m sure. Calm down, I’ll treat you now.”

“This, this is by n-, no means, the w-, the will of Lelis..... Eh?”

The Council Chairman goes from groaning from agony and trying to protect Lelis even while the shadow of death loomed over him to being slack-jawed with surprise. Though I do currently have [Detect Enemy] activated, even if that wasn’t the case I would still find it really hard to suspect him.

From my sling bag I take out a silver ring, which I immediately press against his body while chanting the command phrase.

“Detoxify all poison in this person.”

“O..... oh?”

Medical Ring is a magic item that can be used 3 times a day to cast a Cleric spell, such as Heal or Detoxify. The color in Braus’ face returns to normal within a few moments.

The secretary who had been petrified makes his way over with tottering steps and helps to support Braus.

“Council Chairman! A-, are you alright?!”

“A, Ahh..... It’s like it was a lie. Margils-dono, are you also a Priest?”

“I’m sorry, but no. It’s due to a magic item that I just happened to have had on me.”

“What a wonderful item it is.....”

While wiping his mouth, it seems that Braus has finally caught his breath. With a start, he roars at his secretary.

“What are you loitering around for?! Margils-dono and I were almost killed with poison by someone! Seize that maid from just now! Without fail!”

“Y-..... Yes, sir!”

The secretary flies out of the parlor in a fluster. Guards and nearby people being bombarded with rapid instructions can be heard through the door.

“..... Well, what’s most important is that we’re both fine.”

“I am truly very sorry! I promise you, the criminal will definitely be caught! I beg of you, please calm your anger!”

Council Chairman Braus is apologizing profusely while in dogeza.

It appears that he is seriously worried about me being angry and dropping a meteor on the city of Lelis. Of course, he still knows almost nothing about me, so I can’t blame him for being apprehensive.

Braus had been courteous yet fully composed the entire time, but now he’s thrown aside all appearances and is pressing his forehead against the floor. At this sight, besides the discomfort of having someone grovel to me, I feel enormous respect for this man.



Pacifying Braus, who staunchly refused to lift his head, took quite a bit of effort.

Only after I’ve convinced him that I’m not suspecting him and that I have no intention of rampaging through Lelis does he get back up, looking relieved.

Finally we can get to discussing what to do from here on.

Firstly, about the maid. The guards on duty at the Council Hall searched high and low, but naturally found neither shape nor trace of her. Instead, they found the real maid locked up in a storage room. Apparently, the criminal had attacked her as she was on her way to the parlor while carrying the tea, then took her place. The escape route seems to have really been the window, but no one saw anything. However, the maid uniform used by the criminal was found abandoned in an alley beside the Council Hall.

Being able to pull this off in broad daylight when there are not only guards but also government staff and ordinary citizens coming and going throughout the Council Hall means that it was no common criminal.

..... Wait, before even that, [Detect Enemy] didn’t react to her. What does this

mean?

“Is she supposed to be \*\*ko-chan?”

The heroine of a certain national anime about a thief comes to mind as I mutter to myself.

“I have already ordered all available guards inside the city to set up checkpoints at all city and inner gates. We shall capture this criminal for sure.”

“Ahh, that’s..... Yes, please.”

“If it was just me, that would be one thing, but to target Margils-dono’s life is absolutely unforgivable.”

“..... Council Chairman-dono, you believe that the target was my life?”

“..... Indeed I do..... Actually, I’m not so sure.”

Braus shakes his head.

The fact that he and I are meeting is a fact that could easily be found out after a little digging into either a Council member or the Council Hall. Furthermore, hiring such a skilled assassin must mean that the employer thought it possible to assassinate the both of us together. However, I can’t see a motive in going after the both of us.

“Thinking about it simply, it must be someone looking to sour the relationship between Margils-dono and myself.”

“I see. The best outcome would be for both of us to die. But if one side survives, or even if both sides survive, enmity would remain.”

“Exactly.”

“Do you have any idea who would plot something like this?”

“If the target was only me, then I have a few..... However, I’m afraid I do not have enough of a basis to divulge their names to Margils-dono at the moment.”

“Fumuu.....”

Previously, I’d heard from Irudo about the power struggles between the merchants faction and nobles faction. To be honest, if this is merely another part of those power struggles, I don’t want to get involved. However, purposely

setting this up in a place where I would be present means there is a real possibility it was my life being targeted. But more importantly, if Mora and Irudo really got dragged into this..... any amount of regret would never suffice.

If the criminal..... the fake maid is still somewhere near, I would very much like to find her employer. But unfortunately, most of the spells that I'd charged for today are movement and defense types, and I don't have much that can be used for investigating.

Which means that there is no other option than to have Council Chairman Braus try his best for now.

"The investigating, I will leave to you. If you find out anything, please tell me immediately."

"Understood. I will definitely do so."

Right now, I see what appears to be a slight flinch in Braus' eyes.

..... I see, perhaps even I've begun exuding a slight bit of authority.

"Apologies, but I will take my leave here."

"Very well..... About today, once again, I am truly very sorry."

Braus looks like he wants to talk more, but it's about time I make my own move. Though it's just a precautionary one as a just in case.

"..... Oh, and for the sake of investigating—I'm serious, it's for investigative purposes!—may I take with me that maid uniform that was retrieved?"

"....."

Braus wordlessly packs the maid uniform into a box, then hands it over. His expression does not even twitch once.

This guy is a real pro.



After leaving the Council Hall, I get into the carriage that had been prepared and chant two spells.

They are [Fly] and [Move Outer Plane]. I give the coachman a shout from inside the carriage, then transfer my body to the Astral plane.

(T/N: I've decided to take you guys' suggestion and call it the Astral plane instead of just 'the alternate dimension,' at least until the author says something that would make this difficult. So, is 'Astral' supposed to have a capitalized 'a' or not?)

Flying within the Astral plane makes travel ridiculously fast.

My destination is the Magician Guild.

After all, when I try to think of someone who might wish me dead at this point in time, the only possible candidate who comes to mind is the person who was lit up nice and bright by [Detect Enemy], Magician Guild Branch Leader Heldol.



There might be some sort of 'magical' barrier surrounding the Magician Guild, but such a thing cannot stop me in the Astral plane.

I manage to find the Branch Leader's office while avoiding all detection. Without delay, I pass through the door.

Instead of his usual open smile, Heldol is currently scowling while going through some documents.

This time, I am foregoing all etiquette. I transfer back out of the Astral plane right in front of him.

"Heldol-dono, excuse me."

"uUoh!"

Heldol is of course shocked, but immediately shoots up from his chair and takes a stance with his staff. As expected of the top of a Magician Guild branch.

"M-Margils!..... -dono?! How did you..... never mind that. What is the meaning of this?!"

"Truly sorry for the intrusion. As a matter of fact, I was almost killed by poisoned just now."

"? What are you saying?!"

I grasp a certain magic item within the hem of my cloak as I turn my gaze straight towards him.

[Detect Enemy] is working as it's supposed to, so I can see the light of his hostility. That ominous glow suits the expression of anger on his face very well.

“Did you not know? Well, I was worried that this villainous fellow who tried to assassinate me might lay his hands on the Magician Guild that I have such a close relationship with.”

“How would I know! What are you on about?!”

«This guy, what is he saying? Is he here just to bother me?!»

It appears that he is unable to resist the effect of the magic item ‘ESP Medal’ that I have in my hand. His surface consciousness is being converted into words and transmitted directly to my brain.

So he really doesn't know anything about it. Guess I did him a bad turn.

“..... Is that so. I apologize for having bothered you. Hmm..... in that case, would you happen to know of anyone who despises me?”

“..... Margils-dono is the hero with great victories against the anki. I can't think of anyone who would despise you.....”

«I do! My magic soldier project! You disrupted my dream of becoming the leader of the human forces in the war against anki! What are you going to do about it if the magic soldiers and trainees end up on the streets because of you bastard!»

“I see. So that's what it was.....”

The follow-up question that I asked as an aside unexpectedly gave me the explanation for his hostility.

As someone who hasn't spoken of ‘dreams’ since decades ago, I feel a certain reluctance against answering the hatred of this person, who must have devoted so much time and effort towards his ‘dream,’ with simple eye-for-an-eye hatred and just cutting and throwing him aside.

At any rate, the sense of guilt from reading someone else's heart is immense, as I'd feared. Let's try our utmost to play this hand as little as possible.

“I'm sorry, but may I have you calmly think about it one more time? When it comes to the city of Lelis, you are far more knowledgeable than me. If it was

just me, then it would be something else, but I wish to avoid having the people around me falling to harm.”

“..... Muu.”

Heldol lets out a long sigh, then begins to wrack his brain while rubbing his chin.

“Rumors of you have reached every nook and cranny in Lelis. Even if only 1 in 10 of those are true, I really doubt that anyone would even think of messing with you. This leaves us with those stubborn people who refuse to believe your power, or .....”

His shapely eyebrows twitch.

“You defeated anki..... in other words, those who would despise you..... [Demonist].....”

«Do they actually exist? Here, in Lelis? .....How frightening. They’re going to kill me too.....»

The fear that Heldol feels to the very bottom of his heart reaches me through the ESP Medal, throwing me into a gloom.

# Chapter 41: Demonists

Demonists are, as their name implies, religious fanatics who worship the anki.

(T/N: For those who forgot, 'anki' literally means 'shadow demon.' Thus, 'Demonist.' I was just too lazy to type out shadow demon every time.)

The information that I heard from Heldol, whose face was twitching during the telling, is as follows.

Firstly, they are an organization of fanatics who perceive the destruction of the world by anki as salvation. They go underground to conduct rituals where they offer sacrifices to the anki or undertake training to 'become closer to the anki.' Since after the first Bleed 500 years ago, their numbers have been suppressed many times, but never completely wiped out. To this day, there are still active cells underneath various countries. Their members include anyone from slum dwellers to nobles and even priests.

"..... or so goes the rumors. I've heard of them being very active in Shulendal and Feldi, but..... Demonists in Lelis....."

The last line sounded more like a question to himself.

As a magician, he belongs to the Subjugation Faction, who claim that magic is a tool for destroying anki. That puts him at complete odds with any Demonists that might or might not be out there.

"If such people are really in this city....."

"You would be a blatant target for their hate. Far more than even I would."

He has this really complicated look on his face while vocalizing this conclusion.

The position that he'd wanted to shoulder was snatched by me, who'd suddenly appeared out of nowhere. I do feel slightly sorry about it, but.....

"I gave you my thanks for the information, Heldol-dono. I swear that I will

never again visit such disrespect against you.”

“A-, Ahh. That would be greatly welcome.”

Talking things over with this young man who is overflowing with dreams and aspirations (or so it appears to me) will have to be postponed to the next opportunity.

If these Demonists who have gone beyond the reach of reason are truly here, then they might be a problem that the Great Wizard should resolve. Furthermore, it would also mean that the ‘one in a million’ chance of Irudo and Mora and other people I know being targeted has jumped up to ‘one in a thousand’ or maybe even ‘one in a hundred.’

I don’t have time to be dawdling here like this.



After paying the bare minimum of farewell greetings, I leave the Magician Guild.

In novels and games, heroines and collaborators get kidnapped or killed when they leave the protagonist’s eyes for just a moment. If I am just needlessly exacerbating my own sense of impending danger, then it’s fine—if it turns out this way, then let’s just say I’m excessively self-conscious or I have a gamer’s brain—but I am now very worried for Mora and Irudo.



“.....?”

I have now arrived back at Irudo’s mansion after travelling almost in a straight line through the Astral plane.

The second and third floors of Irudo’s mansion are residential, while the first floor is an administrative office for managing his caravans.

Commerce Avenue is, true to its name, a bustling place with shops lined side by side throughout its entire length, and thus isn’t a dangerous place..... or so I’d thought.

A prickly atmosphere currently permeates the air in the avenue. The pedestrian traffic is thin, and Irudo’s mansion is especially quiet. Time and

again, passersby shoot uneasy glances towards it. There is unnatural damage in the wall and a few windows.

Don't tell me.

“MORA! IRUDO!”

While rushing into the mansion while almost being crushed by an ominous sense of foreboding.....

“Gio-saaan!”

“Mora!”

Mora rushes towards me with a full power tackle..... I meant, hug. When I reflexively hug her back, I feel her small body trembling.

“Are you unharmed?! What about Irudo?”

“Margils-sama!”

Irudo appears in front of me in perfectly good health. Wh-, what a relief.....



Apparently things did not develop into the worst case scenario.

We are in the living room, reporting what had happened to each of us.

“Actually.....”

While I was off having my meeting with the Council Chairman, there were some intruders who tried to kidnap Mora.

The burglars were a 3-woman group who managed to infiltrate the mansion without anyone noticing and knock Mora out. Mora was about to be taken just like that, but one of the burglars was rendered immobile by ‘an invisible entity.’

That burglar raised a shout, which caused Irudo and the servants to realize what was going on. They all rushed towards Mora, which prompted the remaining 2 burglars to use Mora as a hostage. However, when they saw the genie that Irudo summoned out of nowhere, they lost their will to fight and fled.

The damage that I saw from outside the mansion was all caused by the genie.



“I see..... In any case, I’m glad that Mora is safe and uninjured.....”

It seems that the [Invisible Demon] that I used beforehand did its job properly. Irudo also managed to use his Genie’s Ring well. I breath out a huge sigh and relax all my tensed-up muscles.

“Gio-san was the one who protected me, right? Th-, thank you very much!”

“To think that you have saved my daughter once again.....”

Mora, who is sitting next to me on the sofa with her body glued to mine, looks up at me with teary eyes. Irudo also deeply lowers his head in thanks.

However.....

“..... However, I bear responsibility for things having become like this.”

Considering that the burglars’ target was Mora, then I believe it safe to conclude that I am the target of whoever orchestrated everything that happened, and that this is not related to the Council’s inner power struggles. I do not know for sure if they are Demonists or not. When I conveyed what I’d heard from the Branch Leader to Irudo and Mora, it turns out that they also know of the rumors.

““There are Demonists conducting sacrificial rituals underground’..... this is a rumor frequently passed around at least the citizens, if not the Magician Guild. But more importantly.....”

“It’s not Gio-san’s fault at all! Those people are the ones in the wrong!”

“It is exactly as my daughter says. Margil-sama, please do not take it upon yourself.”

While patting Mora’s head as she gives me a tight hug, I absentmindedly let my thoughts roam.

I get it now. So this is what it means to be a Great Wizard, a hero.

Whether I like it or not, my very presence greatly affects the people around me. The reason why great wizards in stories isolated themselves in towers might have been because they hated this.

In actuality, could I, by myself, really protect these two, as well as all humanity, from anki?

..... That's not right.

"I am sorry..... Actually, thank you, you two. I won't let anyone lay even one more finger on either you two or the servants in this mansion."

If it is a given that the hero's nakama have to get hurt regardless of his will, I will gladly kick such logic to the curb.

The burglar who was caught by the Invisible Demon was tied up and locked away, but had apparently escaped soon afterwards. Well, if she's a nakama of that fake maid, then I'm not surprised.

It's indeed painful that I didn't charge investigative spells like [Sense of Adept] and [Psychometry] today. Tomorrow, let's make sure to change my loadout with focus on investigation, defense, and pursuit. As for fighting, my Wizardry Staff and various magic items would have to make do.

And one more thing.

I've just thought of a City Adventure conquest method that neither a Japanese salaryman nor a TRPG character can do—it is a hand that only the Great Wizard Gio Margils can play.

"There is a place I want someone to guide me to."

"Yes? Where would that be?"

From my sling bag, I take out a leather bag almost bursting with gold coins and precious jewels.

"The Adventurer Guild."

# Chapter 42: Adventurer Guild

Next morning.

After waking up and changing out the spells that I have charged, I immediately use one of them: [Psychometry]. It is a spell that enables the caster to read the past of objects and places—it is also a spell to make your GM cry.

My target is of course the maid uniform left behind by that fake maid.

Looking deep in contemplation while holding the uniform cuts a rather problematic figure, but I don't have the time to worry about that.

Projected directly into my consciousness is the figure of a girl who is right in the middle of putting the uniform on.

It seems that conveniently, I am being shown the scene of the imposter changing. The other girl lying unconscious on the floor is most likely the real maid employed at the Council Hall.

When I concentrate on the girl who is changing, her figure gradually grows clearer.

Her style is rather good..... no, it's quite something. The color of her skin is a dark tan that borders on black. Long, purple hair, and golden pupils. Slightly plump lips the same color as her hair. Hmm..... among all the females that I've met so far, her appearance shouts 'fantasy!' the loudest.

Furthermore, what surprises me is that the top part of her ears is long and pointed. Whichever way I think about it, she is an elf. And a dark elf at that.

I've heard from Sedam before that elves and dark elves exist in this world. True to the cliches, dark elves are abhorred as an 'evil species.' Depending on the region, they might even be treated as 'phantom demons,' a subspecies of anki. They are almost never seen around Lius Lake, but.....

As I was in the middle of my recollection, the elf has finished putting on the

maid uniform and is now drawing some complicated-looking symbols in midair with a finger. It must be magic of some sort, as the symbol suddenly starts shining. After the light fades, the person wearing the uniform now looks like the chestnut-colored hair maid.

“I see. So the female assassin was a dark elf. How cliché.”

I cut the effects of [Psychometry], break my contemplative pose, and massage the area between my eyebrows.

At that moment.

“Exactly what is it that you see from holding something like that so tightly, Gio-san?”

In front of my eyes, there stands Mora, who is glowering at me with moist eyes. Her mouth is firmly in a ^ shape. The maid uniform in my grasp is also getting very pointed glares.

I could have done without this cliché, seriously.....



After breakfast.

Irudo, Mora, and I are in a carriage heading towards the Adventurer Guild.

Security at the mansion has been locked down iron-tight with items and spells, but Irudo cannot be in this state of being open but conducting no business for an indefinite amount of time, considering how he has 5 caravans under his management.

This situation must be remedied with utmost haste.

“Now, to confirm once again what I know about the Adventurer Guild.....”

As I'd heard yesterday, the Adventurer Guild in Sedia is quite different from the ones imagined in light novels and games nowadays.

The basics of accepting and resolving requests from troubled persons or groups, exploring dungeons, and subjugating monsters is the same.

However, it is not a free organization where someone can show up out of the blue and just register, and taking on requests is not a simple matter of tearing a

poster off a board and bringing it to the counter.

The ranks in the Adventurer Guild are as follows: Guildmaster, Adviser, Leader, Member, and Trainee.

Members and a Leader forming a 'party' together is as expected, but the Leader and Members are not on equal footing. Their relationship is akin to that of a craftsman and apprentices, and the Leader holds all authority when it comes to decisions regarding jobs. The Leader is tasked with educating his/her members, which includes teaching them the knowledge and skills necessary for becoming an adventurer. However, when it comes to class-specific skills that the Leader cannot teach, such as a Warrior's fighting techniques or a Scout's covert techniques, it is the Adviser's job to provide guidance.

The Guildmaster oversees all requests, and possesses the authority to decide which request goes to which Leader. As for dungeon exploration and non-request monster subjugation, Party Leaders have to proactively dig up the relevant information on their own, then bring it to their Guildmaster and gain approval beforehand.

In short, the Adventurer Guild's structure is the exact same as the Carpenter Guild's or Leather Craftsmen Guild's or other such guilds.



"Well then, this seems as good a place to get out as any."

"H-, hai!"

"Understood."

After making a certain amount of progress on the large avenues via carriage, I speak up according to what we'd agreed on beforehand.

We do not know if there are any, but this is a ploy to confuse any surveilling parties by using [Move Outer Plane] for the latter part of our trip to the Adventurer Guild. The coachman has already been instructed to randomly roam the streets for a few hours.



It would have been a problem if it wasn't so, but we did end up finding the

Adventurer Guild quite easily.

We've already sent a messenger ahead of us outlining our business, so we were courteously guided to a parlor by an old man.

Already gathered in that room are ten Party Leaders, with Sedam included.

"Welcome, Wizard Margils-dono. Once again, my name is Lect, and I am the Guildmaster. Those present here are the Leaders who head the most excellent parties in my Guild."

"....."

Having cast [Sense of Adept] on my own eyes beforehand, I now look at the Guildmaster and Party Leaders in turn.

In my view, the words [Human *Male* 65 Years Old / Level 8 Thief] are floating above the old man's head. [Sense of Adept] is a spell that enables me to see other people's status information.

However, the Thief part is strangely quivering. According to D&B rules, the only existent professions are Warrior, Cleric, Thief, Wizard, and Commoner. Thus, I surmise that the quivering must be an indication that 'if his profession in this world is to be forcefully classified under one of the basic professions, then he would be a Thief.'

Furthermore, the concept of levels do not exist in Sedia, so the numbers I see are merely 'if this person's strength is to be measured by D&B standards.'

Sedam's level 9 is the highest out of what I've seen so far, but there are several people here who could be a match for him.

Just like the other mind-reading skills like [Detect Enemy] and [Telepathy], I feel significant resistance about using this spell, as it disregards the privacy of other people's personal information, but this time will have to be one of those rare exceptions.

"I am the wizard Gio Margils. Today, I have come here with great expectations of you experienced adventurers. The task will be a difficult one, which is why I am here to borrow your strength."

"Hey, hey, you're that guy, right? The one who can call down a meteor like

dobaa~, right? Can't you show us a bit?"

Before the Guildmaster could say anything, a young man speaks up in a frivolous voice.

Even I've already noticed this person who has his long legs on the table and is fiddling with a knife. He sure does come on straight.

By the way, according to [Sense of Adept], his information is [Human *Male* 23 Years Old / Level 6 Thief]. His level is a bit on the low end among the adventurers gathered here.

"Shaup! Will you stop!"

"You're being disrespectful!"

Rebukes fly from several other adventurers, but the man called Shaup acts like it's no concern of his.

Irudo and Mora are about to stand up, but I swing my staff to stop them.

Well, as people who make a living in this world as adventurers, I understand them not wanting to accept the existence of an overwhelming power without witnessing it for themselves.

There are even several adventurers who, instead of censuring Shaup, nod as if in agreement with him, or are looking my way with suspicion in their eyes.

Seeing as how the Guildmaster is staying quiet, this is either orchestrated, or he is letting Shaup bear the full brunt of whatever may happen as he weighs me up.

The very fact of weighing would mean that he, too, has doubts.

When I look towards Sedam, he jerks his head in Shaup's direction and raises a single eyebrow for a fraction of a second.

Though I haven't known him long, he is a nakama with whom I've faced an anki nest together. I can at least understand that he is saying "give it to him."

"In short, you wish to see me cast a spell?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying. Don't you get it, ossan?"

"I see."

Sorry, this ossan is a bit irritated right now.

The fastest way to handle some people is to show them the difference in power from the start.

I turn towards Shaup and utter a chant.

“By means of this spell, transform him into the figure of an unsightly pig. [Transform Other].”

“Hah? What did you say? Hurry up and call a m.. m.... bu..... buu..... bubu.....”

[Transform Other] transforms someone else into an animal or monster. Although he might be someone with enough strength to be a Leader in this world, being only level 6 by D&B standards means there’s no way he could have resisted the spell.

His body shrinks squishily like a character in a doll anime until all that’s left is a piglet.

“Buh..... Buhi.....”

“Oh, I beg your pardon. I’m afraid I couldn’t really catch what you were saying. Did you want me to call something?”

“ “ “ ..... ” ” ” ”

The energetic piglet running around the parlor who used to be Shaup, and the speechless Guildmaster and adventurers.

Irudo’s and Mora’s faces are twitching.

“Guildmaster.”

“Y-, yes?”

“Would you be able to finish what Shaup-kun was trying to say earlier? Please, I only wish to grant his wish.”

“P-..... Please forgive us!”

“We are very sorry!”

“I did tell him to stop!”

“Please don’t turn me into a pig, Wizard-sama!”

Including the Guildmaster, the adventurers fall onto the floor in dogeza while apologizing profusely. The only exceptions are 3 people, one of which is Sedam.

This Guildmaster is a bit..... Isn’t he supposedly more used to the ways of the world that I am?

Sedam is openly grinning at Shaup-kun and the adventurers, but comes to his senses with a start and rearranges his posture into a decorous bow.

“I thought I had adequately conveyed the information about you to all of them, but it was clearly not the case. I, too, bear some of the responsibility. Please accept my apologies, Margils-dono.”

“We will make sure that Shaup fully atones for his transgress, so please calm your anger with this much.”

“We are truly sorry.”

The other two adventurers who did not appear unsettled even while looking at the ruin of what Shaup once was also respectfully apologize to me. Respectively, [Human *Female* 30 Years Old / Level 7 Cleric] and [Human *Male* 38 Years Old / Level 8 Warrior] show up.

When treated in such an adult manner, it makes me feel embarrassed about my quick and careless handling of the situation.

On top of which, Mora’s reproachful eyes from the side hurt quite a bit.

“He said he wanted to see wizardry, and I merely answered his request. That is all that happened—there is no anger. Worry not, I shall return him to his dashing form a while later.”

“T-, Thank you so very much.”

“Can we now move onto the discussion of my request?”

“Yes, of course. Please begin.”

There is no longer anyone left who would dare interrupt.



“..... And this is the situation that we currently find ourselves in.

Consequently, what I wish to request for is firstly, the protection of these two friends of mine and their property, and secondly, the identification of the mastermind behind these incidents.”

“..... Is the order of priority in that order?”

So asks the Guildmaster timidly. Irudo aside, Mora looks uncomfortable being the focus of attention of all the adventurers.

“Naturally.”

“However, to conduct both investigation and escort duties at the same time would be quite difficult.....”

“That’s only if we’re talking about a single party, right? I have full intention of hiring every single party led by the Leaders currently present.”

“T-, that’s..... I’m really sorry, but to hire all 10 parties represented here would incur quite the expense.....”

“Hah? Expense? Would this be enough?”

I stand up, and flip my sling bag upside down.

True to its name, this sling bag, more properly called Infinity Bag, is capable of storing literally an infinite number of items below a certain size.

A golden river starts pouring out.

As the river makes contact with the floor of the parlor, it returns to individual pieces of gold coins and white gold coins and jewels, which proceed to pile up into a rapidly growing mound.

In front of the slack-jawed faces of all the adventurers, I could not suppress my feelings of glee.

Instead of slapping their faces with stacks of bills, this is more like punching them with gold coins and jewels. And in the mounted position, no less.

“Gio-san, Gio-san!”

Beside me, Mora is desperately making the [x] sign with her fingers. It seems that she is trying to say “that’s enough.” Irudo also has a worried look on his face, and Sedam is shrugging resignedly.

“..... I’m afraid I’ve yet to count it, but I hope this much should be sufficient as compensation?”

Thanks to them, my emotions have already calmed down as the Guildmaster furiously nods his head. I am truly thankful for such reactions from them.

It is thanks to them that I can remain the person that I am.

# Chapter 43: Human Wave Tactic vs. Dark Elves

“Buhi, buhi.”

The piglet that Shaup-kun had been reborn into is energetically running around the floor of the room, which is currently also being occupied by a mound of gold coins and jewels that had come from my sling bag.

If Mora hadn't tried so desperately to stop me, that mound might have turned into a mountain or a mountain range.

When I fumble around in my bag, it feels like the 3,000,000+ coins and jewels that even I don't know the quantity of haven't gone down at all. In spite of that, the pile of treasure now in front of the adventurers' eyes is apparently worth more than 100,000 Sedian gold coins.

The amount that Irudo was supposed to have paid for Mora's rescue was 3,000 gold coins. If that is the market price for hiring a party as good as Sedam's one, then there should be change and then some even after hiring all 10 parties represented here.

“I trust this is enough? If so, then I would like everyone to immediately get started with the job.”

“I-, Indeed it is. Duly acknowledged.”

With that, all of the adventurers, Guildmaster included, do a 180 and jump right into having a serious meeting about the job.

But not before moving to a different room, of course. It was quite distracting having that much money scattered all over the floor.



As expected of pros—once the objective is clarified, the discussion proceeded

very quickly. The meeting was soon over, with the following decisions reached: the high level warrior's and cleric's parties would form the core of the escort group, and Sedam shall head the investigative group. In terms of number of parties, it is 4 towards escort, 6 towards investigation.

“I will first do some digging at the Thief Guild. I plan on bringing Shaup-kun along, so could I trouble you to return him back?”

“That spell's duration is 6 hours. Just leave him alone and he'll eventually turn back by himself.”

“Haha, that sounds good. I'll show him off to the guys in the Thief Guild too then. If I say 'If you refuse to cooperate, then you'll also be turned into a pig,' even their tongues should become a lot more loose.”

Sedam is as reliable as always. But with that flow of events, won't it make me look a bit like a bad guy?

But then again, for someone who's come to this city for a few days, trying to catch assassins or masterminds would be like trying to hold a cloud with bare hands. Allowing these professionals to employ the methods they think best would be the wise choice here.

“Which reminds me, is Claura not here?”

“Claura is a magician, after all. Magicians and clerics are handled in a slightly different way.”

It seems that because magicians and clerics possess highly specialized and effective abilities, they are allowed to hold dual membership in the Adventurer Guild and the other association related to their profession. In Claura's case, she is active as a magician more often than as an adventurer, so her participation in Sedam's party is not always a given.

“Margils-sama, just leave everything to us!”

(Cultural Note: The actual line here is 大船に乗った気でいてください, which directly translates to 'please consider yourself as having gotten onto a large boat.' When you get on a boat with someone reliable steering it, you can just sit back and you'll still get where you're going. The boat being large means it's stable, no tossing and rolling. Cool phrase, isn't it?)

“Be it dark elves or Demonists, we’re gonna catch ‘em all!” (T/N: Soz, couldn’t resist.)

Both escort and investigative parties are shouting enthusiastically as they file out of the Guild.

The investigation team’s plans are to first gather information from the Thief Guild and information brokers in the slum areas, then to go through all the underground tunnels and places that look like viable hiding places with a fine-tooth comb.

The escort team’s plan is to divide themselves up among 3 shifts to provide non-stop guarding over the mansion and Irudo and his people.

After filling out an official contract, we leave the Adventurer Guild behind us.

Because the escorts have already begun their duties, we take the carriage prepared by the Guild instead of using the Astral plane.



On the way back, we made a detour to the Council Hall so that I could check in on Council Chairman Zatou Braus.

He appeared to be in good health, but he continued to apologize profusely, so I told him to just focus on catching the criminals.

“Of course, of course. Even if we have to put Lelis’ prestige on the line, we will catch that criminal without fail.”

“The criminals are a given, but please also catch the mastermind. It would be one thing if it was just me, but now even my friends have been targeted. I wish to immediately nip any possible future regrets in the bud while I still can.”

“..... Does Margils-dono believe that the criminal who tried to poison us both is connected to the ones tried to kidnap Irudo’s daughter?”

“Council Chairman, the fact that I hold goodwill towards the citizens of this city remains unchanged. I fully understand that these incidents are the handiwork of a very small number of people. As such, I believe that we can dispense with the tatemae, don’t you agree?”

(T/N: Braus is trying to give shed doubt on the fact that the two incidents are

connected so that he won't have to handle the other one too. However, Gio-san is insinuating that this stance is mere tatemae, an official front that Braus is duty-bound to hold. By then saying that they are close enough to not need tatemae, he makes it so that Braus cannot hold onto his stance without 'toning down' (which effectively means breaking) their alliance.)

"..... Excuse me. Of course, you are correct."

Normally speaking, the Chairman of a city's ruling Council is not an opponent that someone like me can act so superior towards. But.

For the guest that he invited (and himself) to get poisoned at the meeting he called, and to even be treated by said guest—that is one colossal weak point.

Due to that, I could press him this forcefully. But, well, I need to be careful to not get cocky and up the pressure too high.

Which is why I also handed him a little bit of treasure under the pretext of 'encouragement for the soldiers.'

The city seems to have around 1,500 soldiers, but there should be enough for everyone to get a bonus.

When I looked out of the carriage on my way back to Irudo's mansion, all the guards I saw were conducting questionings and inspections with full motivation.



"Haahh..... Gio-san, don't you think you just squandered a bit too much?"

"Ugu."

So says Mora after we've returned to the mansion. As expected of a merchant's daughter—she looks like she's got a few things to say about the way I spend money.

To be honest, even I was thinking that it wasn't such a cool thing to do, so her comment was extra effective.

"Mora, Margils-sama was doing that to protect us....."

"That's, I know that. But then it makes it seem like we're just being a burden for Gio-san....."

Mora pouts in response to Irudo's rebuke, then sharply turns towards me and bows deeply.

"I'm so sorry, Gio-san, that I have caused you trouble yet again! Gio-san is a Great Wizard, but someone like me is getting in your way....."

"....."

Indeed, there's no way that a serious girl like Mora wouldn't fret at seeing me throw money around like water.

From my perspective, however, my wealth was merely another number written down in some corner of Gio's character sheet, so I've unconsciously gotten indifferent to it.

"Mora, I'm sorry for having made you feel that way."

I kneel in front of Mora to bring our eyes to the same height.

"You call yourself a burden, but that is not true. By calling me 'Gio-san' instead of 'Great Wizard-sama'—by relating to me as a human—it saves me from losing my human heart. If you're cheering and applauding after having seen what I did today—it gives me chills even thinking about it."

"Gio-san....."

"Which is why I will never even hesitate to spend any amount of money if it's for your or Irudo's sake. I have arbitrarily begun to think of you two as 'family' after all."

"Margils-sama....."

"Gio-saaan~"

When I was a salaryman in Japan, there was absolutely no way that I could have uttered such embarrassing lines, even if they were how I truly felt.

But this place is a world where people slightly simpler than those in modern Japan live, and I am wearing the mask of a Great Wizard. I hope I can be forgiven for this much.



I realized that I can't really conduct my own investigations because firstly, I

would be distracted with worry if I had to be outside the mansion for an extended period of time; secondly, I know nothing about the locality; and thirdly, I don't have the personal connections to do this kind of thing.

Aside from the few times I accompanied Irudo outside on unavoidable business, I was basically holed up inside the mansion for the next 3 days.

In that time, various happenings like three assaults on the mansion by bandits employed by the dark elves and the discovery of an unknown underground passage took place. However, due to the adventurers enthusiastically taking care of everything, there was no screen time for me.

There was one more thing that happened that I did not know about.

The dark elves tried to abduct Claura. Now that I think about it, I guess she falls into the category of 'people close to me.'

However, in my mind, she is 'a reliable nakama' and not 'a protection target,' so she'd completely slipped my mind.

The investigative group caught onto the dark elves' movements at the last possible second and managed to protect her, so it did not turn into a big deal. When I heard about it all later, I shed almost enough cold sweat to drown in.

And of course, Claura gave me waaaay more than an earful.

I suggested assigning one of the adventurer parties to be her escort, but she said "How can I let you do such an inefficient thing!" and so now she is also staying at Irudo's mansion.



And then, on the fourth day.

The adventurers' and city guards' great efforts finally bore fruit.

The exploration of the underground passage turned up the dark elves' hiding place, and 1 of the 4 dark elves was successfully captured.

"..... This is....."

Looking down on the dark elf that the adventurers had brought in, I inadvertently blurt out what I am thinking.

“Why is there so much skin exposure?”

# Chapter 44: Head of Assassins

(3<sup>rd</sup> Person)

(Author's Note: I have begun to feel the limits of expression in 1<sup>st</sup> person, so there will be 3<sup>rd</sup> person chapters like this every once in a while from here on.)

In dark elf society, each clan specializes in a certain profession, and the perfection of one's skill in their clan's profession is what all dark elves strive towards.

Leihanaluka Heikreuz Ruu.

50 years ago.

She was born to the Heikreuz clan. Seeing her light purple hair (which is rare even among dark elves), her mother gave her the name Leihanaluka, which means 'alluring shadow.'

Dark elves have names for each social position, such as Rou [Clan Chief] or Bou [Bow Craftsman], and these titles are added to everyone's names as titles.

The techniques for assassination and espionage that she had carved into her body finally earned her the title of Ruu [Head of Assassins] 30 years ago. Due to that, she was granted 5 subordinates, together with whom she served various masters while living in the world of schemes and plots that is Sedia's underworld.

She herself has high skills worthy to boast of, but after letting a subordinate die due to an oversight on her part, she also sharpened the leadership and discernment that she needed as a Ruu. However, the vacant stare of the subordinate that had died within her arms forever remained in her heart, like a needle that had become stuck inside.



25 years ago.

Right after her clan relocated their base of operations from Reindal to Shulendal, the Master they met completely distorted her and her clan's fate.

She doesn't even remember exactly who this Master is. To be more specific, all of her memories after the moment she gazed into those repulsive golden pupils is just a white mist.

Her soul, if it could be called that, was locked in the back of her consciousness after meeting Master.

Her own body had been turned into constraints of flesh that imprison her soul.

Her arms, her legs, her neck, and even her waist—the entirety of her body is now under the full control of a puppeteer right behind her. If the skin of dark elves is a dark tan color, then the color of her puppeteer and his bonds are pitch black.

Master handed down orders that even she, a member of the Heikreuz clan, found repulsive. Stripped of the ability to resist, she had no other choice but to fulfil them, her body moving like a doll on strings.



10 years ago.

Under orders from Master, she was deployed to the Demonists in the city of Lelis. By this time, she had already grown used to the hatred and strength conveyed through the flesh constraints crawling under her skin.

It's fine to not think about anything.

If she simply gives in to the absolute powers that binds and manipulates her, she will neither be hurt nor have to worry about anything. Then it will eventually be over.....



Several days ago.

Still controlled as usual, she vaguely felt herself being used to carry out an assassination.

It was supposed to be another monotonous job, but for some reason the puppeteer behind her seemed greatly agitated.

It seemed that somehow, the job had been a failure.

Mad with rage, the puppeteer tightened her restraints, digging into her soul. She screamed and wept.

The puppeteer then used her to carry out various plots with a never before felt desperation. Her four subordinates, who are all in the same situation, did everything in their power too, but all of these plots also ended up as complete failures.

On top of that, the five of them, who were supposed to be even more inconspicuous than shadows, felt themselves slowly hemmed in and driven into a corner.

It was as if the entire city had turned into their enemy.



1 hour ago.

They were ambushed in the underground refuge where they were lying hidden.

The forces that stormed in were adventurers of various professions and wearing various equipment. The dark elves had plenty of experience trifling with mere adventurers.

The only things different this time were the adventurers' numbers and morale.

While soldiers blocked off the the escape tunnels with numbers as numerous as mice, the adventurers came after them with glittering eyes.

At that time, for the first time ever, she felt the puppeteer behind her exuding fear.

The restraints digging into her soul loosened just the tiniest bit. However, instead of feeling joy at the weakening of the power that had so completely held her down and controlled her, she felt unease. That's how much she'd grown to depend on her bonds of hatred and power.

At that moment, a cold, sharp pain assaulted her. It was due to the needle that was the gaze of her long-dead subordinate.

The pain freed her soul for a mere moment.

For the first time in 25 years, she fought under her own will. She managed to occupy the adventurers and soldiers long enough for her 4 subordinates to escape, then was captured.



Now.

Inside the deepest parts of her consciousness, a colorless and shapeless Power is trampling over everything.

The puppeteer that had full control to the very tips of her fingers received the Power head on, then let out a high-pitched scream as if it was a real body.

The fetters that had reigned so absolutely over her were burned as if by hellfire, crumbling to pieces like mere waste paper.

The shackles on her soul literally fell off, one by one, until there was none left.

What a wretched release from the bindings that, though tight, had been so reassuring!

With her support gone, terror rushes into her as if to fill the now-empty hole in her heart.

“NOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!!”

She screams and cries, like a baby.

The puppeteer that had clung to her so desperately is now mere dust, blown away into the wind. There is no longer anything left inside her.

Only—madness.

Having forgotten even her own shape, she was about to let go of her fading self. But at that instant, a tremendous pressure envelopes her.

It is the Power that had burned away that puppeteer.

The Power roars into her hands, her feet, her neck, her waist, and everywhere

else. Everywhere the Power goes, it reminds her of that part of herself, until she completely recalls her Self.

She has been reborn.

“AAAAHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

Raising her voice in immense joy, the girl returns from doll to dark elf.

All while feeling herself being changed from Ruu [Head of Assassins] into Shi [One who Serves].

# Chapter 45: Lord of Wanderers

It was three of the parties in the investigative group under Sedam's command that managed to catch the dark elf.

It's been a while since I last saw the members of Sedam's party: the warrior priest Torad, the scout Fijika, and the warriors Ted and Jilk.

They did a commendable job.

With the full support of the Thief Guild and city guards, they had set up an encircling net that could literally have caught any criminal. On top of that, they even proactively investigated.

In the end, after identifying the dark elves' hiding place as a certain abandoned underground cemetery, a general force of around 200 people composed of adventurers, thieves, and city guards was mobilized in the capture operation.

As expected, there were indeed 5 dark elves taking refuge there, but due to one of them interfering with terrifying fighting skills and magic, only that one dark elf was captured.

Letting 4 out of 5 get away even after mobilizing 200 people sounds bad, but judging from Sedam's and the adventurers' expressions, most of them seem quite satisfied with this result.

That is a testament to how highly a dark elf's skill in espionage and assassination is valued in this world. Or feared, it could also be said.



The female dark elf who was brought to a room in the Adventurer Guild is still marred by wounds that bear witness to the fierce battle that had led to her capture. Both of her hands and feet are tightly tied up with restraints, and even her mouth is gagged.

From time to time, a small moan escapes her lips, but she does not seem to have regained consciousness yet.

I recognize her light purple hair and chiselled facial features. There is no doubt that she is the dark elf who I identified with [Psychometry] as the one who tried to poison me.

But all that aside.....

“Why is there so much skin exposure?”

She is wearing a tight outfit suitable for thieves and assassins, but the exposure at her back and about her thighs and chest area is way too bold.

If I have to put this into the perspective of modern Japan, it's not quite to the degree where it would be described as “excessive exposure” when compared to light novels, but for this world where women generally do not show much skin in front of other people.....

“Where. Are. You. Looking. At?”

“Ow ow ow ow!”

Claura, who is standing behind me, smiles while pulling on my earlobe.

Not good, not good.

In Japan, there was even a case where a man was accused of sexual harassment just for pointing out to a female colleague that her nametag was crooked.

In the first place, this person is a criminal who fed the Council Chairman and me poison and tried to kidnap Mora. It is no time to be distracted by her appearance.



“Should we slap her awake and immediately begin questioning her, Margils-sama?”

So asks Shaup-kun with a broad grin. Oh right, he's managed to safely reincarnate back into a human. However, the lowness of his waist is definitely

not inferior to Jilk's and the others'.

"The opponent is a dark elf. There's no way questioning would work."

"So, torture then?"

"That's an option."

The people currently in this room (aside from Claura) are the party leaders. From their expressions, I understand that the existence of dark elves are indeed quite hated. I also fully understand that there is no such concept in this world as treating prisoners well.

But be that as it may.

Having been born in modern Japan, I cannot allow torture on my watch, be the opponent an ossan or a criminal.

"I shall be the one to talk to her. Apologies, but can everyone aside from Sedam..... everyone aside from Sedam and Claura please step outside?"



All the adventurers file out, leaving behind myself, Sedam, and a Claura who is staring razor sharp daggers. The silence in the room is only interrupted by the seductive sound of the dark elf breathing through her gag.

I ask Sedam to prop her torso up and remove her gag.

"..... Are you alright?" (Gio)

".....~....." (Leiha)

As I kneel and gently shake her shoulder, the dark elf slowly raises her face.

"....." (Leiha)

"I am the wizard Gio Margils. Do your wounds hurt?" (Gio)

"....." (Leiha)

She sluggishly shakes her head without saying anything. I peer into her golden pupils, but see no sign of any will inside.

If this was anime or manga, I would have already concluded "this woman is clearly brainwashed!" on the spot.

But honestly speaking, if I consider that her consciousness is being controlled through some means, then it might explain why [Detect Enemy] did not react even when she was trying to poison me.

“What is your name?” (Gio)

“..... Leihanaluka Heikreuz Ruu.....” (Leiha)

“Lei..... what?” (Gio)

“I believe the first is her personal name, the middle is her clan name, and the last is her professional title.” (Sedam)

“You would know.” (Claura)

Somewhere along the way, it's become a routine for Claura to give Sedam a jab whenever he shows off his extensive knowledge.

“Soo, um, Leihanaluka? Do you understand the words that I am saying?” (Gio)

“.....I ..... do not understand.....” (Leiha)

“This person, has she been drugged.....?” (Claura)

“That is a possibility.” (Sedam)

It seems that both Sedam and Claura can also feel that her state is not normal. Despite being able to hear our conversation, her eyes still look vacant.

“Are there magic spells for manipulating someone's mind? Or perhaps, medication or hypnotism.....” (Gio)

“Such a detestable magic is what I'd expect to be in a dark elf's repertoire. However, I don't see any magic currently affecting her.” (Claura)

“The possibility of medication remains. But that time when she was fighting to help her nakama escape, she did not look under the influence of anything.....” (Sedam)

So, it's not magic.

Is it really medication then? But even when I use the Medical Ring to detoxify all poison and cure all diseases, there is no change.

Furthermore, when I try to read her mind with the ESP Medal, all I get is a

thick, heavy fog.

We might have to just conclude that this is either a magic that Claura has never seen before, or that this is hypnotism.

But then again, there is always the possibility that this is all an act.

“How about entrusting her to the Temple and letting them slowly heal her? Or perhaps some torture first?” (Sedam)

“We can’t exactly wait that long, right? Torture is out of the question, but as things currently stand, her remaining allies and employer could already be making plans to flee the city.” (Claura)

She is entirely right.

Worse case scenario, I might have to cast [Greater Mind Control] to overwrite whatever she has in place. Even if this is all an act, it wouldn’t matter.

But before going that far, let’s try just one more spell, even though I doubt it would do anything.

“By means of this spell, may all evil affecting this person’s mind be purified. [Curse Break].” (Gio)

This is a spell that thoroughly erases any and all curses and evil spirits.

A soft, white light emanates from the palm of my hand and shines on the dark elf’s erotic face and body.

After the experience at the Magician Guild, I am convinced that this world’s magic and my wizardry draw from completely different sources. Consequently, I really don’t think spells like [Dispel Magic] or [Curse Break] would be of any help. But.....

“Ah.” (Leiha)

The dark elf, whose back is still being supported by Sedam, begins to shiver and gasp.

“NOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!!” (Leiha)

With her face scrunched up, her body wriggles around with her tongue sticking out stiffly.

“Oi, what did you do?” (Sedam)

“Wait, you.....?!” (Claura)

“Wh-, what’s wrong..... uoh!?” (Gio)

As I try to peer into her face to ascertain her obviously unnatural state, her tanned body jerks upward, then falls against mine.

Caught off balance by the sudden weight, I fall flat on my butt, but manage to hold her up with both hands.

“AAAAHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” (Leiha)

In accompaniment with her shriek, a strange black ‘mist’ exudes from every part of her body, then seems to burn up and disappear.

Most likely, [Curse Break] really did take effect, and something has just been purified from her.

While I am thinking such things dazedly, the dark elf in my arms lifts her face.

“I, I..... Ahh, I was.....” (Leiha)

“Are you alright? Do you feel strange anywhere?” (Gio)

Her pupils, which were previously golden, are now a transparent purple. That’s probably an indication that her previous state, be it brainwashing or possession or hypnotism, must have been lifted.

Her bewitching features looking like she’s waking up from a bewildering dream is extremely erotic.

If this was acting, then it is really, really good. But I haven’t lived so many years for nothing. I have had to sit through many a sexual harassment seminar.

Which is why my eyes are firmly fixed on her own, without straying anywhere else. The places where I am touching to support her are also all safe zones.

“..... Are you, the master, of that Power..... the Power that destroyed..... the, demon, inside me?”

“Indeed, I believe so.”

“Is, that so. If that is the case, in that case, I..... I am no longer Ruu [Head of

Assassins].....”

“..... What does that mean?”

“From this moment on, I am Leihanaluka Heikreuz Shi. I will be [One Who Serves]..... and you will be my Master, Oluri [Lord of Wanderers].”

# Chapter 46: One Who Serves

“From this moment on, I am Leihanaluka Heikreuz Shi. I will be [One Who Serves]..... and you will be my Master, Oluri [Lord of Wanderers].” (Leiha)

Nn?

The fact that [Curse Break] was effective means that she was under the influence of a brainwashing or curse wizardry.

I say wizardry also because of the fact that Claura couldn't detect it, which ruled it out as a magic of this world. Of course, I'm not 100% certain of this inference, but that makes me all the more curious about the origin of this 'curse.'

Either way, with the curse lifted, this dark elf is supposed to have returned to her senses.

“Though under a demon's control, I fully remember my offenses against you. Such transgressions cannot be forgiven even after a thousand sword cuts. I beg of you, please punish me until your rage subsides.” (Leiha)

She gets down on both knees and lowers her head so low that her voluptuous breasts touch her hands.

I've seen it a few times in this world already, but this position has the nuance of 'falling prostrate' even back in Japan. Furthermore, in those light purple eyes that look up at me time and again, I see a strong enough light of attachment and dependence that gives me the shivers. Directing these feelings so directly at me seems even more unnatural than her emotionless state before.

More like, weren't all four of her limbs tied up? She's already shrugged out of them like they didn't even exist.

“What does that mean??” (Gio)

This situation is clearly much weightier than the time Claura expressed her

respect for me.

At a complete loss, I mutter to no one in particular.

“If I remember right, Oluri [Lord of Wanderers] is a ruler from dark elf legends whose position is even higher than clan chiefs. Rather than that, she’s offering to serve you, so isn’t that a great thing in and of itself? A dark elf assassin is going to be quite helpful in various capacities from here on.” (Sedam)

So says Sedam lightly while showing off his extensive knowledge as usual. Who are you calling a ruler.

“Look, I don’t want to rule over anyone. I’ve already dispelled your curse, so you’re free to go..... Oh wait, no, you still have to answer for all the crimes that you’ve committed so far.....” (Gio)

I don’t think I’m saying anything strange. This city has a proper courthouse. It should be common sense to bring her there to receive the appropriate punishment. Because she was in a brainwashed state due to a curse (or whatever that was), she probably won’t get the death penalty.

“Whatever you command of me, I would gladly carry out. But.....” (Leiha)

The dark elf beauty remains on her knees while desperately sidling up to me with tears in her eyes.

“I am your Shi! If you order so, I would even kidnap the infants of my clan and wring them to death before your eyes! If there is a plot you wish to further, I will manipulate any organization for you! If you tell me to kill myself, I will swiftly do so! If you lust for this odious body, then I shall gladly offer all of it to you. All I ask in return, beg in return, is for you to never again say that you do not want to rule over me.” (Leiha)

“Every single one of your examples is so sinister! And erotic! Why do you even want to be something like that?!” (Gio)

““Something like that’?!” (Leiha)

Letting out a wail of despair, the dark elf turns pale enough to be noticeable despite her tanned skin and throws herself to the ground.

“Come, come, Margils-dono. It makes her seem so pitiful when you put it that

way.” (Sedam)

Sedam throws an arm across my shoulders, then steers me to a corner of the room and whispers to me.

“But, I mean, it makes her sound like a slave!” (Gio)

“That’s where your misunderstanding lies. Slavery is when two parties exchange a contract dictating ownership over a third party whose will is disregarded. But in this case, she is trying to enter your service of her own free will, right? How about honoring that request of hers?” (Sedam)

“Rather than ruling and whatnot, why can’t she just be a nakama?” (Gio)

“What are you two whispering about over there?!” (Claura)

“Guah!” (Gio)

A sharp pain runs through my left ear. Of course, it is Claura’s work.

She is smiling like a hannya. Does anyone else find it strange that she isn’t already growing horns?

(T/N: Hannya: a mask used in Noh theater representing a jealous female demon, with the characteristics of two sharp bull-like horns, metallic eyes, and a leering mouth)

“You..... Even though you claim to have lifted her curse, didn’t you actually just cast your own brainwashing spell on her?!” (Claura)

“I didn’t, I didn’t!” (Gio)

“What a shameless man you are! It’s so pathetic that I’m almost going to cry.” (Claura)

“It’s a misunderstanding, a misunderstanding!” (Gio)

“If you didn’t brainwash her, then this must be a trap to ensnare you! Stop drooling!!” (Claura)

Before I knew it, her usual attack of ‘one sharp pull’ has evolved into an unending hell. At this rate, my ear is going to get stretched.

“P-, please wait a moment!” (Leiha)

“..... Eh?” (Gio)

Help has come from an unexpected source.

The dark elf draws Claura’s attention by kneeling in front of her.

“I am brainwashed no longer. Actually, even if I am, if the one controlling me is Oluri, then such would be my heart’s desire! Therefore please quell your anger, my lady!” (Leiha)

“Ogu?!” (Gio)

(T/N: Yep, that ‘my lady’ there implies the connotation of ‘wife of my lord.’ Go grab your popcorn.)

Hold on a-, just wait a moment. For various reasons, give me a moment.

If my memory serves me, we were supposed to be interrogating this dark elf whom we suspect of attempting to poison me and kidnap Mora on behalf of the Demonists that she works for. Right?

So how on earth did the conversation jump to the dark elf wanting to become my slave and Claura being my wife?!

“Th-, this person’s..... I, I’m n-, not rea, really.....” (Claura)

“No, as someone capable of conversing so casually with my lord, who holds as much power as he does, who else can you be but my lady?” (Leiha)

Aren’t there many other possibilities?

Claura’s usual sharp tongue appears to be failing her, as she is mostly just fiddling with her long hair while her face is all red. The corners of her eyes, which had been drawn up to the very limit just a while ago, are now drooping down as if she is close to tears.

I’m the one who’s going to have to listen to all her complaints later, aren’t I.

“Alright, listen. She is not my wife. She is Claura, a friend and nakama. Same goes for Sedam over there.” (Gio)

“..... Th-, that’s right! This person and I are friends. Friends, you understand?” (Claura)

“As they’ve said. Nice meeting you, [Shi]-san of my friend.” (Sedam)

Anyways, my first priority is in defusing this situation.

Afterwards, we need to draw out as much information as we can from this dark elf—she’s called Leihanaluka, right?—for the sake of capturing the mastermind. There are still 4 more dark elves out there, and the mastermind might be attempting to flee the city already.

Ignoring Sedam, who had thrown in that unnecessary comment as an attempt to calm everyone down, Leihanaluka turns and speaks to me directly.

“So that is how things are. Please pardon my earlier discourtesy.” (Leiha)

“..... Exactly why on earth do you think of Margils as that Oluri?” (Claura)

As if that ‘my lady’ remark earlier had drained all the poison from her fangs, Claura’s question was posed in a small voice.

“For several decades, my everything had been ruled by the demon that had been lurking inside my heart. The one who schemed to poison my lord was that demon. What I now find most repulsive is how, after so many years, I myself had grown acceptive of the demon’s rule. However, as of just now, I have been set free through my lord’s tremendous Power.” (Leiha)

Demon..... was it really the doing of the anki after all?

Is it that anki have managed to slip into human society and are scheming from within the populace, or are there humans somehow borrowing the power of anki? Either way, the situation is grave.

“The fear I felt when the demon was obliterated, and the joy I felt when I was saved—neither of these can be fully expressed with words. Dark elves value the continuation of one’s clan above the fate of the individual. However, when an individual is done a favor weightier than the fate of one’s whole clan, the individual is free to accept that benefactor as their Oluri and enter the benefactor’s service.” (Leiha)

“The logic seems sound, doesn’t it?” (Claura)

“I, I suppose.....” (Gio)

“.....” (Sedam)

This is Sedia, not Japan.

Sedia has Sedian standards of ethics, and I shouldn't press my own on these people.

That logic, I can see how it flows.

But still.....

"..... Either way, you will cooperate with us from here on, right?" (Gio)

"Not just from here on, but forevermore I will swear my allegiance....." (Leiha)

"Let's leave that aside for now. Firstly, provide us with information so that we can find the mastermind who manipulated you to feed me poison. After we safely capture that person—Ahh, if your nakama are in the same situation, then we ought to save them too—we will have you receive this city's judgment. After you've made up for all your sins, if you still wish to come to me, then feel free."  
(Gio)

Umu.

Before anything else, drawing out the necessary information is the highest priority. Afterwards, whatever the judgment is, some time will have passed, and she will most likely have changed her mind by then.

"Good for you." (Sedam)

"Well..... if she earnestly swears her allegiance to you, you can't really reject her, can you?" (Claura)

"Th-..... Thank you so much! Thank you so much! I will prove my usefulness, definitely!" (Leiha)

In this world, aside from the primary frameworks such as family and country, there is also the concept of [allegiance], where one fully devotes oneself to another by their own will. Looking at the Carbanera Knight Order, I thought I had already known that fact though.....

Now I feel like a petty person for having entertained the thought "Let's read her mind with the ESP Medal just in case."

# Chapter 47: Towards the Source of the Fog

In the end, I still used the ESP Medal to confirm whether Leiha (her full name is too hard to call, so I'm shortening it) is acting or not.

When they learned of the existence of an item that can "read someone else's mind," Sedam and Claura did not look pleased at all. In contrast, Leiha gave her assent delightedly.

"Very well, I will now begin. Umm, first question: was it anki who brainwashed you and your nakama?" (Gio)

"The one who reduced me to that state was human..... I think. However, that power..... the existence that bound and manipulated my heart for all those years certainly did carry the aura of anki. The favor of saving me from it is a debt that I will never be able to fully repay, even with the rest of my life."  
(Leiha)

«To willingly entrust myself to the strength of another..... what a disgrace this is. But it is also the only path of salvation open to me. I am currently in front of an overwhelming power that far overshadows even that demon..... Ahh, I want to be ruled by my lord's power! I want to be bound, I want to be held down.....»  
{Leiha}

"I, I see..... But still, to speak of swearing allegiance so abruptly..... Are you actually just acting like this to get us to let down our guards so that you can get away?" (Gio)

"Far from it! Swearing allegiance to my Oluri is only natural, as I am your Shi. If you still doubt me, I can tear out my very heart and show you that it is nothing but the red of truth!" (Leiha)

«Ahhh, Oluri is doubting me..... How frightening it is that my pillar, the one I'm to cling to, does not believe me..... Instead of that, I would much rather end this miserable life in front of my lord's eyes!» {Leiha}

“Is, is that so..... Alright, I understand now.” (Gio)

(T/N: Hmm, so, what –dere is it when the girl would rather die than go without your love and attention?)

The frightful thing is that she meant everything she said about allegiance and swearing—every single word was her heartfelt intent.

Within that single word ‘allegiance’ whirls so many different emotions that I don’t want to touch.....

Of course, I don’t like it when strong hostility is directed at me like Heldol did, but strong goodwill (?) is..... well, it’s heavy. All I did was use a single spell, but it had the unintended consequence of irrevocably changing another person’s life forever. That’s frightening.

“So, how is it? That onee-san is serious, isn’t she?” (Sedam)

So asks Sedam, who is standing next to Claura, who in turn is looking back and forth between Leiha and me with a complicated face. Whichever way I look at it, he’s just enjoying himself now, isn’t he.

Even though I am like this, I too am a man. Despite being mature and all that, it’s not like I don’t have any lust at all.

Now that I know her true thoughts, I can’t flatly reject her anymore. Before even that, there’s no way I would feel bad when a beautiful lady who’s basically a mass of eros yearns (?) for me so deeply.

But it’s just, you know.....

“..... Though I am still withholding my acceptance of her offer, but it seems so, yes.” (Gio)

“You believe me now?! Thank you so very much!” (Leiha)

“..... That’s well and all. By the way, are you not going to ask her for information about the person who was controlling her? The crucial mastermind?” (Claura)

“Mu. That’s right. Even if your memory is a bit hazy, tell us any little thing that you remember.” (Gio)

“Indeed I will.” (Leiha)

“Guess I don’t need this anymore……” (Gio)

More like, I don’t want to use this item for quite a while. As I put the bothersome ESP Medal into my sling bag, Claura speaks up.

“I’m just saying, but if you ever use that thing against me, I will cut every one of our ties as friends, you hear?!” (Claura)

So declares Claura with both hands on her waist and her face slightly tinged with red. Now this reaction is what’s normal for a real-life human.

A normal reaction, huh. For the present me, it is something that I am most grateful for.

“……” (Gio)

“Wha-, what is it? I bet you’re thinking that a woman who would listen to anything you say like that dark elf over there is more preferable, aren’t you?!” (Claura)

“Not really…… Thank you, Claura. Always keep scolding me like in the future too.” (Gio)

“HAH?!” (Claura)



Like that, with a few chaotic moments here and there, we finally managed to hear all the information that Leiha had to provide.

The person in Lelis who ordered her to assassinate me was a nobleman with black hair, whose crest was a pattern with a sword and a sail.

Hearing that, Sedam strikes his hands together with a ‘pon.’

(T/N: The Japanese gesture indicating that a lightbulb had gone off in their head.)

Among the people of interest that had come up from the adventurers’ investigations so far, there is indeed someone who fits this description.

His name is Baron Neib Koval.

He is a powerbroker who holds a seat in the Council, and has been a thorn in the Merchant faction's side for the longest time.

There are mountains of dangerous rumors about his mansion, such as frequent cases of people in the vicinity going missing, suspicious people coming and going, and the maids seeing rituals extolling anki being conducted.

Of course, the adventurers had done enough substantiating investigation to prove that these rumors are actually all quite close to the truth. On top of all that, we now have testimony from the assassin's own mouth.

"This is definitive. Baron Koval must be a Demonist." (Sedam)

"Shall we march straight to the Baron's mansion?" (Claura)

"I shall come along!" (Leiha)

"No wait, what are you guys saying. It's a bad idea for a single person to decide by themselves to arrest someone else." (Gio)



First of all, we request the currently active adventurers and city guards to keep tabs on Baron Koval's location and to obstruct any escape attempts, and to monitor the area around his mansion.

After that, I head towards the Council Hall together with Sedam, Claura, and Leiha.

Though I feel slightly bad about the short notice, I demand for Council Chairman Braus and the Garrison Commander.

In front Council Chairman and the Garrison Commander, both of whom had hurriedly made their way over, I report that there is a high possibility that Baron Koval is a Demonist and is the mastermind behind my and the Council Chairman's attempted assassination.

Despite being the Chairman's political opponent, both of them were astonished to hear that a noble had committed the crime of worshipping anki, which is considered an especially taboo act in this world.

"I'm shocked. But well, it appears that there is no room for doubt here."  
(Braus)

“There is the testimony of that dark elf, as well as the circumstantial evidence gathered by the adventurers. Let us immediately move to arrest Baron Koval on grounds of assassination and pagan worship.” (Garrison Commander)

“Fumu..... Margils-dono, is that fine with you?” (Braus)

Normally, it would be strange for the Council Chairman to seek confirmation from me on this kind of matter.

Despite that, the fact that he read and sympathized with my intentions proves that he really is a sharp person after all.

“Of course, I think it only natural to arrest him. However, there is a high chance that he has some strange power derived from the anki. Furthermore, I also wish to prove my friendly attitude towards the city..... With these in mind, I wish to request for permission for me to cooperate with this arrest.” (Gio)

“Hah? .....Council Chairman? Is that really fine?” (Garrison Commander)

“What a welcome offer it is. Though I would normally shy away from imposing such a burden on you, but please do lend us your strength. Garrison Commander, for anything related to the arrest of Baron Koval from now on, please cooperate with Margils-dono.” (Braus)

“..... Yes, sir.” (Garrison Commander)

Sedam, Claura, and Leiha are all looking upon our exchange with puzzlement.

From the point of view of these adventurers and one assassin, there is undeniable proof, and we have the needed power on hand, so purposely going to trouble of attaining the city’s permission just seems like a waste of time.

However, if I am thought of as someone who would make light of the law whenever it suits me, I will eventually lose the people’s trust. The Council Chairman also fully understands that I am trying to take a stance of respecting the city’s law, and thus is playing along.

“By the way, Wizard-dono, about that dark elf over there.....” (Braus)

“Ahh, I’d almost forgotten. I will hand her over to the city guard. Please give her a proper public trial.” (Gio)

“ “ ..... ” ”

As someone who had committed (or attempted to, at least) assassination and kidnapping in this town, at least both of her hands are now tied. Having adamantly requested for me to tie her up instead of Sedam, she seemed strangely happy at the time (which I refuse to notice).

Seeing how, aside from walking, Leiha is now always kneeling beside me, the Garrison Commander reservedly comments on it.

“But, it seems to me that she’s acting like she’s, um, Wizard-dono’s servant.”  
(Garrison Commander)

“This and that are separate. Unfortunately, she has committed crimes in this city. As such, it is only natural for her to be judged based on the laws of this city.” (Gio)

After displaying her loyalty to me so vocally, to be abruptly thrown to the authorities does make her seem quite pitiful.

If I pretend to not know anything and simply begin bringing her around as a servant, I don’t think anyone (except for Claura) would say anything.

However, there needs to be closure somewhere for the things that she has done. Although she was brainwashed, there might have been people who have indeed died by her hand. No world is indulgent enough for my singular decision to forgive her to suffice as all closure. At least, it’s not supposed to.

“ In that case, we will conduct the trial at the end of the month—which would be 10 days later—so in the meantime the city guard will assume custody over her.” (Garrison Commander)

“For the trial, she will need a defense attorney and a guarantor..... Will Margils-dono be her guarantor?” (Braus)

“..... Ahh, naturally.” (Gio)

Guarantor? I don’t know much about this world’s trial proceedings, but it’s great that they actually go to such lengths. Or rather, I almost even want to be her attorney too.

It would be great if she could get off with something like only a few years of

confinement or a bit of forced labor.

“..... I hope it will be noted that she was under the control of some sort of evil magic of a Demonist. The various crimes that she had committed were not by her own will, and she is currently deeply remorseful and is saying that she wishes to make amends. With due consideration of all this, I wish to lend my strength towards helping her attain a more lenient sentence.” (Gio)

Mu. Did I lay it on a bit too thick? If it is perceived that I am pressuring the sentencing, it might work to her disadvantage.....

“Indeed, we are fully aware. Please leave it to us.” (Braus)

“All guards will be notified to help her pass the days until the sentencing comfortably.” (Garrison Commander)

..... At that moment, I did think that the atmosphere was slightly strange, but.....

It was even to the point where I can't believe I didn't already realize it from how Sedam had kept quiet the entire time (more like, he was outright smirking).



Baron Koval's whereabouts was determined a mere few hours later.

His location was, to no one's surprise, his own mansion.

Several adventurers particularly skilled at covert operations had cooperated with members of the Thief Guild in investigating the inside of the mansion, and found the Baron and his subordinates heading towards an underground room.

Due to the possibility of that underground room being an escape route, a thick encircling net composed of adventurers, thieves, and guards was set up both underground as well as overground.

His mansion is situated in the city's high class housing district, which is on a higher elevation, and is surrounded by high walls.

On his tightly closed gate is a sword-and-sail crest, just like what Leiha had

mentioned.

Though there was no human presence on the other side of the gate, this side is packed with adventurers and guards and onlookers. There's no way those on the inside haven't already noticed us.

The fact that there's no response whatsoever must either mean that they've given up, or that they've really escaped through a secret escape route..... or that they've prepared some fantastical evil cult-like measure to flip the situation around.

Most likely, it's the last one.



“Wizard-dono! All prepares for the storming in have been completed!”

There are 7 fully armed guards lined up in front of me.

The Garrison Commander had previously told me that he'd selected out some guards to accompany me (officially though, I'm the one accompanying them). As hoped, each and every one of them look quite strong. Well, they're still inferior in comparison to the Carbanera Knight Order, but let's leave that aside.

These 7 people should be equivalent to one adventurer party..... is what I'm thinking as I look towards Sedam.

“Ahh, it might be better if we don't go this time.” (Sedam)

“Nn? How so?” (Gio)

To be honest, I doubt there's another adventurer more reliable than Sedam.

“We already know you full well. However, that's not the case for these other guys.....” (Sedam)

I see.

So he's implying that I should take advantage of this situation to build more connections.

“We might not be as smart as Sedam, but our arms are still quite strong, you know?” (Adventurer)

“Ahh, so I see. I will be relying on you then.” (Gio)

The one who said so while drawing his party over is a warrior who had served as our escort so far.

I have self-awareness that I do tend to act quite arbitrarily at times, but Sedam also has his own thoughts. At times, it might even be different from what I'd intended.

I lightly nod towards Sedam as an expression of my thanks. In response, he smiles slightly by lifting a corner of his mouth.

“..... The onlookers..... I meant, the esteemed observers are currently watching, understand? It means that you need to say something gallant before the storm in.” (Claura)

“Ue.....” (Gio)

That's right. I must receive the advice from my respected nakama with sincerity.

Regardless of how reluctant I feel, at times.

# Chapter 48: The Lifting of the Fog

We are at a corner on the high class residential street where Baron Koval's mansion is located.

On that wide street are currently crowds of Lelis citizens belonging to a large variety of social statuses and professions.

The reason why they are here is to watch the scene of a Great Wizard (me) taking revenge on Baron Koval, who is a Demonist.

Probably because of how flashy my actions have been, I have completely become the main topic of gossip flying around the city these past few days.

And not just among the citizens—the gathered adventurers and city guards are also looking my way with great interest in their faces. They probably are curious what kind of person the 'Great Wizard who destroyed an anki nest' is like.

In that case, then I have no recourse but to show them.



“Beloved citizens of Lelis. I am the wizard Gio Margils.”

Putting strength into my abdomen, I speak out in as dignified a voice as I can muster. My surroundings fall silent.

“Apologies for the commotion. As all of you already know, I am now about to accompany the city guards in requesting an audience with Baron Koval. The purpose is because of the suspicion of him being a Demonist.”

When I speak aloud what has previously only been hearsay, the crowd begins to buzz again. There is fear in a lot of their expressions.

“This is at most a suspicion. There is still the possibility that we learn from our talk with the Baron that all this was merely a misunderstanding. However, IF—if

he really is a Demonist.....”

The crowd has returned to being deathly quiet. Everyone is waiting for my next words with bated breath.

“I will apprehend him and protect you all, without fail! Know that the wizard Gio Margils is an enemy of anki and everyone involved with anki!”

After speaking loudly for a while, my throat’s gradually doing better.

I think that last line reverberated quite well. But it made me remember that time when I newly joined the company and was made to sing out loud at an intersection in the city, so I feel terrible.

“Waaah.”

“Great Wizard-sama!”

“Our hero!”

“Please protect our children from the anki!”

Unlike the lukewarm gazes of the passersby from that time, the Lelis citizens’ reactions are fervent. Even the city guards and adventurers are pumping their fists into the air and shouting.

Though I was the one who caused this, it still doesn’t feel very good.

“You’re starting to get quite accustomed to your role, Great Wizard-sama.”  
(Sedam)

“That’s the way to do it.” (Claura)

“Thank you for saying so.” (Gio)

I feel relieved as Sedam and Claura act like they’re praising a stupid child who’s finally made some progress.



“Wizard-dono, we are ready to move at any moment.”

So says the warrior Gad, who towers at least a head over me, with a fierce smile. His whole body is covered with rugged metallic armor, and he has a double-handed axe over his shoulder.

When I had looked at him with [Sense of Adept] back in the Adventurer Guild, I had noticed that he was the highest level among the adventurers, at level 8. He does not look pressured by the current atmosphere nor by me.

“You all, don’t you drag down Wizard-sama’s feet!!”

“Yes, sir!!”

“Leave it to us!”

His subordinates (according to how the Adventurer Guild is set up in this world, they’re more like his subordinates or disciples rather than nakama) are mainly warriors who wear equipment heavier than the members in Sedam’s party. Of course, as it is a party selected for the purpose of stepping into the mansion, there are a few scouts, and also one cleric.

“Well then, let’s go.”

Accompanied by the cheers of the crowd, the adventurers, city guards, and I make our way into Baron Koval’s mansion.



True to the scouts’ reports, the inside of the mansion is empty.

There are strange books and idols all over Baron Koval’s personal room and study, but we don’t have time to examine them in detail and thus leave them alone.

After quickly sweeping through all the rooms, we head for our main target, the underground room.

According to the adventurers who’d been in the investigative group, the entrance to the underground room is hidden behind the huge wall painting in the parlor.

The painting depicts a goddess wearing an armor made of ice and snow striking down anki and other monsters. It seems that this is Ashuginea, the Goddess of Winter that I’d heard mentioned a few times before.

“It’s now open, Wizard-dono.”

So says the scout with a self-satisfied face after unlocking the hidden door.

“Alright, I will take the lead from here on. Wizard-dono and guards, please slowly follow behind.”

“Very well, the lead is all yours. But before that, can everyone gather around me for a moment?”

“?”

With puzzled faces, the adventurers and guards crowd around, specifically within a 3m radius from me.

We are 12 full grown adults armed to the teeth, so this is a bit tight, but there’s no helping it.

“By means of this spell, may all these heroes within 3 meters of me have their physical strength, stamina, explosive power, durability, and 5 senses enhanced for 1 hour. [Physical Boost]”

After I finish chanting, blue-white sparks jump around within the 3m radius circle centered around me, significantly increasing everyone’s physical capabilities upon touching them.

“ Oh..... Ohhhh?!”

“What is this?!”

“Power..... I feel power welling up inside.....!!”

“My spell has enhanced everyone’s strength. It only lasts for 1 hour, but this job will be finished within 1 hour, will it not?”

“Awesome! So this is the power of wizardry!”

“Long live Great Wizard-sama!”

“This is indeed quite something.” (Gad)

Suddenly feeling strength coursing throughout their whole body and their five senses sharpened, the adventurers and guards once more pump their fists into the air and roar excitedly.



We found an underground tunnel in the underground room.

The situation almost felt like dungeon crawling but for the fact that, for good or bad, neither monsters nor drops showed up.

We came upon several forks, but the adventurers always managed to figure out the correct direction without me having to use Mapping Scroll.

Our progress was almost disappointing in how smooth it was. Eventually, we noticed the air growing increasingly humid.

“Perhaps this route leads to an underground waterway. Either that, or it connects to Lius Lake.....”

So commented the scout at the head.

His words were proven right several minutes later.

We came out to an open area about as large as a gymnasium, but the deeper half of the area was a dark, muddy-looking water surface.

Somewhere close to the edge of the shore was a sinister altar, surrounded by several human silhouettes poised in preparation.

“..... To think that you yourself would come all the way here, wizard Gio Margils.....!”

One of them, a man wearing a black robe with the hood pulled forward so that only his eyes were visible, addressed me with a torch in hand.

“It seems that we’ve finally met the Baron, Wizard-dono.”

“.....”

Gad sounded slightly excited while readjusting his grip on his double-handed axe, but I couldn’t manage to say anything.

To the left and right of Baron Koval were 5 or 6 people wearing similar attire, but my attention was drawn by the thing behind them instead. The pitch-black altar that looked like it had been painted over with tar, and the ‘thing’ that laid on it.

On top of the roughly 3 meter tall altar with a distorted shape, the skull of a colossal animal was enshrined.

It was clearly not something alive..... but despite that. Within those empty

eye sockets, a golden glow was flickering and showering us with a hatred powerful enough to prick our skin.



There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind.

That thing is neither a handmade item nor a mere imitation.

It is either an actual anki, or an equally 'bad for all humans' existence.

# Chapter 49: The Lifting of the Fog (Part 2)

Neib Koval was born in a mansion in Lelis 45 years ago.

His father was a noble from the Kingdom of Liius. However, because he liked the urban life, he spent more than half of his life behind the city's walls.

When the Kingdom of Liius, which used to control the area around Lake Liius, fell apart from civil war, the city of Lelis became the stage for several military clashes.

The mansion that Neib Koval had lived in since young suffered attacks from both rioters and robbers. Due to his father having been an absolute failure at administering to the people of his fiefdom, he himself was also often showered with resentment on his father's behalf.

Growing up within such circumstances fostered within him a selfish personality that saw others as nothing but tools.

In spite of that, if only he had never come across that thing. After Lelis gained its independence, he could very well have turned out a run-of-the-mill noble capable of making realistic decisions every now and then.

The outbreak of Shadow Demons 10 years ago, though not large enough in scale to be called a Bleed, left deep scars upon the various cities of the Liius Union.

At the time, having already succeeded the title of Baron from his father, he participated in the fight against the Shadow Demons as a member of Lelis' defence force.

Of course, he never went to the front lines in person, but he did fulfil the bare

minimum of his duty.

Eventually, thanks to the efforts of the Carbanera Knight Order, the Adventurer's Guild, the Magician's Guild, and the 「War Tribe」, the Shadow Demon nest was destroyed.

A few months after that, the Koval House received a queer offering from one of the villages neighboring Lelis that was, in name, under their control.

“What is this. It's creepy.”

The Baron's reaction was only natural, as it was the skull of a Small Demon. Its black surface was so glossy that it almost looked wet. He could not discern whether this was painted on or if it was the skull's actual color.

“Indeed it is. No one would even think of putting something like this up for display, would they.”

His faithful, elderly steward's words was common sense and also only natural. However, something in there touched a string in his heart.

The moment he peered suspiciously into the gaping eye sockets, he thought he saw a faint golden flicker in its depths.

“Hou, is that so. Then I will purposely leave it on hand. It seems more stylish than a common sculpture, does it not?”



The Baron left the Shadow Demon skull in his bedroom, which led to a small change in his heart.

He became able to recognize the evil intentions lurking within everybody's gazes. He also became able to hear the malicious gossip being whispered about him in places beyond his sight.

It took almost no time at all for this small change to bring about great distortion.

3 days later, he came to view all humans as clumps of malice out to scorn and

torment himself. He could no longer believe the fact that he himself was a human.

7 days later, he had fostered such affinity for the anti-human race of Shadow Demons that he offered his own blood to the skull.

Finally, 10 days later, he invited a Demonist priest to his mansion.

“I was convinced that you of all people would understand the Shadow Demons’ glorious mission.”

“Ahh..... the repulsive beings known as humans must be eradicated, no matter the cost.”

The priest was the Village Head of the village that had sent the Shadow Demon skull to the Baron. That village had apparently been completely converted to Demonism ever since the Baron’s father’s time.

“However, we still need to gather a far greater amount of power in order to eradicate the humans. To that end, you must seize power in Lelis.”

“That goes without saying. So far, I’ve only thought of securing a safe life for myself. From now on, though, I will seriously aim to kick down those merchant bastards.”

“To that end, use these as you please.”

What the priest offered to the Baron this time was 5 dark elves.



Using his dark elves as assassins, the Baron surreptitiously expanded his own power.

With advice from the priest, the Baron took only the most inconspicuous moves. With that said, though, more than 10 of his political enemies eventually succumbed to accidental deaths. Because he was employing such superior yet completely loyal assassins, even the Thieves’ Guild did not notice what he was doing.

However, even with his barony's history, historic customs, and financial capital, it took him 10 years to rise to the top position of the Noble Faction. In the meantime, he mercifully led every single person in his household, beginning with his steward, down the path to becoming fervent Demonists.

During that entire time, he never once failed to uphold the monthly ritual that the priest had taught him. The bottom of the underground lake that was the ritual site became filled with countless numbers of human bones.

Everything was going smoothly.

When he finally got to starting preparations for wresting the seat of Council Chairman from the eyesore Zatou Braus, he showed up.



The Baron was ecstatic upon hearing from the priest that a new Shadow Demon nest had appeared close to Yuule Village.

But a mere few days later, that nest was wiped out by a single man. His joy was immediately replaced by rage and hatred.

Being able to easily destroy a Shadow Demon nest with that strange 「wizardry」 of his..... such an existence must not be tolerated.

“Even if we have to stake our lives, we must kill the man, Gio Margils, without fail.”

“Say no more. Destroying that which destroys Shadow Demons is the mission of us Demonists.”



The first opportunity was when Margils, who had gone to the trouble of coming to Lelis himself, was meeting with the Council Chairman.

The most excellent pawn in his hand was capable of easily infiltrating the Council Hall. So it seemed a great idea to poison the two of them together.

If both of them died from that, then that was that. If only the Council

Chairman died, he could frame Margils as the culprit. The same went for the other way round.

In the one in a million chance that they both survived, there would naturally still be friction and distrust between the two of them. Or at least, that was how it was supposed to have panned out.

The actual result was that both Margils and the Council Chairman survived. But rather than friction, the incident helped the two of them to gain even more trust in each other.

Taken back at the report from his pawn, he rushed to the Council Hall to look at Margils from afar, but all he saw was a common, mediocre, dime-a-dozen middle-aged man. What kind of a joke was this?!

Either way, he understood that Margils could not be killed with any conventional method.

Even though he sent his other pawns in an attempt to take hostage people close to Margils, they failed because of an 'an invisible devil' or 'a female devil made of wind' or some other bullshit.

If a small number of elites can't finish the job, then how about numbers. So thinking, he hired all of the trash around the streets, but they were obstructed by an even greater number of city guards and adventurers.

Then he was informed that a female magician that he had already considered an enemy from a while back was also close to Margils. But when he sent his pawns to her, they were once again foiled by adventurers.

Right when he was laying low, trying to think of a new plan, he received a report that adventurers and city guards are scouring the entire city for information about his pawns.

Up to now, there had been times when city guards or adventurers had directed gazes of suspicion towards himself, but he had deftly diverted them all.

This time, however, was different. A strange light burned in their eyes, and they were as persistent and tenacious about it as if they were seeking revenge against a generations-long clan enemy. Furthermore, even the Thieves' Guild, with whom they had a tacit non-aggression relationship, were now also

crawling through the underground routes in hot pursuit.

(T/N: The power of money lol.)

Lelis had been nothing more than a huge canvas for his malicious intellect to freely weave plots and intrigues on. But before he knew it, it had already turned into a cage that locked him in and was trying to corner him.

By the time he came to that realization, it was too late. The rumor that he was a Demonist had already flooded the streets, and his mansion fell under double and triple surveillance by guards and adventurers and even nosy onlookers. He could not take even a step outside.

According to the information that his pawns barely managed to get to him, every single one of these movements had been due to orders from that Margils.

“Baron, now that things have become like this, there is nothing more that we can do. Let us at least perform the last ritual.”

“..... Damn you, Margils! Exactly who on earth is that guy?”



Even before they heard the cheers raised by the crowd outside the mansion, he and the priest and his pawns had already reached the ritual site by the underground lake.

“If we only had five more years, we would have been able to resurrect the Demon God, but.....”

“How many hundreds of people do you think we’ve already sacrificed? This much should be more than enough to wipe them all out.”

“Indeed, so we hope.”

So mutters the priest regretfully while looking at the skull sitting on the altar beside the lake shore, which had been ‘nurtured’ to three times its original form.

However, he still brought himself to kneel before the altar and began to chant in prayer.

In response to the priest's voice, ripples appeared on the surface of the skull, causing shivers to run down all of their spines.

At that moment.

With city guards and adventurer parties in tow, that man — Gio Margils — showed up.

“..... T-, to think that you yourself would come all the way here, wizard Gio Margils.....!”

Seeing the target of his hatred right in front of his eyes, the man who had controlled the guards and everyone else into cornering himself, the Baron's voice trembled slightly.

If he hadn't been wearing a hood, surprise and ecstatic joy would have been clearly visible on his haggard face.

“It seems that we've finally met the Baron, Wizard-dono.”

The Baron heard the wizard's adventurer companion whispering to him, but it was of no matter.

For as of just then, the priest had finished his prayer.

“At, at the very end, did you want to deal the final blow yourself? It seems that it is fame that you seek, Margils! But that pride shall be your downfall!”

“A-, ahem. Baron Koval, is it? You already have nowhere to run to. Will you quietly turn yourself in?”

“Saying such meaningless things!!!!!”

Clack, clack, clack.

As if in response to the Baron's shriek, the jaw of the skull laying on the altar began to rattle furiously, while steam began gushing out of the depths of its eye sockets.

“Wha-, what's going on?!”

“Sha-, Shadow Demon?!”

“It’s moving……! You’re kidding me, right?”

At the start, it was just a small skull.

But after diligently ‘nurturing’ it by painting it with the blood and flesh of living sacrifices and offering prayers of hatred to it every single month……

The puny city guards and greedy adventurers alike fell back in fear, flustered.

The thought of sending out his pawns did cross the Baron’s mind, but the best thing to do here was of course to offer them all to the Shadow Demon as living sacrifices.

“Right now! Right here! With the Demon God that we had spent 10 years nurturing! All for the sake of destroying you! And this detestable town! And every single human in existenceeee!!!!”

Bubbling mud began flowing out from the inside of the altar, taking form as twisting and writhing limbs.

The golden light within the skull’s eye socket shone even brighter than the moon in a decidedly ominous manner.

“What the hell, why is a Shadow Demon……”

“Is, is it a golem?”

“Hii…… hiiiiii……”

Within a brief moment lasting less than 10 seconds, it had turned into a grotesque figure resembling neither spider nor crustacean that towered more than twice a human’s height.

Buried in its center, naturally, is the skull, which was clearly serving as its core.

At the tip of four of its limbs glittered pincers and claws the length of longswords.

And above all else, it emanated such terrible hatred that even the priest who had nurtured it felt his blood draining from his face.

“KyuOOoooo.....! GiRluuuooo.....!”

The high-pitched cry that sounded like pieces of metal grating together seemed almost capable of slicing up people’s hearts.

Even that Margils, who had mysterious powers completely beyond his ken, was merely standing stock-still and just muttering to himself.

Neib Koval was sure beyond a doubt.

“This! This Demon God! It is my other self! My real self! With it, I condemn this world that looked down upon me!”

“GyaAAahh!”

Hearing a thud, the Baron looked over to see that the skull — no, the Demon God — had sliced up the priest from top to bottom with a pair of pincers.

However, the Baron no longer cared about even that.....

“[Destruction].”

Margils, who had been struck both immobile and speechless by fear (or so he had been pretending) suddenly raised his staff, from which a small white bead of light flew out. The light touched the Demon God.

Without causing an explosion, the light simply dived straight into the body of the Demon God.....

“Kyu..... GyukyUUuu.....?!”

The next instant.

The large body with a grotesque shape and numerous limbs began falling apart from the inside.

No thunderous roar. No shockwave.

Like a ice sculpture that got smashed into smithereens by a giant hammer, the jet black Demon God simply became several tens of fragments, then a

thousand, then mere dust, then ..... simply disappeared without a trace.

“Wha-.....-t.....”

So ended Baron Neib Koval’s secret manipulations within the shadows of the city of Lelis.

# Chapter 50: After the Fog

“U, u, UOOOHHHH!!”

“Awesome, awesome, awe~SOME!”

“A single blow against such a gigantic Shadow Demon!”

It looks like [Destruction] worked properly in pulverizing that monster.

What a relief.

The city guards and adventurers are so hyped that they are roaring out at the top of their lungs.

That gigantic Shadow Demon had felt several times more dangerous than even the Rock Demons that I had seen in the Shadow Demon nest. Having suddenly been released from that heavy bloodthirst, I can understand the adventurers and guards being a bit high.

“The power of your magic is every bit as absurd as the rumors claim.....”

“..... I don't know what rumors are out there, but at least what you just saw was real. Though it wasn't magic, but wizardry.”

Even the voice of Gad, the experienced adventurer Leader, is filled with heat. The Carbanera knights had responded the same way when we subjugated the Shadow Demon nest. Does this make me seem like someone who likes advertising his own name? Well, I guess I am trying to spread my name, so I suppose there's no helping that.

But this is not the time to daze out thinking about such things.

“By means of this spell, may 108 living beings within my field of sight be paralyzed. [Greater Hold].”

I use a spell to paralyze all of the black hooded people, who seem as shocked as Baron Koval. They all fall down due to suddenly being robbed of their movement, but I hope they'll bear with at least this much.

“..... Capture them all! Draw back their hoods!”

Coming back to his senses, the city guards' commanding officer barks out an order. At that, the guards rush towards the black hoods.

“Carefully investigate every inch of the place! There might be escape routes or traps, so stay on your toes!”

“You got it!”

Gad and the other adventurers undertake the searching of the vicinity, making full use of their skills.

I myself also keep a sharp eye on the surroundings and the remains of the pulverized Shadow Demon statue for a while, but don't notice any particular problems.



“Uaa..... uaaagh.....”

When all the hoods were removed, the city guards confirmed that the the leader who had been manipulating(?) the gigantic Shadow Demon was indeed Baron Koval.

Just like Jyagul had been after being de-petrified, the Baron was no longer in a state where conversation was possible. Seeing the dim golden flicker within his eyes, I tried to use my ESP Medal on him, but only learned that the Shadow Demon influence had reached very deep into his heart.

I suspect that he did not begin worshipping the Shadow Demons on his own

volition.

The city guards did not recognize the man who had been cut up by the gigantic Shadow Demon's pincers. One of the adventurers, however, claimed that he resembled the Village Head of a village under the Koval House's rule. Considering the fact that he had been the one offering prayers in front of the altar, he was most likely one of the main perpetrators as well.

The rest were, as expected, dark elf girls.

With dark tanned skin in common, each and every one of them were young ladies with their own characteristic charm.

All of them were in a completely emotionless doll-like state, exactly like Leiha had been. Their fully golden eyes indicated that they had already been completely brainwashed.

Although I had only prepared 1 charge of [Curse Break], I thought about trying to dispel the brainwashed status of all them with [Dispel Magic]. While [Curse Break] is a single-target spell, [Dispel Magic] erases all effects due to wizardry within a certain radius, so it is very convenient spell.

".....?!"

"What's going on?!"

"Gah..... gafu..... guhooh?!"

"Oi.....?"

Therefore, I tried [Dispel Magic] on Baron Koval and the dark elves all at once.

The very moment the Shadow Demon influence was eliminated from the inside, the Baron's body began twitching so violently that it seemed his spine would almost snap..... then he died.

Based on my knowledge from TRPGs and fantasy works, the Shadow Demon curse must have already fused with his life, such that when the curse was removed, his life also went with it.

But still.

Despite the fact that he was the one who plotted harm against myself and Mora and the rest, I still felt a bit depressed about letting someone die.

Since if I had been able to safely undo his brainwashing, he might have become able to live a normal life again.....

As for the dark elves, they merely lost consciousness, but seemed otherwise fine. Judging by the color of their eyes, it seemed like they had even deeper under Shadow Demon influence though. Perhaps the depth of the brainwashing and the strength of the relationship to Shadow Demons are two separate factors.

I'm sorry to the Baron, and I can't say this out loud due to ethical reasons, but..... if I'm honest with myself, I would probably have been much more depressed if it was these girls who died instead of the Baron.....



“Per your command, the dark elves will be transferred to the medical center for treatment, after which then they will be imprisoned.”

“It seems like there really isn't anything else around here.”

Hearing the city guards' commanding officer and Gad's report, I can finally breathe easy.

Though they said there's nothing, there are still lots of things that the city guards will have to dedicate time and manpower to examining later on, such the documents inside the mansion related to Demonism worship and the human remains piled up around the ritual grounds.

Even though Baron Koval and the priest-like man are both dead, we do not know for sure that there are no more Demonists in Lelis. The investigation needs to be thorough and, depending on the situation, my help might be needed again.

Whether everything is truly over will depend on the results of their investigation.

But still, this has now given me a slight bit of peace of mind.



The rest of the time I spent in Lelis were head-spinningly busy.

The very day we failed to apprehend Baron Koval (though everyone calls it ‘successfully defeating Baron Koval’), I had to participate in a joint meeting with the Council Chairman, Adventurer’s Guild guildmaster, Magician’s Guild guildmaster, and the Garrison Commander in regards to our next move.

I personally wish to build a strong friendship with the city of Lelis. The Council Chairman, being who he is, was worried that the scandal of such a well-known personage being revealed as a Demonist would turn into censure against the Council.

The countermeasure that we came up with was to use the trial of the dark elves. I would take that chance to explain the incident to the citizens, and to appeal to them the fact that the Council had done everything in its power to resolve the situation.

When we promised to share some of the credit with the magicians and adventurers, the two guildmasters also agreed to go along with the plan (though I didn’t bother digging into Heldol’s inner thoughts).

As there were still 10 more days before the trial, I stayed at Irudo’s mansion and spent the time cooperating with the investigation and going around greeting the various powerbrokers in the city.

The encounter that left the deepest impression on me was, as can be expected, the talk with Count Andel of the Council’s Noble Faction. In other words, Claura’s grandfather.

The obese elder who was unlike his granddaughter in every way possible remained in jovial spirits the entire time. Apparently he had had a very bad relationship with Baron Koval, despite being fellow nobles in the same party.

“This is the best that I’ve felt in the past 10 whole years! Wizard-dono! How about riding this flow and marrying into my family and taking over all of Lelis?!”

“..... I’m afraid I have to respectfully decline.”

According to Claura, who I had never seen this vexed, and her younger brother, their grandfather was a typical power grabber who had been at odds with the Council Chairman for long years. Well, as long as it’s not related to Demonists or assassins or the like, then he can do as he likes.

The younger brother was a handsome young man who resembled Claura more, but even he displayed a strangely friendly attitude towards me.

“Margils-sama, did my sister also pull your ear? My sister doesn’t do that to people that she doesn’t care about at all, so.....”

He whispered lots of similar such things to me.

Does that mean that in Claura’s eyes, I’m unreliable like a younger brother? Even though age-wise, she’s young enough to be my daughter.....



One more important thing happened: I visited the Manuscriptor’s Guild.

In this world without a papermaking industry, almost all written records are on sheepskin (though they do use leather from other creatures).

Of course, the printing industry also does not exist, so all books have to be handmade, and all manuscripts have to be written by hand.

In modern Japan, it is almost impossible to lay eyes on a sheepskin manuscript. Here, though..... the several hundred variations of dyes and leathers, the delicate cover and page decorations utilizing combinations with metals, and the writing techniques with full consideration for ink viscosity and the font of each and every letter..... I was completely fascinated by every aspect of the process of production.

But of course, it’s not like a passion for traditional crafts awoke in me. It’s for making my backup spellbook.

The ingredients list, which figuratively dripped with chuunibyuu with item descriptions like “ink mixed with the shattered fragments of a jewel exposed to the light of a full moon” and “sheepskin cut with a knife blessed by the goddess of fire,” made me seriously want to wring the necks of my younger self and my

game master. However, everything was successfully gathered, and my request for the production of a blank book was accepted without much issue.

The guildmaster himself took on my job, so it would apparently be finished 3 months later.

He didn't want to charge 'the city's savior' for the job, but I still made sure to pay some remuneration as an expression of my respect for his skills.



While spending my days so, the investigation into the remaining Demonists in Lelis made steady progress.

Naturally, Baron Koval wasn't the only Demonist in town. 2 other nobles, 5 merchants, and several tens of citizens were apprehended.

Also, almost every village under the Koval House had been completely converted to Demonism. With the guards and adventurers cooperating together, almost every single villager was also successfully apprehended.

From the interrogations of the Demonists and the documents found from the nobles' mansion, more facts about the Demonists came to light.

The man who got cut up by the gigantic Shadow Demon was indeed a priest, and even a leader among them. He had come to the village from somewhere several decades ago, then steadily increased the number of adherents, before finally involving even Baron Koval.

The priest had called the skull that had turned into the gigantic Shadow Demon a 'Vessel of God,' and had apparently been offering living sacrifices to it from a long while ago.

The brainwashing of the dark elves and Baron Koval were more due to the power of this Vessel of God rather than the priest, apparently.

Aside from him, there were a few other brainwashed Demonists, but because they would die from [Dispel Magic], they were all thrown into jail instead.

I felt pity for the brainwashed people, but those who turned to Demonism worship on their own accord were merely reaping what they had sowed. I aided

the investigation with [Psychometry], so I believe no one was falsely charged.

Thanks to even the Thieves' Guild having participated in the Demonist hunt, it can probably be said with confidence that their presence in the region has been completely erased.



Ten days after failing to apprehend Baron Koval.

I am attending the trial, which is being held at the large plaza before the Council Hall.

Right in front is the judge. The members of the jury are seated both left and right. To the right is the Garrison Commander as the public prosecutor, and to the left are the 5 dark elf defendants and their counsel.

My role is to stand guarantee for them.

Trials in Sedia are, of course, very different from those in modern Japan.

The verdict is still determined by a vote of majority among the jurors, but the greatest influence on their decision is the guarantor.

Furthermore, what is given weight is 'who the guarantor is' much more than 'what the guarantor says.'

I suppose it's along the logic of "if an upright person that everyone trusts is standing guarantee, then that's how trustworthy the defendant's testimony is."

In this case, though I'm the one saying it, I am currently the most upright person that everybody trusts the most in all Lelis. The very instant that the Great Wizard Gio Margils had agreed to be their guarantor, the dark elves had already almost been guaranteed an acquittal.

Now I understand why the Garrison Commander and Council Chairman had acted the way they did when I handed the girls over to the city guards.....

"I, wizard Gio Margils of Jiiteias, hereby swear that the judgment sword of Guras, the God of Justice, shall strike true today."

The thought “I seriously shouldn’t have underestimated fantasy” flits through a corner of my mind as I stand up to fulfill my duty and my promise to the Council Chairman. While facing both the jurors and all of the gathered citizens, I speak up to testify and provide a synopsis of what had happened.

Incidentally, Count Andel was the one who had proactively instructed me in trial etiquette, even though I never even asked him to.

“..... The cowardly Baron Koval took advantage of these dark elves to kidnap an innocent young girl who had taken good care of me.....”

Despite being in front of a fully packed plaza the size of several soccer courts, I don’t feel embarrassed or fear like before.

It seems that I am steadily growing accustomed to Great Wizard persona.

“..... The beautiful female magician from the Magician’s Guild successfully managed to evade his evil grasp by her own strength. And then..... together with the gallant city guards who had sworn their loyalty to the Council, as well as the adventurers burning with righteous indignation who wanted to serve as a shield for the citizens of the city, we all infiltrated the underground section of the Baron’s mansion.....”

Let’s not forget to give due mention to each and every source of help that we received.

“..... As a result of our investigation, we realized that the dark elves and a portion of the Demonists had actually been brainwashed by the priest. We know for sure that the terrible acts that they had committed were coerced, with zero regards to their personal will. With the name of the wizard Gio Margils on the line, here I assert that these girls are innocent.”

At the start, I did not know that the trial would be like this. But if this is the way of this world, then I feel no hesitation in abiding by — or using, actually — these rules.

In the first place, the Garrison Commander and Council Chairman didn’t even want the troublesome issue of the dark elves on their hands. Seeing this as an opportunity to buy a favor from me while washing their hands in the same stroke, there was no chance for the verdict to have gone any other way from

the start.

“I shall announce the verdict. Members of the jury have agreed unanimously that the defendants are innocent!”

“ “ “Our Oluri [Lord of Wanderers]!” ” ” ”

The moment the judge uttered the verdict, all of the dark elves shrugged off their handcuffs (like taking off a pair of gloves) and kneeled in a line before me.

..... Not that I didn't expect this, but it seems that even Leiha's subordinates are going to call me their 'Master' .....

“We have not the words to express our gratitude for our Master personally testifying on our behalf.”

“From this moment on, we will be your Shi [One Who Serves] alongside Leihanaluka-ane, dedicating the rest of our lives to repaying our debt to you.”

(T/N: Ane means 'elder sister.')

Amidst the floating confetti and the sounds of bugles and bells and cheers from the citizens, I feel a cold sweat coming over me.

As a man, I would be lying if I denied being happy about having these beautiful ladies in my service. If I let my guard down, my face might just crumble into a broad grin.

Being used to the confident attitude of a Great Wizard? That's fine, I suppose.

But having people kneel to me is going over the line, I think.

I sincerely pray with all my heart that these girls would not turn into a sweet poison for me.

# Chapter 51: Steward and Maid and Assassin

“Alright, next is grocery shopping for Gio-san’s dinner!”

“ “Yes, Mora ojou-sama!” ”

“Today we will make a salad with fresh vegetables! Gio-san won’t eat vegetables if there’s no sauce, so we’ll also visit lots of herb stores today!”

“ “Yes, Mora ojou-sama!” ”

(T/N: Ojou is like ‘my Lady,’ but has the connotation of being a young, unmarried lady, such as the daughter of the master.)

I still have quite a few things left to do, such as coordinating the personnel procurement for Jiiteias Castle and discussing the finer details of the transfer of guardianship status for the former Magician’s Guild magic solder trainees. As such, I am still staying in Irudo’s mansion at the moment.

Right now, I am watching the heartwarming scene of a very excited Mora strictly overseeing four of the dark elf girls.

I have yet to speak with them one on one, so I don’t know their particulars, but here is a list of their respective appearances and relative ages, in descending order.

Aruga is the eldest, with semi-long hair and a gentle disposition. Next is Rashil, the serious one with braids. The taciturn third daughter with very short hair is Gilma. And the energetic girl with short hair is the youngest one, Sasara.

Of course, they’re not actually blood-related. However, they were all raised together in the same clan, so they look like real sisters from the side.

Incidentally, all of them have transformed out of their tanned skin and pointed ears. It is because dark elves are generally viewed as an evil race..... not. In actual fact, the main reason is because they’ve become super famous from the trial, and a huge crowd gathers whenever they go outside.

The acquittal from the trial had set them completely free. But as expected, they insisted on serving me the rest of my life and refused to leave.

From now on, I am aiming to gather together every single country and force in the continent in an alliance against the Shadow Demons. With that in mind, honestly speaking, I would seriously appreciate having such excellent spies, so I officially accepted them as my subordinates. But at this moment in time, I don't really have anything for them to do.

As I myself am still just a freeloader, I can't very well burden my host with 5 more idle mouths.

Which is why all of them are currently serving as maids in Irudo's mansion.

Basic training in the Heikreuz clan apparently also included domestic chores, but they couldn't hold a candle to Mora, who had been running the mansion as the de facto lady of the house for many years.

On top of which, it seems that it's really obvious that I'm really soft on Mora, so they've been calling her 'ojou-sama' from the offset.

As for their superior, Leiha, she has assigned herself the role of being my bodyguard. She's constantly sticking close to me, but maintaining herself behind me or in other positions out of my sight.



"Everything considered, you were truly a massive help this time."

"Come now, what are you saying?"

"No, I'm serious. Without the help of you all, I wouldn't have been able to do anything."

Irudo had resumed his trading work, which had been put on hold during the disturbance.

Despite being so busy, he's still putting in lots of time into the matter of finding people for me to hire.

Indeed, the incident this time and the various work afterwards had strongly impressed upon me the importance of collaborators. No matter how great a wizard I am, there is a limit to what a single person can do.

As the dark elves and former magic soldier trainees will also be going to stay at Jiiteias Castle, we will definitely need people to run the place. Thinking like that, I realized that we are eventually going to need to gather several tens to hundreds of helpers.

“So, Irudo.”

“What may it be?”

“This is my first time telling you this. From now on, I am thinking of gathering nakama at Jiiteias Castle for the cause of protecting the world from Shadow Demons.”

“That’s..... I see, that’s indeed a grand enterprise that only Margils-sama would be capable of undertaking.”

“So, because of this, aside from those servants that I had asked you to help me find from before, please also inform me if you can think of anyone who might be likely to join me in my cause.”

“..... A pretty difficult request, but I will do everything in my power.”

At that time, the discussion had ended like that.

But a few days later, Irudo and Mora came to me with resolve in their eyes.

“Firstly, me as the steward of Jiiteias Castle. Then Mora as the person to serve you at your side. Then please also take in the three servants of my house as your retainers.”

“Sorry, what?”

“I beg of you! Gio-san, please take us along with you!”

The steward is someone who manages all of a house’s running and finances in place of the master.

If maids and menservants are the hands and legs of a house, then the steward is the brain. Without a steward, no matter the number of servants, the master would have to personally give out detailed instructions and calculate expenditure every day. As I am now trying to found a large organization, the

presence of such a person is absolutely crucial.

Having someone as reliable and trustworthy as Irudo take the position would be an absolute godsend. Of course, having Mora at my side — she whose skill at housework I have already confirmed firsthand, she who is already familiar with my temperament, she who knows that my true self is just a normal person — I would be lying if I say that I haven't entertained some hope for such an arrangement.

But still, with that said.

“Wait a moment. You have your current trading business, do you not? And what are you going to do with this house?”

“I am going to hand down both the business and the mansion to my cousin. I have already received permission from the Trader's Guild guildmaster — oh right, you know him better as the Council Chairman.”

“But, even Mora? The possibility of being targeted again by people like those Demonists is quite high.”

“Please pardon my discourtesy, but I wish to point out that with how deeply we have already become involved, there would be danger regardless of where we are.”

“Ugh.”

“Furthermore, it was actually Mora who first voiced this idea to me. In all likelihood, even if I don't come along, I suspect that Mora would still go with you by herself.”

“..... Muu.....”

Irudo has a point in regards to the danger. Rather, it might be even more dangerous for us to be split up between Jiiteias and Lelis.

It's just that..... This father/daughter pair had been living proper lives until I came, but now.....

“Margils-sama, I have been thinking it over for the past few days already.”

Seeing me looking torn and indecisive, Irudo leans forward towards me.

“I am but a humble merchant. But Margils-sama, what you are about to do is very likely going to go down in history. When I see this as a chance to support, to be a part of something so huge, my heart jumps in delight. This is no longer just me trying to repay my debt to you; this is now my own ambition.”

His own ambition, huh. I wonder if what I am about to do would truly be worthy of such words.

“Lastly, when you increase the number of your subordinates to a hundred, a thousand, or even more, how are you going to look after the livelihood and wages of them all? Just managing the maintenance and stocking of the castle and the repairs of your subordinates’ equipment would eat up all of your time. Do you have in mind someone else with the ability that you also know you can trust?”

(T/N: Ooo, that’s a low blow. He was the one tasked with the personnel searching. But oh well, Gio needs his butt kicked every once in a while lol.)

“When Gio-san is feeling down, the only one who can give you encouragement is..... well, there’s Claura-san and Leiha-san, but I can do it too!”

In the face of the combined attack of Irudo’s logic and Mora’s tears, I stood no chance at all.

“Very well. More like, I’m the one who wants to ask it of you two. Irudo. Mora. Please lend me your strength.”

# Chapter 52: Adviser and Student and Adventurer

I am currently holding a face-to-face with the servants who want to come along with Irudo and Mora.

“Since our job is to serve Danna-sama and Ojou-sama. It doesn’t matter to us where they go, we will follow.”

“Of course, Wizard-sama will become our Oodanna-sama, so we will also serve you to our utmost.”

(T/N: Whereas Danna in this context means ‘master,’ Oodanna means ‘great master.’ As in, they acknowledge him as the highest authority, since he is the master of their master.)

This smiling couple in the prime of their lives who are bowing to me are Sam and Anna.

They are the ones who had been accompanying Mora the time of our reunion at the city gate. They are the most senior among all the servants, hearkening from Irudo’s father’s time, and are the indispensable main force behind all of the mansion’s housework and miscellaneous tasks.

“It’ll be my first time working at a castle, but I’ve give it my all.”

The young man with sparkling eyes and a good physique is Zek.

He, too, is the son of a servant couple who had been with Irudo’s family since many long years ago. He is proficient at servicing the carriages used in caravans as well as making repairs to the mansion.

“It will indeed be a completely different environment. Though the change might require some effort getting used to, I place myself in your care.”

In addition to Irudo and Mora, these three people's lives are now also riding on my shoulders.

Feeling the pressure of that great weight, I naturally found myself bowing deeply before I knew it.



For the moment, that's enough personnel to handle the interior workings of the castle.

With that out of my mind, I can now focus on the handing off of the former magic soldier trainees.

Me taking over their custody is due to the arrangement that I had discussed with the Magician's Guild.

In exchange for having them give up on training magic soldiers and letting the trainees go, I have to teach them how to make golems. Furthermore, for those who want to come to my place but lack the aptitude, I also need to secure their employment at the Carbanera Knight Order or anywhere else they wish to go.

Among the 18 3<sup>rd</sup> generation trainees, only 3 asked to receive training from me at Jiiteias Castle.

There's Log, that boy who acted like the leader of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gens, and his follower and friend Teru. Then there's Daya, who wants to bring down the Shadow Demons that killed her father.

To be honest, I'm slightly relieved at the low number, because I don't know for sure whether or not I can really teach Sedians how to make golems.

In regards to the remaining 15, 7 wanted to join the Carbanera Knight Order, and the 8 others wanted to return to a normal life. The latter I entrusted with the Council Chairman, who found merchants and craftsmen able and willing to take them in. As for the former, I will be temporarily bringing them to Jiiteias Castle also, while I find time to go to White Sword Castle in person to host negotiations.

"To think that there really were Demonists within Lelis..... We of the

Magician's Guild will also have to give thought to our own countermeasures on this issue."

So said Heldol, guildmaster of the Magician's Guild, Lelis branch when I paid him a formal visit. As always, his hostility against me is still alive and well on the flip side of that handsome face of his. However, there have been so many changes recently that there's no time to worry about that.

"There really isn't much that I can do against such people. Although this might be a burden, I wish to entrust this to the Magician's Guild, who will always be standing beside the people of this town."

"..... And such is only natural. From now on, don't think that you'll be able to continue monopolizing the spotlight."

There was strength in his reply and his handshake. That strength made me think that, his feelings towards me aside, I can really trust this man in regards to his vigilance and sense of responsibility against Shadow Demons.

"Oh right, which reminds me. In regards to the magician that we are going to dispatch from our guild to learn those golem production techniques....."



"So it really is you."

"Why do you sound so matter-of-fact about it?!"

As expected, it's Claura.

With her usual wavy blond hair, almond-shaped green eyes, and great style. She is a magician (a profession worthy of high esteem by this world's standards), and she's the daughter of a Count.

Having a girl with such high specs officially staying under the same roof with me would undoubtedly be something to be happy about.

However, it's just that she is the person closest to me from the Magician's Guild, so there isn't even a shred of the element of surprise about this selection.

Whereas it was exactly as I had expected, frankly speaking, I find myself also a

tiny bit disappointed.

“I bet you wanted someone submissive like those dark elves, didn’t you? Having pretty and loyal servants kneel to you must have felt quite satis-”

“No, it’s the opposite.”

“-fying..... Eh?”

Indeed I am both glad and thankful for the dark elves swearing loyalty to me.

But.

“No matter how much I act as a Great Wizard, you and Sedam would never just follow my instructions blindly, right? What I really need from here on are such ‘collaborators’ who would give me their frank advice and honest opinion.”

If there are only people like the dark elves around me as I walk this path that I am on, I can say with certainty that I will ruin myself. Having someone who isn’t afraid of my power and who would point out my mistakes to me is highly important to me.

Which is why I think it very appropriate that she join me not as a subordinate, but with the standing of an outsider.

I think she understood everything that I’m trying to convey.

Looking bewildered, her eyes dart all around.

“A-, actually, I don’t really, er, mind, kne-, that’s, I mean.....”

“Nn? What?”

Her face is uncharacteristically red and she is mumbling unintelligently to herself. I try to peer into her face to see what’s wrong.

“Not that I didn’t think about it! I approve of the way you think!”

“Uoh..... wait a-”

She suddenly brings her face up, causing our noses to be almost touching.

When I try to draw my head back, her hands shoot out and firmly grasp my collar, stopping me from doing so.

“For the next while, I will be stationed at the castle as a trainee from the

Magician's Guild as well as your magic adviser. If I ever catch you being silly like you always are, I'll make sure to give you a thorough scolding. Prepare yourself!"

"Now that's the Claura I know. I'll be in your care."

When she stares straight at me with her usual proud attitude, I think her very beautiful. If only I was 10 or 15 years younger, or if she was older, I might actually have felt conscious about it.

That aside, I can't help but to smile a little at the very Claura-like response.

"Wha-, close! You're way too close!"

"Okay, you've got to be able to see how unreasonable that complaint is, right?"

After that, I was immediately slapped with a lecture on 'proper etiquette towards noble-like ladies.'



Despite her official standing as an outsider, Claura has properly become my nakama.

Which means that now I should go talk to the other person that I really want to join me.

So thinking, I went to..... Sedam the adventurer's house.

"It's the real Wizard-sama!"

"You beat all the Shadow Demons together with Dad, is that true?"

"We want to see a meteor!"

"Oh, please pardon the cramped space. To think that you would come all the way here in person....."

A completely unexpected scenery greeted me at Sedam's place.

The building itself is a pretty generic 3 storey house from among the relatively

richer citizens.

But the three children running around making the place feel even more cramped, and the beautiful lady gallantly trying to take care of them.....

“I’m really sorry for saying this, but this I did not see coming.”

“Yea, I get told that often.”

I had totally expected him to live in some removed hut inside the forest, or at least be single. But here he is, smiling wryly at me.

I mean, he did mention that he’s now 32, so it shouldn’t be surprisingly for him to have a wife, but.....

Now it somehow it feels hard to broach the subject.

“I already heard from Irudo. You’ve come to invite me to be your nakama, right?”

“Quick on the uptake as ever.....”

“I’m fine with it.”

It seems that rather than just waiting for my visit, he’s already been giving the idea some thought. His wife and kids are not particularly raising a fuss about it (well, his kids are raising a fuss, just not about this).

“Are you sure you’re not being a bit hasty with your decision? I mean, you’ve a family and all.....”

“My wife is totally fine with it. Of course, they can’t head over right now, but please think about making it so that my whole family can live there together within the next five years.”

“That’s something that I would have done even had you not requested it. Very well. I still don’t know what shape or form it will take, but I promise to arrange everything as soon as I can to make the place hospitable enough for entire families to stay together.”

Once I sort out the living environment over at Jiiteias Castle, then I might be able to call them over even before the 5 years are up.

“That would be a great help. By the way, what will my position be?”

“It’d be bad for you if you don’t get your salary, right? Which is why on paper, you will be an adventurer that I’m hiring for the while. However, I personally will be treating you as a ‘collaborator’ with equal authority as myself.”

Just like with Claura, what I hope for from Sedam is someone to keep watch over me so that I don’t grow self-conceited. Unfortunately, in his case, my only way to keep him on is by being his employer, but I doubt he’ll let that affect him much, for which I am grateful.

“Now that’s quite some role indeed. But well, no problem, I’ll take it on. Oh, one more thing. I actually have another request.”

“I’ll give it every bit of consideration that I can.”

“This one is just like a little extra something, since it’s related to my dream.....”

“Dream?”

Hearing this extremely practical and logical person bring up such a word caused me to tilt my head in bewilderment.

“Don’t laugh, alright? So, my dad was actually a relatively famous scholar from Shulendal.”

“Hou, is that so. I can totally see it.”

That explains his un-ranger-like breadth of knowledge. Since he must have grown up in a house littered with books and scrolls all over.

“Now he’s already dead, but there was something that he was searching for throughout his entire life. To be honest, the reason why I became an adventurer was also to look for that thing.”

“What is it? It sounds like something quite amazing.”

“Amazing? I mean, yea, I suppose it is, but.....”

After Claura, now I get to see an unexpected side to Sedam too. He is embarrassedly scratching his head.

“Its name is Kadol Bruez [Library of the Age of the Gods]. It was built by the first people who came to Sedia, and is the repository where all the knowledge

about the beginning of the world is stored. Of course, the official opinion of the academic world is that it doesn't exist."

"But you believe that it does, don't you."

"I'm not sure, to be honest. But it's just that if either of us ever come across information related to it..... I want to ask for your help with looking into it. Can I ask this of you?"

From his facial expression, it seems that even he does not fully expect to find this Kadol Bruez place. The fact that he is bringing it up must mean that he hopes my wizardry may turn up something, which in turn means that there really is a part of him who still yearns for the thrill of chasing a dream.

"I give you my word. We'll definitely find it, some day."

"Ye-, yea."

To my ears, it sounded more like I was just asked to 'find it and search for the mystery of this world.'" Although it hasn't come to my mind much recently, this might also give me a hint in regards to the intentions of the 'The Guardian' entity who transferred me here.

I was apparently a bit too enthusiastic while promising to search for Kadol Bruez, to the point where even Sedam drew back a bit. But regardless, we still exchanged a firm handshake over it.

# Chapter 53: Return

For now, I have gathered everyone that I wanted to bring to Jiiteias Castle with me.

Gathering nakama was simply a means and not an end, but it still gave me the feeling of having made some progress.

I actually wanted to set off for the castle immediately, but ended up being held back in Lelis for 3 more days.

Firstly, that was how much time it took to gather enough supplies for 30-odd people to travel to and stay at the castle for the next few months.

But then again, it was Irudo doing almost all of the running around, and all I did was cough up the funds.....

The other reason was because I got roped into joining the parade that was hosted to commemorate the eradication of the Demonists and the the city 'entering an alliance with the Great Wizard Margils.'

I had to sit on a specially made boat and make my way down the main canal while being showered with cheers and praise and falling flower petals and wine and water (I was like, 'what the heck?' but then apparently it was something like holy water).

For some reason that wasn't explained to me, Claura was sitting next to me the whole time. She looked embarrassed yet extremely satisfied by the end. All I felt was tiredness.

Almost all of the event went towards gathering popularity for the Council Chairman, but at the end, the terms of the contract that I had signed with Lelis were properly announced to all the citizens. To me, that was the most important part.

The main points are as follows:

- The city of Lelis cedes all territorial rights of Jiiteias Castle and its environs to wizard Gio Margils.
- The city of Lelis is now allied with wizard Gio Margils in regards to all matters related to the anti-anki cause.
- The city of Lelis will do all in its power to convince the other city-states of the Liuus Union to sign the same contract with wizard Gio Margils.

Of course, this was not something decided by the Council Chairman alone. These points were all decided and voted on at a Council meeting.

With this, I will now be able to move much more freely, as least in the area around Lake Liuus. Furthermore, with my relationship with Lelis as a foothold, I have gained a method of communication with Shulendal and the other countries.

Thanks to coming to this city, my aim has become a lot clearer, which seems to bode well for my path from here on.



“We can finally set off.”

We are gathered in the plaza before Lelis’ main gate.

Five carriages, and five horses for riding. I find myself feeling wonder once again while standing before this group of exactly 26 people.

Female magician, Claura Andel.

Adventurer, Sedam.

Sedam’s party members: the warriors Jilk and Ted, the scout Fijika, and the warrior priest Torad.

Former trading merchant, now my steward, Irudo.

Irudo’s daughter, my new Head of Maids, Mora.

The gardener Sam and his wife, Anna the chef. Carpenter, Zek.

Former assassin, now my Head of Intelligence, Leiha.

The 4 spy/maid dark elf sisters.

Former magic soldier trainees, now students studying golem production techniques: Log, Daya, and Teru.

The 7 other similarly former magic soldier trainees who will be staying with us until I can entrust them to the Carbanera Knight Order.

When I see everyone gathered like this, it is quite a spectacle.

Back during my time as a salaryman, I only had 3 or 4 subordinates.....

I was surprised when I heard that Sedam's entire party was also coming along, but apparently no one else has a family, so all of them were cool with it.

"Margils-sama. Before we set off, may we have a word from you?"

When Irudo says that like it's the most natural thing ever, everyone's gazes gathers towards me. That also includes those of the passersby surrounding us at a distance.

I gulp involuntarily.

I will have to shoulder the livelihood of all these people from this moment on.

To make myself feel the full weight of this burden, I look at each person's face, one by one.

Claura, Sedam, Irudo, and Mora look like their usual selves.

In the eyes of the former magic soldier trainee kids, I see anxiety, but also a strong light of hope.

The servants return my gaze with eyes full of trust.

The dark elves are all kneeling with head bowed, so I can't really tell.

A sense of responsibility and of purpose so powerful that I would never have imagined it back in Japan wells up from within me.

I realize that I myself am also being nurtured from their trust.

"Everyone. Once again, I offer my heartfelt thanks for coming along with me."

Maybe this is the bad effect of the Great Wizard mask. Even so, I have something that I really want to say to all these people gathered here — that their choice was the right one.

“We will now be heading for Jiiteias Castle. At the moment, it is but a tiny castle in the middle of nowhere. However! If all of you combine your strength together with mine, I truly believe that it will become the strongest fortress ever, protecting all peoples against the threat of the Shadow Demons!”

“ “We are your Shi! We shall follow our Oluri, Margils-sama, even should the land be swallowed by darkness!” ”

The ones who abruptly shouted out an oath of loyalty in sync were of course the dark elves.

“In representation of the Magician’s Guild, I too will lend you my full strength, wizard Gio Margils-dono.”

“Well, let’s take care of each other.”

Claura plucks the edge of her mantle and makes an elegant bow, while Sedam grins like usual.

The others are also clapping or pumping their fists into the air, so it seems that the reception is good.

However, when even the surrounding citizens begin cheering, it still elicits some discomfort in my heart.

“Alright, let’s set off now. Hurry up a bit.”

And that’s how we departed towards Jiiteias Castle.



There was only Claura and myself leisurely making our way down the Road of Law when I arrived at Lelis. Never did I imagine that I would even have carriages in tow when I left.

There were no bandits foolish enough to attack a group of this size, so we safely arrived at Jiiteias Castle 3 days later.

It wasn’t like the trip was entirely uneventful, though.

The most noteworthy problem was the fact that my [Meteor] had collapsed the mountain path between the Road of Law and the castle. I remember that was why the Carbanera knights and I had to take that precipitous side road the

last time I came.

The knights had fixed up that side road, but not to the point where carriages could use it.

Which is why I had to use wizardry to forcefully get over the collapsed portions. Specifically, I used a spell to summon an Air Elemental, who carried all the carriages and people across. The kids who were seeing my wizardry for the first time loved it.

Furthermore, when I restored the castle that had been lifted up some tens of meters with [Renovation]..... suffice it to say that they were surprised.

“Awawa..... the castle is.....”

“That’s unbelievable.....”

“We are going to receive training from someone this amazing.....”

“We were like that too not long ago, weren’t we.”

“The human ability to adapt to things is frightening indeed.”

The servants and trainees had their mouths so wide open with shock that their jaws seemed about to fall off. In contrast, the ‘adapted’ group like Mora and Sedam were just casting warm, understanding gazes at the former.



There were no particular problems with Jiiteias Castle due to the short-term vacancy.

As the sun was already setting, it was decided that the serious unpacking would start tomorrow.

“Well done making it here. From tomorrow onwards, I think that getting things all settled at the castle will make you all very busy, but for tonight, have as much fun as you like.”

“ “OHHH!” ”

Though short, this journey was the first job that this group accomplished together. Furthermore, it was also going to be their first night at Jiiteias Castle. With those two things in mind, it became decided that the first thing to do was

throw a party.

A huge bonfire was lit in the middle of the courtyard, and benches were brought out for everyone to sit on.

Irudo brought out the sake and cooking and snacks lavishly, and the castle that had fallen still and quiet became filled with energy all at once.

“Alright, shall this oji-san reveal a hidden talent of mine?”

The middle-aged warrior (wait, no, he’s around my age) Jilk revealed a truly unexpected skill of his.

Skillfully strumming a stringed instrument similar to a guitar, he began playing a very jovial tune.

“I’ll daance~!”

“I’ll sing.”

“I’ll grab my flute!”

“Guess I’ll dance too.”

Without a moment’s delay, the 4 dark elf sisters also began dancing, singing, and playing a flute alongside the music.

“You guys also eat up. Come on, eat up!”

“B-, but.....”

“Can we really eat something this good.....”

“Gio-san wouldn’t say stingy things like that! Eat as much as you can, then grow as quickly as you can, so that you can study as much as you can!”

The young boys and girls who were being reserved in the face of such a feast (by their standards) got a little scolding from Mora, who was acting like a big sister.

Watching all this happening, I felt completely at ease.

It’s not like I’ve lived in this castle for any prolonged period of time, but I’ve apparently already grown a bit attached to it.

Though that might have been due in part to the sense of achievement from

how far my nakama and I have come.....

Incidentally, Irudo had already been KOed by the sake since quite a while ago.

“Goodness, why does he become like that after getting only a little sake in him.”

“..... Do you have any right to be saying that? You’re also pretty drunk, aren’t you?”

“Well, tonight is just that sort of night after all. It’s important to let off steam every once in a while when it comes to work.”

Sedam, Claura, and I are occupying the best seats for watching the dark elf opera troupe.

This needs not be said, but Leiha is standing behind me, as always.

“Hear, hear! I knew that Sedam would get it!”

I recovered from the boorish counsel of a woman through the passionate friendship between men while repeatedly clapping Sedam on the back.

“..... But with that said, there are a ton of things to do starting from tomorrow. First is getting the castle in order. That collapsed mountain road needs to be repaired, and..... oh, right.”

“..... What is it.”

Sedam looked annoyed by my extended invitation of passionate friendship as he changed the subject.

That’s the limit of what friendship between men amounts to, after all.

“We need to gather soldiers. Whatever we want to do, we are going to need soldiers.”

“Furthermore, we will need a strategist who can instruct us on how we should move from here on.”

“.....”



Though my drunkenness was completely blown away thanks to the two’s

helpful advice, I found my bed as comfortable as if I had been using it for years.

Last time I stayed here, I was all excited about a 'mancave' or whatever, but this time it's completely different.

The instant before I fell asleep, I realized it.

"I see. So this place..... has become my 'home' ....."

# Chapter 54: Starting with Wei

The morning of the next day, we began the actual work of moving in.

First was cleaning the interior of the castle from corner to corner, and mending all the damaged areas. After that was placing all the furniture, household goods, everyday necessities, and foodstuffs in their respective locations.

The figure of Irudo rapidly delegating tasks and roles to the servants, adventurers, trainee boys, and even the dark elves fully earned my admiration.

Last time during the Shadow Demon subjugation operation, the Carbanera knights only stayed here, so there wasn't much damage. Zek's skill as a carpenter was also better than I had expected, so the repairing went along smoothly.

The cleaning squad was commanded by Mora. She, with the dark elf sisters who kept on calling her 'Ojou-sama' and a few of the trainees, polished the castle up until it was positively gleaming.

Sedam and the other adventurers also played a very active role, being called on for anything ranging from heavy lifting to detailed tasks like mending curtains.

I turn my back on the courtyard from where the lively sounds of teamwork is resonating. Claura and I both let out a groan from the respective sides of the table at which we are seated at.

"For now, can we just put all the children together in the largest room?"  
(Claura)

"There are 10 of them at the moment. Since 7 of them will eventually be going to the Order, we can let them stay together until then." (Gio)

"Since Sam and Anna are a couple, we can put them together into one servant

room. Then how about Mora and Fijika together in the next room?" (Claura)

"Good idea." (Gio)

On top of the table is a rough sketch of Jiiteias Castle that Sedam had drawn for us. And right now, Claura and I are discussing the room distribution.

Or so I say, but the large majority of what's going on here is Claura giving out her opinions and me nodding to them, so maybe it's only Claura who's actually working here.

"This room for attendants just happens to be for 5 people, which makes it appropriate to assign to the dark elves."

"There's no need, Okugata-sama. We have no need of a room."

" " ..... " "

(T/N: Okugata means 'wife of a nobleman.' I can't just use 'my Lady' because that's how ojou is also to be translated, but the latter carries the connotation of being an unmarried, younger lady of the family. To keep the distinction, both will be transliterated only.)

Once again, this needs not be said, but Leiha is currently positioned beside me.

I was under the impression that I had already resolved the misunderstanding that Claura is my wife, but for some reason Leiha's method of addressing hasn't changed.

However, it seems that Claura's already given up trying to correct them, so I'm just treating it as the dark elves' own unique title, just like the way they call Mora 'Ojou-sama.'

Rather, what gave us pause was how low the dark elves' view of themselves are..... to be frank, it's to the point of being demeaning.

Even though everyone has already gotten used to the dark elves these past few days, they themselves have still yet to drop the attitude and behavior of a slave.

"Ah..... Leiha....."

“Leihanaluka-san? If you truly intend to call yourselves this person’s attendant — his Shi — then you must not do things that would tarnish your Lord’s authority.”

Before I manage to find what words to say, Claura speaks up with the tone of educating a child.

“Wh-, what do you mean by that.....”

“‘The wizard Margils is incapable of even giving his attendants a proper livelihood’..... what would you do if someone scorning him says something like that?”

“.....!? Tha-, that’s.....”

“‘By looking at the subordinates, one can know the master. And by looking at the master, one can know the standard of the subordinates.’ That maxim is common sense in the world of nobility. If you are truly proud of following this person, then proudly accept the treatment befitting of your station.”

“Okugata-sama.....”

Ohhh, as expected of the daughter of a Count. What an impressive logical exposition. It’s a way of thinking that I, who had been taught since young that everyone is equal, would never have arrived at.

“Guh?!”

As I am gazing at Leiha, who is looking downwards with hand pressed to mouth in amazement, I got a kick under the table, right in my shin.

Of course, it was in a position that Leiha couldn’t see.

“.....! .....!!”

Claura seems to be urging something from me while indicating Leiha with her eyes.

..... This is.....

“Ye-, yea, she’s right. Leiha. From here on, I am going to need you dark elves to play a very active role. With that in mind, can I also also trouble you all to accept this treatment that befits such a role? After all, there might be other

talented people who would come wanting to follow me due to seeing how I treat you all.”

I think I was able to put to words something appropriate with the idiom “starting with Wei” in mind (though I think the current generation has a slightly different interpretation). After all, it is true that I want to treat them well.

(C/N: Finally get to explain this chapter’s title. It is a Japanese idiom derived from a classical story from the Chinese Warring States period. King Zhao of Yan asked Guo Wei how he can attract wise men to join his court, to which Guo Wei replied, “First treat mediocre people like your subject here with favor. Then wise men will gather on their own accord.”)

“My Lord..... Okugata-sama..... I shall accept, though this is too great an honor for this self.....!”

Even though we were just talking about not lowering yourself so much..... oh well, I guess we can take it one step at a time.



With this and that, the room distribution was finally finished.

The following was written onto the rough map of the castle.

Main Tower

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor: Margils

Residential Hall

Room for knights: Sedam *Claura* Irudo

Small room for attendants (x2): the 5 dark elves /

Torad & Ted & Jilk & Zek

Room for servants: Sam & Anna / Fijika & Mora

Large room for soldiers: all 10 of the former magic soldier trainees

To be honest, I wanted to give everybody their own room, but of course I wasn’t unreasonable enough to press for it.

Thankfully, there were no particular complaints.



“Fuoo.....”

After the afternoon work and dinner, I was relaxing in the bath.

This world also has the custom of using baths (though not to the degree of using it everyday like in modern Japan), so there was already a bathtub in Jiiteias Castle. However, there’s no gas heater nor water service, so the tub has to be filled with hot water every single time.

I meant to prepare it myself, as it’s just a personal enjoyment, but.....

“Gio-san, is the hot water enough?”

“Ye-, yea, it’s perfect.”

I got found out by Mora when I was carrying the bathtub, who then wrested all the preparatory work away from me.

All 5 dark elf sisters made a bucket relay carrying hot water up, so the bath really is hot and feels absolutely great, but.....

“Having girls do heavy labor for the sake of my own bath..... I think it might be better if I just used a spell or two.....”

“This isn’t heavy labor at all~ From now on, Gio-san is officially my Go-, Goshujin-sama after all. Please allow us to be of more use to you!”

(T/N: Fun fact. Just like danna, goshujin can mean either ‘master’ or ‘husband.’)

“Muu.....”

I just realized that this is the flip side of what Claura said earlier.

Since they truly want to work for me, then I should gladly accept their feelings.

“..... By the way, I want to get out now though.”

“Understood! I’ll wipe you down then!”

Un. Sorry, but that I can’t accept.



“Margils-sama, please take a look at this.”

The next morning, Irudo and Sedam showed me a sheet of paper, On it was a point form list of the things that I need to do.

Here they are, all 4 of them:

1. Repairing the road to the castle
2. Procuring soldiers to guard the castle and road
3. Taking control over the villages in the domain
4. Procuring a steady source of funds

“First of all, you’ve got it make it possible for people to get in and out of the castle even without the help of your wizardry.”

Sedam began his explanation. It’s true that only having the shortcut is inconvenient, and it was me who destroyed the mountain road in the first place.

“Next, and I’ve already mentioned it last night, but you need soldiers. When you’re here, we have almost nothing to fear when it comes to fighting, but the responsibility to maintain public order on the mountain road and the nearby territory has now fallen on you. You can’t very well wander here and there and everywhere everyday, right?”

“We would need at least 30 soldiers at our current state.”

Maintaining public order, huh. I think I remember the Carbanera Grand Cross mentioning something to that effect when he ceded the castle to me. To be honest, I’m a bit reluctant to hire 30 more people on top of our current number, but..... I guess I’ve got to learn to stop reacting so much to ‘merely’ 30 people, huh.

“..... That’s fine, then. But ‘villages in the domain’? What’s that? I thought there’s only Yuule Village around here.”

“Oi oi, the Knight Order guys said that there are 3 villages of hunters and lumberjacks inside the forest, didn’t they?”

“..... Did they? And this ‘domain’ thing..... does that mean that those villages

are part of our domain?”

“Please say ‘my,’ not ‘our.’ But yes, they are. You can collect taxes and labor from them, but on the other side, you also have the duty to give them protection.”

“Wait, wait, wait. The Knight Order only gave me this castle, you know. There was no mention of any villages.....”

A cold sweat accompanied my contention, but Sedam and Irudo merely looked at each other. What is with those puzzled faces.

“Margils-sama, castles are built for the purpose of defending land. So it naturally follows that the area around the castle would also belong to the lord of the castle.”

“Didn’t Lelis already proclaim that they’ve ceded ‘all territorial rights of Jiiteias Castle and its environs’ to you? So there’s no problem at all.”

“More like, that in itself is a problem.....”

Mu mu.....

I feel like I can no longer just say “I don’t really want the territorial rights~” by this point in time.

The amount of responsibility seems to have gotten a ton heavier all of a sudden.....

“My Lord!”

Though it needs not be said, Leiha is stationed beside me. It is extremely rare for her to proactively join a conversation not related to her.

“What is it, Leiha?”

“Please pardon my forwardness. However, it is this one’s humble opinion that every single person blessed with the privilege of living inside the domain of the Great Wizard whose greatness can be hidden by neither heaven nor earth would feel naught but sheer delight for the fact.”

“.....”

I think that Leiha speaking out her opinion like this is her way of processing

what she was told yesterday.

..... Saying all that about me, is she trying to imply that I should also stop lowering myself?

More like, isn't this "the person who said it should do it first," the modern interpretation of "starting with Wei"?

"Oh alright. Then in the near future, I'll give each of those villages a visit, tell them that they can be relieved about having a new feudal lord."

At that moment, I did not yet realize it.

Actually, no, maybe I was just trying to not see it.

The fact that it was the first step towards the task of 'founding a nation.

# Chapter 55: The Road Passes Through

“Well then, what’s this about funds procurement?”

I was still a bit shell-shocked from having suddenly become a feudal lord with responsibility over 3 villages. But I gathered myself back together and turned towards Irudo.

I’m now inquiring about the fourth item on the list that he and Sedam had made of pending issues I need to address.

“So far, all of our funds had been coming from Margils-sama’s own pocket, but we can’t continue doing that indefinitely.”

“Hmm, that’s true.”

“Even if we start collecting taxes from our villages and the caravans that use our roads, the total would not amount to much. We need to create a source of revenue.”

Inside my Infinity Bag is enough to comfortably feed everyone here at the castle for 10 to 20 years, but I get Irudo’s point.

After all, if an organization cannot earn enough to sustain its own operating costs, then it cannot be called healthy by any standards.

“Fortunately, I have friendly relations with Senpu Village. How about let’s make a trade route connecting that place, Jiiteias Castle, and Lelis?”

“I see. Making this castle the relay stop between Senpu Village and Lelis, huh.”

Isn’t Yuule Village currently serving that role?

I nod while recalling the large map that I had hung up in my study in the tower.

“If we do so, at least 5 or 6 caravans would come by the castle, allowing us to

earn quite a bit from passage toll and lodging fees.”

“If it’s you saying so, then I’m sure it will be like that. Let’s move towards that direction, then.”

“Thank you very much. Aside from this, actually, I had something that I wanted to consult with Margils-sama on.”

“Nn, speak.”

His question turned out to be whether I had any spells at my disposal that could be of help in regards to the construction of the trade route.

“U—n, I don’t think there are any such convenient spells.....”

“Is that so? I apologize for asking for something impossible. In this case, then it seems we have no other choice but to again rely on Margils-sama for the funds..... We are going to need an enormous amount of laborers and materials, so.....”

“I don’t mind. Actually, no, wait a second.....”

‘Laborers’ made the connection for me.

“No worries. I have the perfect spell for this. Labor costs is something that we won’t have to worry about. Hmm, no, we’d still need people to do detailed work as well as the actual architectural designing.”

“Is that so! As expected of Margils-sama. Things like the designing we can commission the dwarves to do, so there’s no problem.”

And thus, because of this discussion, Irudo promptly headed towards Senpu Village to make the negotiations. Of course, besides we trade route, we’d also need help with the restoration of the mountain path.

I have confidence that he would get great results for me. For his escort, I assigned all of Sedam’s party members, so there are no worries on that end.



Without Irudo present, there is no point in me visiting the villages by myself, as I cannot do the necessary coordinating by myself.

Which is why I went to White Sword Castle to hand over the former magic

soldier trainees in the meantime.

The running of the castle I left to Mora, and the security I left to the 4 dark elf sisters.

On the day of departure, the 10 kids all gathered in the central courtyard, and there were a lot of tears and hugs as the 3 who are staying and the 7 who are leaving said their farewells.

I was worried that there would be a lot of suppressed crying on the road to White Sword Castle, but my fears turned out to be unfounded. These are kids who had managed to live through the terrible conditions of that place. By the time the majestic appearance of White Sword Castle came into view, all of them were already back to their normal selves.

When I was making the journey from Lelis to Jiiteias Castle, I had already sent a messenger to White Sword Castle explaining everything, so the reception of the young boys went smoothly.

They are apparently going to be assigned miscellaneous tasks and also given basic training for the next 5 years. Those who turn out to have the aptitude would then be accepted as knight trainees.



“I am deeply thankful for accepting my request. If any issues come up, please contact me immediately.”

“It’s been a long while since we last had young ones joining us, so we’re the ones who are thankful. We of the Carbanera Knight Order will take responsibility and look after them.”

It feels like it’s been ages since I last saw the Grand Cross. He’s smiling like a good-natured old man at the children, all of whom are petrified from nerves. But still, the color of his face is bad.

“That aside, it seems that your health has taken a turn for the worse.....”

“Fufu. I heard that you have the power to heal illnesses, don’t you.”

So he already knows about me saving the Council Chairman from being poisoned. Poison and illness are separate things..... but well, it’s true that I can

heal illnesses too.

“Unfortunately though, this is merely old age. I probably only have about a year left.”

“I’m still not going to be Arnogia-dono’s backer, though.”

“What a pity.”

While we were having that sort of conversation—

“Wizard-dono!!”

“It’s been a while!”

“Th-, thank you for making the trip here.”

The siblings Gillion and Lioria, as well as Arnogia, all came in.

“Wizard-dono, I have an earnest request to make!”

“Please listen to our request!”

“Y-, you two, no need to be that rushed.....”

These three are getting along a lot better since last time, aren’t they? And the Grand Cross too, there’s quite a bit more warmth in his eyes when he looks at them, even with Gillion there.

The request from these three turned out to be “please summon the same ogres as last time for us to train against.”

It is true that the Carbanera Knight Order is going to have to get a lot stronger to fight properly against the Shadow Demons.

“I don’t mind, of course. Wait, rather than that.....”

My [Create Ogre Platoon] creates 6 ogres that continue to exist for 3 days.

So, I offered to come to White Sword Castle once every two weeks to resummon ogres for training use. They immediately accepted happily.

Then they got worried for me, asking if it was alright for me to be away from Jiiteias that frequently. When I explained that I can use [Teleport] when I am alone, which is a spell that enables me to instantaneously travel to any place I am familiar with, I got three very different responses:

“It seems that there’s no point at all in worrying about Wizard-dono.”

“I wouldn’t have minded coming out to greet you though.....”

“Do you have a spell that can make it quick and easy for me to become the strongest?”

That last one, oi.



“De—yah!”

“Gyau!?”

Since I’m here, they also had me sit in on their training. And to my surprise, it seems that both Gillion and Lioria have gotten strong enough to defeat an ogre 1 on 1. Last time, Lioria was already able to beat an unarmed ogre, so her opponent this time was armed. Gillion’s was unarmed, but he had gotten markedly better than before.

No surprise, they were both completely exhausted afterwards. But at this rate, the day when they are capable of facing off against 2 at the same time might not be that far off.

“Platoon 1, switch to defense! Platoon 2, circle around from the right, then attack!”

“ “Ohh!” ”

Unfortunately, Arnogia’s combat strength hasn’t changed much from last time. His ability as a commander, however, has been making smooth progress. With 10 knights, he is able to go toe-to-toe with 2 ogres, which is very impressive when compared with how it went last time.

“Ohh, well done indeed.”

I expressed my honest praise along with applause.

If there is ever a ‘next time,’ I would be able to trust them with my back.



The night I returned to Jiiteias Castle.

The cleaning and repair work of the castle has been completely finished, and everybody is resting inside their respective rooms. Irudo's group is scheduled to return two days later.

I am currently deep in thought sitting here in the study. The room is illuminated by the [Light] spell that I had attached to the ceiling earlier.

What can I do to earn funds?

Just like what Irudo had said, if we can establish a trade route to Senpu Village, then it would indeed generate a certain amount of revenue.

However, what we stand to earn is at most only what Yuule Village is currently earning. That might possibly be enough for Jiiteias Castle in its current state, but if I am to continue gathering allies and expanding the scale of my operations, then I'm no longer so sure.

While I sip at my cup of cooled-down Shil tea, my mind races on.

The fastest way is probably me creating some magic item and selling it.

Healing Potions, Antidote Potions, magic arms and armor, or perhaps even the aforementioned golems.

I have yet to see one of this world's magic items. In other words, they are that rare. Consumables that lose effect after a single use, such as potions and scrolls, are apparently being produced by the Magician's Guild in small numbers.

The production of and ownership over those so-called magic swords and magic armors are limited solely to royalty, great nobles, and people on the level of being called heroes or great magicians.

With that in mind, if I make potions and sell them, I would be able to earn a lot.

However, there are two problems with this idea: 1) it takes me 3 days to make a single potion, and 2) I would be stealing the Magician Guild's profit.

(T/N: And he's not worried about stealing Yuule's profit?)

I suppose there is also the option of crafting a very small number of super powerful items beyond what the Magician's Guild can make, and then selling them to extremely wealthy people.

“But that’s no good. I become nothing more than a magic item craftsman.”

The idea seemed good at first, but had to be scrapped almost immediately. More like, if the method still needs me in the end, then it misses the point.

Leiha is currently on standby in the neighboring room per my order, so I can freely talk to myself (it was only later that I learned that the single wall separating the rooms did almost nothing in the way of soundproofing).

Hmmm.....

My current self is like a businessman who has the funds to start up a venture business but has no prospect of making it profitable.

“..... My hip hurts.....”

I turn my upper body without standing up. What comes into my line of sight is the ‘Continent of Sedia, Central Area’ map that I had hung on that wall.

The name ‘Jiiteias Castle,’ as well as the villages that are part of my ‘domain,’ are all properly marked on there.

When I look at it like this, my castle looks like it’s situated quite close to the middle of this Central Area.....

“A trade route reaching up to Senpu Village would be.....”

On the map, the lines representing highways radiating from Lelis towards Shulendal and Reind’Dal and Ran Bolt look all connected, like an aorta.

(T/N: Countries to the north, east, and south.)

One of those lines stops at Yuule Village.

I tentatively tried penciling in the Lelis ↔ Jiiteias Castle ↔ Senpu Village trade route that we are about to build.

“..... This line, wouldn’t it become something amazing if it reached all the way here?”

Mentally, I continued extending the line that had stopped at Senpu Village eastward, through the mountain range in that location..... until it reached the metropolis marked with large letters as ‘Filsand.’