

Mayoeru Yosoji no Kenkokuki

~Joushiki ga Jama de Ore TUEE Dekinai~

Arc 4

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Chapter 70: The Young Girl of Stars and Sword

“What a great honor it is to meet the famed Margils-sama of the rumors!”

As we were walking towards the giant (it feels like I am almost excessively over-using that word) arch at the entrance of Senpu Village, we were addressed by a male dwarf.

“Ah, apologies for the belated introduction. I am Fablu of Rimulon [Clan of Merchants]. The Chief of Zamuslon [Clan of Rulers] has tasked me with being your guide.”

In comparison with most other dwarves, he looked a bit thinner and was wearing much more extravagant clothes. While fixing his slipping eyeglasses, he introduced himself.

As expected of dwarves, they even have eyeglasses.

“Thank you for coming all the way out here. We are in your hands.” (Gio)

“So can we meet that Chief right now?” (Irudo)

“Unfortunately, his schedule is a bit packed with meetings today. Would tomorrow morning first thing be acceptable?” (Fablu)

With Irudo along, I don't have to worry about any of the detailed arrangements, I can just take it easy.

Since the conference with the Chief was going to be tomorrow, guest rooms were arranged for us.

“Well then, welcome to Senpu Village.”

And thus we passed through the gate of Senpu Village, which was flying a complicated crest that was a combination of an axe, a hammer, a protractor, a ruler, and a compass.



“My goodness, this one also looks wonderfully made.”

“Okugata-sama, this pendant has three layers of engraving.....!”

Inside the gate, everything is of course made of stone.

Despite being a dwarven village, the ceiling is very high, not inferior in the least when compared to arcades in Japan.

(T/N: For the Japanese, the word ‘arcade’ (transliterated straight to Japanese from English) refers to a large glass-covered street lined on both sides by various stores (ex. boutiques, fast food chains). Think Royal Arcade in Melbourne. Here are some Tokyo examples.)

According to the explanation by our guide Fablu, the first floor of Senpu Village is for associating with the various other races, including humans, so it was designed to have plenty of space.

True to fact, there are also a large number of humans besides ourselves coming to and fro. It seems that the majority of them are merchants from Lelis who’ve come here to do business.

“Okugata-sama, please take a look at this hand mirror. The reflection would not be like this if the glass was not of a very high degree of transparency.”

“Oh my, how true. And this accessory based on the motif of thorns is also so very delicate and splendid.”

Right after entering, first thing we did was go to the exchange counters close by and charge our recognition plaques with cash.

Of course, the record is not electronic. The exchange counter simply punched the amount into the plaques, in dwarven code.

Every time a purchase is made at a store, the recognition plaque is amended. Then the whole account will be settled all at once when leaving Senpu Village.

But even though we’d charged the plaques just now, they are already in danger of running dry.....

“This necklace..... every single pearl is engraved with the crest of one of the

Eight Pillar Gods..... all I can do is sigh in admiration.” (Claura)

“Despite their thick fingers, how can the dwarves do such fine work?” (Leiha)

On both sides of the four carriage-wide passageway are stores selling dwarven-made goods.

In front of the stores selling jewelry and ornaments, there are large crowds of humans gathered..... And the ones being the most boisterous among them all are the two flowers of our Jiiteias Castle.

‘Focal point,’ our companions left behind at Jiiteias Castle, the coming negotiations with the dwarves and Filsand. In the face of so many worries, being healed by a guileless scene like this might not be such a bad thing.



“Oi, it’s about high time to make them stop.”

Several tens of minutes later.

Having run out of patience, Leid pushes my back.

“No no no. Such an important task, I’ll entrust it to you.”

“Don’t you screw with me. They’re your women.”

“That’s not how it is, alright? Kindly refrain from using such an easily misunderstandable choice of words.”

In retaliation to the incredible amount of strength that he’s putting into his hand, I desperately brace my legs.

The issue is only trivial — the ladies are only releasing an aura that is making it a little hard for us to approach.

..... I kind of feel like after coming here, Leid and I have gotten a lot more familiar with each other.

In the middle of our unproductive pushing contest, Irudo suddenly whispers to me.

“Margils-sama, there are some humans that I have never noticed before. Most likely, they are merchants from Filsand.”

“Hou?”

Indeed, there are several men wearing not the clothing common to merchants from Lelis or Yuule, but white turbans and mantles that simply shout “foreign country!” gathered together in the direction that Irudo is indicating towards.

Among them, several are armed and giving off a soldierly vibe. The stars-and-sword sigil on their shields is, according to Irudo, the insignia of Filsand.

The amount of commerce between Filsand and Senpu Village is ‘a trickle,’ if I remember correctly. At least, it is almost paltry in comparison to that with Lelis.

After gazing at the men from Filsand for a while, Claura and Leiha finally comes back.

“It’s been a while since I’ve enjoyed such high quality goods..... What’s the matter?”

“No, it’s nothing. Alright, can you lead us to our rooms now?”

“Yes of course, please follow me.”

Is this a common occurrence? Fablu unhesitantly transitions from composedly looking on at the ladies to resuming his duties as a guide.

Right before I was about to follow him, Leiha slips next to me and whispers to me.

“My lord. At the next chance, how about gifting Okugata-sama with something she likes? Even just now, she was waiting for it.”

As I keep saying, that’s not how it is!



“Ohhh, this is.....”

“What a sight to behold.....”

Upon following Fablu down the large passageway, we once again find ourselves looking upwards with our mouths hanging open.

At the end of the passageway is a gigantic dome-like hall. The ceiling and walls are dotted with light sources.

What further draws our eyes is the straight pillar standing right in the middle of the hall. There are branches extending from it perpendicularly from a position near the ceiling.

The countless light sources illuminating the pillar reflect off it, giving the entire hall a dazzling, phantasmal atmosphere.

Fablu keeps on walking composedly, so we follow. When we draw close to the pillar, we notice that the entirety of it is composed of crystal.

The base of the crystal pillar had been hollowed out to make it possible to go in and out of it. Within the pillar, there are boxes made of glass-like crystal going up and down.

“This is..... what could it be?” (Claura)

“Perhaps some piece of art?” (Leiha)

Claura, who seems to have improved her impression of the dwarves, and Leiha are whispering to each other. While listening to that, I feel a shiver going down my back.

“Don’t tell me this is..... an elevator?”

“Ohh, what an eye you have. That’s right!”

Fablu rearranges his glasses, looking proud.

“That box inside the pillar automatically moves up and down using hydropower. The gears have been calibrated so that the boxes stop at the bottom and the top for 20 seconds each. Please be mindful of the time while stepping on or off.”

“?”

The construct is apparently not as complicated as the elevators in modern Japan. It only repeats going to the top floor and the bottom floor.

Since they have cranes, it wouldn’t be strange at all for them to have elevators. But for it to run on hydropower, that’s simply astonishing. I don’t know how many times I’ve said it by now, but dwarves are amazing.

However, it seems that Clauro and Leid don’t really grasp the concept of an

elevator.

“Incidentally, why did it have to be made out of crystal?” (Gio)

“Ahh, I also had that question before. According to someone from Tesroun [Clan of Inventors], “that somehow seems cooler” is apparently the answer.”
(Fablu)



Claura and the others still look unconvinced, but well, actually experiencing it would be a lot faster than any further explanation.

“Will it really be fine?” (Claura)

“Who knows what the dwarves are ever thinking about?” (Leiha)

For humans, the capacity is 3 people, so Claura, Leiha, and I are together.

There is no need to operate any buttons, so we just have to stand inside. After the stand-by period timed out, there is a ‘gatan’ sound, after which the box begins to rise up.

“Oh.” (Gio)

“Kya.” (Claura)

I had expected some degree of jerk, but it was strong enough to warrant me propping myself up with my staff.

All around us is crystal and thus transparent. The illusion that we’ve been thrown off into midair elicits a small amount of vertigo. As I attempt to recover my balance, I feel something soft colliding with me.

“Uoh?! Are you alright?”

It turns out to be Claura, who had lost her balance and grabbed my arm to support herself. No matter how much of a dried-up old man I may be, this feeling of something soft and elastic being glued to my arm still makes blood rise to my head.

In spite of that, I still manage to stand my ground. But then Leiha comes into my line of sight.

“My lord.”

She quickly reaches out a hand to support me. I think.

In actual fact, her hand ends up pushing Claura's back, accidentally causing Claura and I to be pushed even closer together.

"Wait a-..... uoohh!?"

"Auh."

Unable to withstand the additional elasticity and pressure, I end up falling on my butt.

Of course, with Claura's body still hanging onto me the entire time, beautiful curves and all.

"P-, pardon me....." (Claura)

"Please accept my apologies, my lord."

Claura looks purely embarrassed, but for some reason Leiha looks kind of..... satisfied?

I don't really get it, but I don't think there's any need to reproach her. I'm sure she also has moments when she feels like playing a prank. I know full well that she would not do something like this if there was even a hint of a suspicious presence.

Furthermore..... to be honest, that wasn't such a bad thing to happen to me, as a man.

Right when this thought is causing a smile to come over my face —

"....."

I realize that there is a young girl standing before my eyes. In other words, we had reached the upper floor.

In short, the young girl is breathtakingly beautiful.

In many more words, she has red eyes, pale blond hair done up in twintails, and is wearing a cute yet extravagant dress with a short hem. She looks middle school age, or barely high school age. In one hand is a slender staff reflecting a silvery gleam.

In front of such a girl, I am on my butt and hugging Claura with one hand.

While looking down with eyes of disillusionment at sharp odds with her lovely face, she takes one step to the side.

With a second look, I see that behind her are several people who seem to be her attendants and guards. Taking their cue from her, they also move aside. In other words, “get off already” is what they’re trying to say.

“Oh dear, we are so sorry.”

“Pardon us.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

We hurriedly stand up and get off the elevator. Having exposed my embarrassing self to a young child pains my heart quite a bit.

After nodding in salutation with a thin, cold smile, she passes by me and enters the box.

On the staff in her hand is the stars-and-sword sigil.

Chapter 71: Entrance of the Tunnel

The next day.

The negotiations with Gald-shi, the Chief of Zamuslon [Clan of Rulers], de-facto ruler of Senpu Village went so smoothly that it was almost anti-climatic.

But then again, since Irudo had already done all the preliminary work, I suppose it was only natural.

Both opening a trade route with Jiiteias Castle and entering the anti-Shadow Demon alliance were apparently fully in line with the interests of Senpu Village, so Gald-shi was more than happy to sign on.

Especially, as they are apparently in short supply of fuel such as wood, he was absolutely delighted when I offered to export the massive stock that we were gathering at Jiiteias Castle due to the large scale reclamation.

As for the alliance, Shadow Demons are equally a problem for the dwarves, so he agreed to join almost immediately.

Apparently, the reports of my previous achievements had had a large effect on this outcome.

Furthermore, when I brought to the table my idea of the trade route extending all the way to Filsand, they gave me a condition but otherwise promised to consider it favorably.



“Without further ado, Magician-dono, please.”

“I’m a Wizard, though. Anyways, here I go.”

Right now, I am outside of Senpu Village, along with several dwarven authority figures.

In this rock-strewn wilderness that looks completely unsuitable for

agriculture, there are numerous curiously-shaped constructions here and there. Of course, the gigantic dwarven statue is also visible in the distance.

As for what we are doing in this wilderness.

“Take a good look with your own eyes and assess how useful my servant would be.”

Their condition for extending the trade route to Filsand is to dig an extremely long tunnel through the mountain east of Senpu Village.

In the meeting just now, the dwarves said that they wanted to confirm how useful my wizardry would be in regards to digging tunnels.

“Unlike logging and construction, tunnel digging is not something that can be done just from having giants” is what they said.

Of course, I’ve already given this thought beforehand.

My imagined self in the Inner World passes through the Door of Wizardry, then descends the spiral staircase until I reach the 8th floor.

While laying my hand on the charged spell resting on the bookrest in the Archive, I think of that gigantic, repulsive yet useful monster, then project it into the chaos.

“By means of this spell, may a Dig Dug Worm be created before my eyes and be under my control for 1 hour. [Create Special Monster]”

“OOOOHHHH?!”

“WHAT IS THAT?!?!”

“MONSTER!”

“I, I don’t feel so well.....”

“Upu..... will you stop calling up strange things all of a sudden!”

The dwarves’ astonishment and Claura’s protest is all too understandable.

After all, what I had just created with my spell is a 30m long, 3m diameter gigantic worm.

“..... Muu.”

I had used it relatively frequently in D&B, but this is my first time actually seeing it.

The sight of its long, wetly glistening, purplish body is indeed repulsive.

“So, so this is your magi-..... pardon me, your wizardry. But exactly what does this do.....?”

“Don’t worry, you’ll understand soon enough.”

Gald-shi’s face color looks a bit bad, but I reply composedly (while suppressing my desire to vomit).

“Well then, Dig Dug Worm. Show us what you are best at.”

Receiving my intention rather than my words, the Worm gets down to work.

It stretches itself upwards, bringing its head high up. The circular mouth at the front end of its long body opens wide. Uu, that is disgusting.

Then the Worm slams its head into the ground.

Zuudon!

After the shock of what sounded like a loud gunshot, the sound of things being grinded to dust starts to reverberate around.

With its head buried in the ground, the Worm wriggles the rest of its body..... and steadily begins to burrow deeper into the ground.

“Oi, don’t tell me this thing.....”

“Exactly. This Worm can eat rocks and dirt and whatever else. Digging tunnels is what it does best.”

Even while we are talking, the 30m Worm almost seems to be getting sucked into the ground.

It took about 5 minutes before the poisonous needle at its back disappeared from sight.

“I can’t believe how fast it can dig.....”

“How far can it go?”

Filled with curiosity, the dwarves quickly make their way to the edge of the

hole dug by the Worm and peer inside.

“Nn? What is this? It seems that the walls of the tunnel has been coated with something that has hardened?”

So asked a dwarf of the Daroun [Clan of Architects]. Quick on the update, it is exactly as he pointed out. The walls of the 3m wide hole running straight down is paved with a grey, concrete-like substance.

“..... A word with you guys, in private..... This is something that the Worm secreted. After consuming the dirt and rock, it converts all that inside its body into a reinforcement liquid, which then gets excreted through its skin surface.”

“Ohh..... this is simply perfect!”

“After all, for tunnels bored through mountains, the strength is always an important issue.”

I gave my explanation in a soft voice so that the ladies wouldn't have to hear it, but it turned out to be highly favorable with the dwarves.



In the end, I got enthusiastic approval from the dwarves of Senpu Village in regards to the construction of the trade route to Filsand. They wanted the unique raw materials that could only be imported through Filsand from somewhere else even farther away.

But however, this matter needs approval from the Filsand side as well, so construction will not begin until negotiations are finished with that end too.

I had planned on sending Irudo to visit Filsand, but then Gald told me something completely unexpected.

“Your timing could not have been more perfect. At the moment, the daughter of the Duke of Filsand is here in Senpu Village to discuss a trade with us. How about you meet with her, perhaps even tomorrow, and discuss this matter with her directly?”



Nighttime.

“..... So that young girl was the daughter of the Duke of Filsand. That was a spot of negligence on our part.” (Claura)

“Unfortunately, her first impression of us might not have been the best.....”
(Gio)

We are all gathered in my guest room having dinner, and Claura is looking decidedly awkward.

The girl she’s talking about is the one that we met at the elevator.

But if Claura’s feeling awkward, so am I, because I bet that it’s her impression of me that was the worst.

“Elizabel Roni Filsandia is her name. According to the rumors that I’ve heard, she’s a highly talented asset who frequently goes to other countries to conduct business and diplomatic deals.”

Though I am thankful for Irudo’s new information, it is only making my headache worse..... wait, no.

“If she is as wise as it sounds, then she would not allow personal feelings to affect the negotiations she conducts.”

Leid follows up for me at an unexpected moment. Furthermore, it was something that I was going to say myself.

I seriously feel like he and I are getting more and more in sync.

“That’s a good point. Well, there’s no point moping about it all night. Let’s head for the baths and get some rest in preparation for tomorrow.”

“Umu.”

When I’d told Valbo before that I liked bathing, it was true. Last night, we were introduced to the public bathhouse (it’s even a hotspring!), where I fully enjoyed myself for over an hour.

Leid didn’t like it at first, but once he submerged himself in the large bath that smelled of sulfur, he became meek as a lamb.

Anyways.

As Leid, Irudo, and I got up to leave the guest room, my door was knocked

violently.

“Who is it? This is the room of the Great Wizard Margils-sama. State your name and your business.”

Leiha replies as if it's the most natural thing to do, directing her voice sharply towards the other side of the door. A man's voice, drawn tight with anger and tension, comes flying back.

“Apologies for the late hour. We are members of the Filsand Knight Order. Our protection target, the daughter of the Duke of Filsand, Elizabel-sama has gone missing. We request permission to inspect your room.”

Chapter 72: The Duke's Daughter (3rd Person)

Filsand was originally the capital city of a tribe that claims to draw blood from an ancient royal family, the Shulz. However, it was invaded by the country of Feldi, then placed under the rule of the Duke of Filsand.

This happened about 20 years ago.

A great number of the Shulz tribe fled southward. To this day, they still fiercely hold onto the wish of recapturing Filsand. To that end, they have launched numerous attacks on the city, but were repelled every single time.

Fifteen years ago, Elizabel Roni Filsand was born between the Duke of Filsand and the princess of the Shulz.

The princess of the Shulz, Sheira, was captured during the invasion of Filsand.

The Duke took her as his second wife in a move to shore up the legitimacy of his rule over Filsand.

For her mother, her father was someone to hate with her whole being, and it would still not be enough.

Fortunately, her mother did not actively plant that hatred within Elizabel. However, growing up while seeing the discord between her parents up close made it hard for her to see her father in a positive light.

Despite all that, it cannot be denied that her father was relatively loving towards Elizabel and her mother. Their living standards were not significantly inferior in comparison to that of his first wife and her children, and proper education was also provided. Her eldest stepbrother was also especially nice to her.

Due to this, she aspired to work as a diplomat on behalf of the Filsand that

she had been brought up in, rather than the Shulz tribe that she had never even seen before. In actual fact, she gave her all towards realizing this aspiration of hers.

Originally, the purpose for which Elizabel came to Senpu Village for is a business deal — the purchase of siege weapons to use against the Shulz, who have barricaded themselves up in a castle.

The dwarves could not care less about the wars between humans. However, due to the Feldians' long-seated contempt of the dwarves, the negotiations went very stormily. In spite of that, she managed to seal the deal.

Despite being only 15 years old, it has already been 3 years since she was entrusted with the full authority to represent the Duke. Having gone to other cities in her home countries, Ran Balt, and even Shulendal, she already has several business and treaty successes under her belt.

Of course, she was not granted the authority for conducting negotiations from the very beginning. At the start, she was no more than a proxy, a figurehead accompanying trade caravans and negotiation parties.

However, she knew how to use her attractive, harmless, innocent appearance to its full potential.

For example, the negotiations with the dwarves that took almost an entire week, mostly went like this.

“In the first place, you people from Feldi and Filsand are contemptuous of us dwarves, aren't you.”

“That..... might be true. I'm really sorry..... someone like me being so self-important.....”

“Oh, n-, no, we're not really saying that you are the one at fault.”

“Thank you..... very much. Even though we say such terrible things, you all are still so gracious about it.”

“Well, we're different from humans after all.”

Or perhaps like this.

“Three easy-to-assemble siege towers? That's going to place quite a heavy

burden on our craftsmen. But that the price you're offering, it's a bit....."

"I, I really don't know anything, do I..... So it's very hard to make siege towers, is it. Exactly how is it made?"

"You don't even know that? Listen carefully, you first take the blueprints....."

Or this.

"Do all dwarves like alcohol very much? I myself don't really drink much, but..... my father is often drinking a strange wine that he gets from taverns in the south."

"Ho ho, what kind of wine is that?"

"Umm, I'm not really sure..... next time, I'll make sure to ask him!"

Her numerous successes were by no means due to a cheat from the gods.

"Make the other party feel good." "Listen well." "Make the other party want to talk to you again." All she did was persistently apply these principles to as many situations, as many people as she could.

Emotional gulfs could mostly be overcome somehow with this approach, after which talks would naturally proceed towards the discussion of reconciliation of interests.

Those who hate her label her methods as 'seduction' or 'persuasion by tears,' but the way she sees it, she was born with these tools, so there's no reason to not take full advantage of them.

Though she worked so hard for the sake of Filsand, the feelings of contempt that those of the conquering side felt towards her due to her blood was deep-seated.

Day and night, the harassment against her never ceased, and she had even been called a savage to her face.

The first wife, her second son, and a few other family members all made no effort whatsoever to hide their hatred of her.

Then half a year ago.

Her position, which she had been able to somehow maintain despite being

showered in her mother's resentment and other people's hatred, crumbled all of a sudden.

Her mother died of illness, and as if it was all timed, her eldest stepbrother died in battle during an assault by the Shulz tribe.

The only children left to the Duke were her and her second stepbrother.

If Elizabel had been powerless and also detested by her father, then perhaps this would not have happened. However, she had earned her father's trust through her work as a diplomat, and her ability was such that no one could call it into question. Consequently, the first wife and her second son deemed Elizabel a threat.

It did not take many days for the pressure from her second stepbrother, which had previously been on the level of harassment, to escalate to attempted assassination.

After closing her negotiations with the dwarves, Elizabel headed towards a restaurant whose patron base was mostly human.

The two knights sitting together with her as escort are both enjoying a few drinks.

"Still, that Wizard guy, he's quite something."

"No way would I want to have that monster as an enemy."

Despite being in front of Elizabel, the daughter of their master's house, the knights are enthusiastically discussing about what, or rather who, they had seen in the afternoon. Though from far away, they had witnessed the Wizard giving commands to a gigantic worm.

Elizabel does not choose to rebuke them, but instead brings a piece of dwarven-made baked sweet to her tiny mouth and takes a bite, while keeping a cute smile on her face.

The reason is because she had already realized that these guards of her are only for the journey to and the duration of her stay at Senpu Village. They had been ordered by her second stepbrother to eliminate her on the way back to Filsand.

It is not rare for undead or Shadow Demons to show up on the unmaintained road between Filsand and Senpu Village, and the footing at several places is also quite bad. There is no limit to the variety of cover stories that could be cooked up to explain her 'accidental' death.

«To have me eliminated right after I complete the business deal with the dwarves..... how calculating of you, Nii.....»

(T/N: Nii means 'brother.' She's referring to her second stepbrother in this case.)

“Did you also see it, Elizabel-sama? That repulsive monster.....”

“Y-, yes I did. Though I didn't really get it, but..... it was quite amazing, wasn't it.”

«Regardless of whether he is a Great Wizard or whatever else, but after that, I think I've a general grasp on the kind of person he is.»

So she thinks to herself while recalling the figure of the middle-aged man that she had seen in the elevator just yesterday.

«..... But then again, he did lend a hand to help that lady regain her balance, and his attitude seemed gentle. At the very least, he does not seem to be a high-handed person.»

This girl who had traveled far and away as a representative of the Duke of Filsand makes an amendment to a portion of her mental record of that person..... then sighs.

“Haa..... not that there's any meaning in doing that by this point in time.”

“Nn? Elizabel-sama, did you say something?”

“No, it's nothing. Rather than that, we will only be going back to our rooms after this, right? Feel free to order and drink as much as you like, alright?”

“Is that so? Then we'll take you up on your offer.”

“.....”

Several tens of minutes later.

Both knights are lying prostrate on the table, letting out hearty snores.

It seems that the medicine that she had always kept on her person just in case had come into use.

Elizabeth calls a dwarf waitress, courteously telling her that “I’m afraid they had a bit too much to drink, so please let them rest a little while longer” while handing over a gratuity tip.

«Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to prepare anything ahead of time, but..... there’s no helping it.»

It will take several weeks before the ordered siege towers will be completed.

It is a viable option to spend some more time to work out a more elaborate plan. However, she is afraid that as time passes, her will to live would grow thin, and thus she makes this reckless decision.

Elizabeth walks quickly, alone, to the barn where the customers’ horses and carriages are stored.

After having the person in charge hand over the reins of the swift horse that had carried her the entire way here from Filsand, she wastes no time in getting out.

Though her recognition plate was indeed checked at the main gate, there was no problem, as she is using her own recognition plate to leave the village on her own will. Without any issues whatsoever, she successfully escapes from Senpu Village..... no, from the Filsand Knight Order.

“Star Wind, I’m really sorry, but I need you to hurry..... {Fire Weapon}!”

She has no time to pay any regard to the fact that she is wearing a dress that exposes her thighs, an outfit extremely unsuitable for riding a horse. Fire envelopes the staff engraved with the stars-and-sword sigil, serving as an impromptu torch lighting the way for her late night full speed dash.

After all, she has no idea if the Filsand Knight Order — for her, they were already nothing more than her assassins — might start coming after her.

«‘If’? There’s no way they won’t come after me..... Doing this is only going to delay my death by an hour, or a day at the most.....»

“This world is truly filled with things that cannot be helped..... It really is as

Mother had said.....”

While gradually surrendering to despair, she continues her blind dash through the night.

Chapter 73: Schrödinger's Young Lady

“Apologies for the late hour. We are members of the Filsand Knight Order. Our protection target, the daughter of the Duke of Filsand, Elizabel-sama has gone missing. We request permission to inspect your room.”

From the other side of the door comes words beyond anything we had expected.

Reflexively, we exchange looks, but there is only bewilderment on everyone's faces.

“Something like th-.....”

As Claura was about to spit out a sharp, noble-like rebuke like her usual self, I raise a hand to silence her.

Then I pose a question in a serious tone, directed at everyone in the room.

“I'm asking this just in case, but..... Is anyone here in possession of the knowledge of the Duke's daughter's current whereabouts?”

“ “” ”

Naturally, they all shake their heads in unison. And neither do I have a clue.

Incidentally, Ted and the three newcomer soldiers were assigned rooms on a different floor, so they are not here.

“We are willing to cooperate with your search. However, a thorough explanation of the situation will be provided, yes?”

“Of course.”

Based on my reply, everyone inside the room understands that I intend to let these people in. Without any delay, they each lay hands on their weapons and equipment. That is a good reaction.

After receiving the Wizardry Staff that Leiha offers towards me, I nod at her.

“We will open the door now. Pay utmost care that you do not visit any disrespect towards Margils-sama.”

“Excuse us.”

While replying in a voice almost cold enough to be freeze when touched, Leiha opens the door, at which several knights wearing light armor enters the room.

“..... She’s not here.”

“Not here either.”

“We apologize for the bother.”

After the knights check out the bedroom and other rooms in the rear (I am apparently being treated as a VIP, so I was assigned an entire suite), a veteran knight gives us an explanation.

“We are the Stars and Shield Knight Order, belonging to Filsand. I am Adahd, a True Knight. We have been unable to confirm Elizabel-sama’s whereabouts as of 1 hour ago. There has been no contact from the two knights that had been on escort duty..... which is why we are searching around like this.”

“..... Fumuu.”

There isn’t much more information than what they had already revealed with their first statement, but perhaps they themselves have yet to fully grasp the details of their current situation.

“With how large this Senpu Village is, is it not too hasty to be worried after going only a few hours without contact?”

So asks Claura with both hands on her waist, looking decidedly irked.

I think she has a point, though. It feels like I’m cooperating with a police investigation, but considering my standing, perhaps I should raise a word or two in complaint.

“That is..... no, Hime-sama is an important person for Filsand. It would not be strange for her life to be targeted at any given moment. Even though we have been given strict orders from the Duke of Filsand to not allow her out of our sight for even a split second.....”

The True Knight Adahd must be very worried about Elizabel-jou indeed. I see his face growing pale as his voice lowers into a mutter.

Still, to think that she would be targeted now. I needed to talk with her tomorrow about the trade route to Filsand, so the timing is truly the absolute worst.

On second thought, regardless of that, a young girl's life is in danger. Though I barely know her and have yet to exchange even a proper word, I believe I should offer my aid here.

“Adahd-dono. If it is alright with you, we are also willing to help look for Elizabel-dono. Would that be fine with you?”

“Wh-.....?!”

Caught off guard, Adahd opens his eyes wide. Is there a need to be that surprised?

“Um, that's..... we have already caused you enough trouble. The safety of Hime-sama is our own duty, so.....”

“Fumuu?”

What? Why is he refusing?

Which reminds me, the only knights that I know are in the Carbanera Knight Order, but even I am aware that they are a bit..... unique. Are most other knights in Sedia inflexible like this?

“However, isn't your current top priority to confirm Elizabel-jou's safety? I have a few spells in mind that would be useful for the search, but.....”

“That is, umm..... Pardon me for saying this, but I don't see how helping us would benefit you in any way.....”

“I actually have a proposal that I wish to bring to her tomorrow, you see. It's problematic for me if she is gone.”

“I see. But still.....”

What is up with this guy, he seems more and more suspicious by the minute. More like, is this actually the plot twist where the knights that were supposed

to protect her turn out to be after her life?

If only I had the ESP Medal in hand. But unfortunately, it's inside my sling bag, which is currently inside the closet.

“Adahd-dono.”

As I turn reproachful eyes towards Adahd, a new knight flies into the room.

“—t—nd. ——se— ——her.”

“Is that so. Understood.”

The new knight whispers in Adahd's ear to make sure we don't hear, but when I look towards Leiha, she smiles and gives me a nod.

“Please pardon us, Margils-dono. We have determined Hime's current whereabouts, and need to make our way to receive her now. We will come again at a later date to offer a formal apology.”

He must have been quite uncomfortable. After extending his farewells so quickly that we didn't even have time to say anything in reply, he rounds up all his knights and promptly leaves my room.



“What on earth was that?! I felt like I was watching a jester acting out a skit titled ‘Suspicious’!”

“I agree, nothing at all indicated their worry for Elizabel-hime.”

It seems that Claura and Irudo are largely in agreement with my opinion. Leid also has a sour look on his face.

“ ‘The two escorts have been found. It seems they were drugged. Hime-sama has apparently fled Senpu Village on a horse. We are currently making preparations to pursue her.’ ”

“Wh-?!”

“That is the message passed onto Adahd just now, my lord.”

I whip around at hearing the voice of the knight who had come to report just now, but only see Leiha standing there looking slightly proud of herself. Oh right, she's not only got sharp ears, she's also a very convincing actress.

“Well done, Leiha.”

“Thank you very much.”

But with things like this, how should we move?

It seems that that Knight Order really is after that young lady's life..... or at the very least, we know for sure that they used the term 'flee' to describe her departure.

Though the circumstances has changed a bit, there is still no way I can do nothing while knowing that a child might be killed.

Back when I first transferred over, I was quite hesitant about actively sticking my head into trouble. However, if I am to continue interacting with this world as a Great Wizard, this is no time to balk at something of this degree. But with that said, it's not as simple as just going around acting as 'an ally of justice.'

“Give me your opinions. Do you think it to be beneficial for us to go help Elizabel?”

“As we do not understand the full situation, that would be hard to answer. If she has committed some crime according to Filsand law, then it would hurt us to cover for her. On the other hand, if the Knight Order, or the person behind the Order, is plotting to assassinate her, then we would gain a huge favor from Filsand.” (Irudo)

“The way I see it, regardless of the circumstances, it would be greatly beneficial for us to first find her and confirm her safety. That's how important someone related by blood to a ruling authority is, after all.” (Claura)

“Don't ask me.” (Leid)

“Everything should be as my lord wills.” (Leiha)

It really hurts that we don't have all the facts. Judging by the situation and atmosphere, this story seems to be that of a misfortunate young lady and the group of bad guys after her, but if we are talking about possibilities, we don't know that she isn't a serial murderer or a traitor to her country.

In other words, we can't know the young lady's true character if we don't save her.

“Very well. Then allow me to change my question. Do you think we should help Elizabel?”

“Of course we should. She is a young girl around the same age as Mora, right?” (Irudo)

“More like, are you even considering abandoning her as a viable option?” (Claura)

“Do whatever you want.” (Leid)

“Everything should be as my lord wills.” (Leiha)

Hearing each one of them give the exact answer I had expected, a grin steals across my face.

If I was someone who would actually entertain the option of abandoning a young child, I’m sure everyone here would have already chosen to walk down a wiser path in life.

But of course, if this young lady truly turns out to be a criminal, then we will need to formally apologize to the Duke of Filsand, but..... at that time, we will have to catch her again by ourselves.

“My decision is that we will now all move to save Elizabel-jou.”

I immediately begin to mentally search for the skills that would help me to locate a Duke’s daughter riding a single horse through the dark night.

Chapter 74: Alliance Bound in Blood

I decided to save the Duke of Filsand's daughter, Elizabel.

According to the information that the knight had said, she is currently on a horse, fleeing away from Senpu Village.

The problems are that she has had at least an hour's headstart, and that we do not know the direction she took. We need to figure out a way to track her.

"Currently, there are only two routes leading away from Senpu Village: the northwestern road towards Yuule Village, or the eastern road towards Filsand on the other side of the mountain range in the east." (Irudo)

"If the young lady is truly trying to get away from the Knight Order, then it seems logical to think that she took the northwestern road." (Claura)

With Irudo's and Claura's input as reference, I select several spells. At the same time, I also give thought to the distribution of roles.

"Firstly, Irudo, rendezvous with Ted and the soldiers. Then tell the Knight Order that we will still search for the young lady, of our own accord. It would be a good idea to emphasize that we are doing this 'of our good will.' Furthermore, also inform the dwarves."

"Understood."

"Claura, cooperate with the dwarves in conducting a search inside Senpu Village, just in case. There is a possibility that she only made it seem like she's left."

"I see..... very well, I understand."

"This is also as a precaution, but Leiha, take the eastern route. If there is no trace of a horse having gone that way, then return immediately."

"As you wish."

“Leid.”

“What? This has nothing to do with Shadow Demons. I don’t need to listen to your orders.”

“No, this is not an order, but a request. Can you remain here, and protect everyone if it ever comes to that?”

I briefly lower my head towards Leid, who is sitting on a sofa with his greatsword in his arms.

His mouth distorts sullenly as he sighs.

“I’m just staying here, in my room. If someone comes to bother me, then I’ll just handle them as appropriate.”

“I’m sorry to ask it of you. Thank you.”

Though his words makes it sound dubious whether he has any intention of helping, I’m already giving him thanks, treating his cooperation as a foregone assumption. I know this is forceful, but since I’m covering literally all of his living expenses, he’s going to have to bear with at least that much.

“Which leaves you to search the northwestern route, yes? Do you really think you can find a single girl in this dark a night?”

“I’ve already given that thought.”



Several minutes later, I have already left Senpu Village and activated the [Fly] spell.

Senpu Village itself is lit up with countless dots of illumination, but a single minute of flying already brings me so far away that the only thing visible is the pale line below me that is the northwestern road. To have a horse sprint on that road would be quite the reckless driving indeed.

After several more minutes of flying, I catch up with a group of horses running full speed on the road. It seems even they have yet to find their ward.

I push on ahead of the Knight Order, but even with my strengthened sight and hearing from [Physical Boost], I catch no clue of the young lady who had had a

headstart.

If Elizabeth is serious about getting away from the Knight Order, there is a very real chance that she's chosen to hide behind some rock or inside some thicket. She even used sleeping medicine (or whatever that was), so that degree of strategy is more than imaginable.

An even worse possibility is that she's taken a random branch road and gotten herself lost.

I stop in midair for a beat and glare into the dark night.

Ho, hou.

Without having to wait long, a single owl comes before my eyes. It circles around while crying its unique cry. It is what I have been waiting for.

Of course, it is no normal owl. It is a Level 4 monster, a Moon Owl, that I had created with [Create Monster].

Possessing sharp night vision as well as high intelligence, I had created 9 of them beforehand, then sent them off to search in various directions.

Following the guidance of this Moon Owl, I eventually see a horse and human collapsed on the road. What I thought was a torch from afar turned out to be a staff clad in magical fire, but either way it made for a very conspicuous marker in the night.

I know this is no time to be saying this, but apparently I would have found her just fine simply by continuing to follow the road.....

When I hurriedly land and rush over, I am able to identify the person to be a blond-haired young girl.

Identifying is fine and all, but.....

“Uu.....”

Despite having that staff as illumination, it seems that the horse ride through the dark night was reckless after all.

They must have crashed into a rock beside this curve in the road. I see foam around the white horse's mouth, but it is not moving at all. The young girl's

limbs are also crooked at unnatural angles, her head is split wide open, and her entire body is covered with blood.

On the ground illuminated by my Wizardry Staff, I see the trail of blood indicating her desperate attempt to crawl on the ground in spite of her broken arms and legs. I cannot help but to shiver at the ghastly sight.

“..... Oi, oii. You there, hang in there!”

As long as she is still breathing..... is what I am praying as I bring my ear towards her half-opened mouth.

Hyu-, hyu-.

I do indeed hear breathing, though it is so faint that it sounds like a mere draft.

“Yes! Then I can save her.”

It's been a while since I've been so impatient for the 10 seconds for casting a spell to be over. Fortunately, I am able to activate [Perfect Healing] before she is completely gone.

“Uu?! Ah..... aaahh.....”

Although the wounds on her head and all over her body have closed up and her limbs have returned to normal, it seems that she is still gripped by the feeling of being on the verge of death.

While uttering meaningless moans, she clings onto my robe with all her strength.

Her cute face is still all messy with tears and fresh blood. She probably still hasn't recognized who I am yet.

“It's fine, Everything's fine now.”

“Uuu, upu. Geho.”

Not knowing what else to do, I simply hug her body, which is trembling so badly it is almost like a joke, and rub her back. The clumps of blood clogging up her trachea that she coughs up gets all over me, but I have no time to worry about it at the moment.

“..... Haa..... Haa..... I..... ah.”

About a minute passes. The young girl’s breathing finally stabilizes, and the light of consciousness returns to her red pupils.

Most likely due to realizing that she is being hugged by a man, she suddenly pushes me away to take some distance.

“..... Y-, you are.....”

“If you can move that much, it seems that your body is fine now.”

Forget the girl, even I am aware that this situation seems strange. I try my best to address her in a friendly voice.

“If I remember right, you are..... the Wizard..... Margils, sama..... right?”

“Indeed I am. Lord of Jiiteias Castle, Wizard Margils. Am I right to believe that you are the daughter of the Duke of Filsand?”

Despite the wariness, or absolute bafflement rather, on her face, this short exchange with her gives me confirmation of something. This girl really is very sharp. At the very least, despite this being our first meeting, she doesn’t call me a Magician, but a Wizard. She must have done some proper looking into me beforehand, and memorized the information that she found.

“Yes..... I am. Elizabel Roni..... Filsandia.....”

Looking still half out of it, she grasps the edges of her short dress with both hands and bows..... then comes to a start and looks all around.

“Ah, I, I was! Star Wind! Star Wind..... AHH.....!”

She notices the white horse collapsed motionlessly on the ground, then raises a short scream. In a fluster, she picks up the staff that she had dropped, then confirms the state of her own body.

“As I’d thought, I really was thrown off of Star Wind..... the bones inside my body..... Why am I still alive?”

Taking out a cloth from the saddlebags attached to the white horse, she wipes her arms and face while churning her mind, before finally remembering everything up to the moment of her accident.

“My head..... doesn’t hurt? Could it be that..... you, did something.....?”

I nod in reply to the girl, whose face is pale from lack of blood.

“Yes I did. You were gravely injured, after all. Though it might have been unwanted meddling, I took the liberty of healing you.”

“Is, that so.....”

“Fuu—.”

In sharp contrast to her twintails, a hairstyle that emphasizes her cuteness, a long sigh like that of an old grandmother escapes her lips.

“Margils-sama..... why did you do something like this.....?”

Not “why did you help me,” but “why did you do something like this,” huh. Guess she still doesn’t trust me.

But before even that, what catches my attention are her eyes.

Having lived 42 years, no matter how peaceful my life may have been, I’ve still seen those eyes a few times. My aunt, who had lost her entire family in an accident, had the exact same eyes I see on this girl right now.

“.....”

What can I say to really help this girl?

In the first place, was she truly trying to run away?

The best thing to do is to be completely honest with each other, but unfortunately, my strengthened sense of hearing tells me that the knights are getting close. We probably do not even have 5 minutes before the Filsand Knight Order is upon us.

“I simply wanted to save you, that’s all. But above that, there is something that I needed to tell you urgently.”

“What may it be?”

I indicate the direction I came from with my brightly shining Wizardry Staff. The flickering torches held by the knights are gradually approaching.

Quickly catching on, she gives me a small nod. It seems that I managed to

successfully convey that I've a general grasp on her relationship with the Knight Order.

"As the lord of Jiiteias Castle, I think it in my interests to help you here. If you are willing to cooperate with me, then I will do everything in my power to help you."

"That's....."

She nods as if listening to a very familiar song. Considering her experience as a diplomat, it seems I was right in thinking that talking profits and benefits would persuade her best. Though of course, what I'm saying is not a complete lie either.

However, the problem is..... whether she actually wants to be saved.

True to expectation, Elizabel begins fiddling with her hair, a troubled expression clouding her face.

"..... I....."

"Umu?"

"As you seem to already know, I am ostracized by my father and second stepbrother, and my life is being targeted. Up to just now, I've been thinking that dying, or being killed..... there was no helping it, there was nothing I could do about it. But now....."

While still looking downwards, she continues as if talking to herself.

"Now I know..... that dying is such a frightening thing....."

The several pinpricks of light are gradually drawing closer. We only have a few minutes left.

In the depths of Elizabel's eyes, I see a faint strand of an emotion other than despair..... I think.

"I..... don't want to just die like this, while bearing my mother's resentment, and without knowing my father's true intentions....."

"..... Is that so."

"Wizard Margils-sama. Though informal, I propose that we form a personal

alliance.”

I'm sure she has yet to fully trust me. However, she has chosen to use me, fully prepared to be used in return, in order to live on beyond this.

She once again rearranges her posture, and gives me a gracious bow.

Despite her hair and dress both being soaked in blood, every single aspect of her is perfectly beautiful.

Chapter 75: Lie vs. Lie

Elizabel had said that she “wanted to know her father’s true intentions.”

Is the Duke of Filsand targeting her life? If so, that’s a pretty serious problem in light of our goals.

But well, it’s not like I can just abandon her now.

“I wish to confirm one thing first. Have you committed any crime that merits the attempt on your life?”

“Aside from being born, no.”

For a 14 or 15 year old girl to say that line not as a joke nor as an affectation, there is something wrong with this world.

“Elizabel Roni Filsandia. As of this moment, I, Wizard Gio Margils, am your ally.”



“Well then.....”

There is a whole mountain of things that I want to ask and discuss about, but.....

“I see her!”

“Hurry!!”

There’s no point in hiding the light of our staves. The knights are almost upon us.

“Margils-sama? What shall we do?”

“..... I’m sorry, but I don’t have a plan. I can help us both escape, and I can also capture them all. If you have a better idea, I’ll be glad to go along with it.”

She is the one who understands the situation best. Therefore, she might be

able to come up with an idea that could smoothly allow us to get over this situation.

She spends several seconds deep in thought, then nods decisively.

“Thank you very much. I think we should put on an act..... please play along.”

So saying, she waits to greet the knights with a dazzling smile on her face.



“Elizabeth-sama..... we have been looking for you.”

“You can't get away-..... EH?!”

After having made quite good time despite the journey being at night, the first one to jump off his horse is of course Adahd.

The other knights who are dismounting one by one and spreading out as if to encircle us already have their swords drawn. But upon realizing that I am with Elizabeth, all of their faces freeze up.

“Ma-..... Margils.....-dono?”

“That's impossible, how did you..... no, why, are you here?”

It seems they are indeed surprised at the fact that I had managed to get here first, but I see a lot more fear than surprise. Let me guess, they probably saw me commanding the Dig Dug Worm in the afternoon.

“..... Why do you think?”

Though Elizabeth had mentioned an act, I have no idea how she intends to talk her way out of this one.

Thinking to just focus on giving off the aura of someone important, I smile leisurely (as least, that's my intention) while evading their question.

“Hime..... it is too rash to go outside alone.”

Adahd waves a hand to have all the knights sheath their swords, then gets on one knee before Elizabeth. Though his words are proper, there is undisguised irritation in his tone and his eyes.

But with that said, it seems he still retains enough reason to not throw all

caution to the wind and go after her in front of my eyes.

“Come, please get on my horse. Let us return with haste.”

“..... Don’t want to.”

“Eh?”

The girl’s words cleanly slice right through the knight’s strong voice. Despite having expected some degree of resistance, his mouth involuntarily falls open upon being denied so decisively.

“I am indeed thankful for your concern. Furthermore, I am sorry for having caused you trouble. But.....”

She is treating Adahd like a ‘loyal knight.’

With me present, the knights are unable to take more forceful measures, and have no choice but to play along. However, I doubt this act this keep those knights far away for any significant period of time.....

“I do not want to be separated from this person.”

“.....?!?”

While I was mulling over Elizabel’s ‘act,’ she suddenly clasps my arm with strength.

She doesn’t just link arms or grab my arm, she glues herself so tightly to me that I can feel her significant breasts pressing against my arm. For a second, I almost reflexively shake free and jump backwards, but I grit my teeth and stand my ground.

I think I’ve gotten the gist of her scenario, but..... oi, am I possibly in way over my head?

As can be expected, the knights are looking astonished, even more so than what I’m feeling. Adahd stands back up, unconsciously leaving a hand on the pommel of his sword.

“E-, Elizabel-sama! That’s..... what does that mean?! When did you s-.....”

Muu.

‘S’, huh.

Not 'f' as in 'fall in love,' but 's' as in 'seduce'? If that was truly what he was about to say, then Adadh must also have a relatively thorough grasp of her and her situation, and is able to make conjectures quickly.

..... But unfortunately for him, I am even more of a softie than he could imagine.

"Come on, be not boorish, Adahd. Time is of no consequence when a girl falls in love, you know?"

"Ma-, Margils-dono! What exactly is your intention?!"

"....."

Adahd directs his censure towards me.

I know that I've gotten quite bold lately in my role as a Great Wizard, but honestly speaking, I would really like to opt out of the role of being a ladykiller who would even go after a little girl.

But I can't contradict her claim out loud, as that's the only excuse I can make use of to detain her. Seriously, I'm terrible at ad-lib, alright?

"Be silent, Adahd! Margils-sama and I have already exchanged vows of engagement! From now on, we will return to Filsand together to seek permission from my Father!"

"?!"

" ".....?!" "

I can see how this can be passed off as the selfishness of a girl blinded by love. If the knights truly had nothing on their conscience, then they could just scold her and forcefully bring her back, but they can't do that because I'm involved. In the slim chance that they actually try to kill me together with her, then that'd actually be a great opportunity for me.

The thing about the engagement is purely as an excuse to justify me going along with her..... is what she explained at a later date.

But for now, I really want someone to praise me for not having spit out in shock the way all the knights did.

Chapter 76: Night With My Betrothed

“Y-, y-, you! What have you gone and done this time?!” (Claura)

“..... Don’t worry, I’ll explain.” (Gio)

After smashing the knights’ morale to dust with her engagement declaration, Elizabel smoothly talked the knights into allowing her to stay together with me — as in, even living in my room — until they return to Filsand. Then we went back to my room together.

The first thing she said when she entered the room was “My name is Elizabel, and I have exchanged engagement vows with Margils-sama.”

Which brings us to the present, where Claura is pulling on my ear with the face of a hannya.

(T/N: Hannya is a horned, grinning demoness mask from noh theatre used to depict a woman’s rage and jealousy.)

Leiha is anxiously looking between Claura and Elizabel.

Incidentally, Elizabel is still glued to me on my right side, so Claura is on my left..... ok that’s enough of that.

“I presume that this engagement was brought up as the pretext to enable Margils-sama to interfere with Elizabel-sama’s situation, is that correct?”

(Irudo)

“That’s exactly right, Irudo-kun.” (Gio)

With a pensive look on his face, Irudo manages to guess the exact truth. As expected.

“So the aim is to protect Elizabel-san from assassins by accompanying her as her fiance.....?” (Claura)

“That’s the gist of it. This would also allow me to brazenly approach the Duke.

After I explain the situation to him, the engagement can be voided.” (Gio)

“.....” (Elizabeth)

Elizabeth’s eyebrows draw together into a frown as she listens to our discussion.

“Every single person here is my ally. They can be trusted. There is no need to worry.” (Gio)

“.....” (Elizabeth)

She bats her red eyes in surprise as she understands what I’m trying to convey.

“Ally.....?” (Elizabeth)

“Yes. She is not just someone who gets on my case all the time, she is an important ally who has been of great help numerous times up to now.” (Gio)

I remove Claura’s fingers from my ear, despite her still sharply glaring eyes. Elizabeth’s gaze roams around in hesitation, then she sighs softly and lets go of my arm.

“Understood. Everyone, everything up to now was an act..... there is no cause for concern.” (Elizabeth)

“I, I was not really concerned! Margils had a lewd look on his face so I was just giving him some pertinent advice!” (Claura)



“Nn, now I feel all refreshed.” (Claura)

“..... To think that the dwarves were enjoying something this good everyday.....” (Leiha)

“That’s true, I myself have also taken a liking to it.” (Elizabeth)

The ladies have returned from bringing Elizabeth to the baths, as she had been covered with blood from head to toe.

Of course, I already casted the now-familiar [Invisible Demon] spell, and also requested the dwarves to strengthen their security, so there is very little worry about any harm coming to Elizabeth here inside Senpu Village.

Rather than that, I am relieved to note that due to the naked socializing or whatsoever, Claura's and Leiha's attitudes towards Elizabel have softened quite a bit.

Now that everyone's calmed down, it's time to exchange information.



"..... So in short, my aim is to decrease the number of casualties from Shadow Demons, and to even cut them off at the source if possible."

"....."

In my case, I need her to understand my greatest goal, or else my actions and decisions afterwards would be really hard to explain, so I ended up talking quite a while. Like the true diplomat she is, Elizabel interrupted with appropriate questions here and there and listened earnestly, but it seems that she is still doubtful about the content of what I'm saying.

"You find it hard to believe?"

"I..... suppose so, yes. It just sounds so..... so like a dream. What do you stand to gain from doing this?"

Rather than contempt, her question was posed with true puzzlement.

Which reminds me, when I had helped her earlier, I did mention "my interests as the lord of Jiiteias Castle."

It seems that everyone else also is interested in how I would answer Elizabel's question, as all gazes in the room gather on me.

"Fuumu....."

I close my eyes and do a bit of self-inspection.

I try to organize the vague thoughts that come up and put them into words.

"I apparently have enough power to possibly change the entire world. If I do not pour all of it into doing something righteous, I am afraid that I might be crushed by that power of mine."

I shiver as I recall the temptation I felt to [Charm] Mora when I first met her in the jail cell at Jiiteias Castle.

What comes next to my mind are the words that Claura said in Lelis.

“ ‘This is a world where Shadow Demons can appear at any moment and kill anybody and their family. If there really is a true hero who can change that reality, I.....’ ”

“..... Furthermore, at the end of the road where I continue to use my power correctly, perhaps, just perhaps, I might be able to do something about all those things in this world that everybody thinks nothing can be done about..... That’s what I’m thinking about, I guess.”

My resistance towards talking about and thinking about power and the world and the like has gone down a lot.

All the faces around me have their own reactions, but ridicule is not on any one of them. It seems that I myself have also gradually grown to become a resident of this world.

“As I’d thought, it really does sound like a dream..... But I can tell that you and your allies are indeed serious about it.”

Elizabeth’s expression softens up a bit as she nods.

“And it is because you all are like this that I feel safe in forming this alliance. Now it is my turn to explain my circumstances.....”



“In other words, you do not know for sure whether your father, the Duke of Filsand, is behind this attempt on your life?”

“That is the case. From what I gathered while eavesdropping on my knights, the order was given directly by my second stepbrother, Agbeil Filsandia. However, it’s just that I can’t imagine my father not knowing about it.....”

From the conversation between Irudo and Elizabeth, I’ve gotten a grasp on the general situation.

The ongoing war between the Duke of Filsand and the Shulz tribe, the deaths of Elizabeth’s mother and eldest stepbrother, the machinations of her second stepbrother.

To think that I was going to go into the middle of all that to discuss my trade

route and alliance.....

In the end, the most important point is what the Duke of Filsand intends to do about his daughter.

There isn't much reason for them to decline the trade route itself, but in the worst case scenario, we might have to demand to retain Elizabel with us.

Either way, we wouldn't know anything until we go there in person.

However, we still have the ongoing construction work at Jiiteias Castle and the negotiations with the dwarves of Senpu Village, whereas Elizabel herself still has her mission of purchasing those siege towers.

After we rearrange our schedules with Irudo as the focus, it became like this.

Firstly, both our sides will wrap up our negotiations with the dwarves within tomorrow or the day after at the latest. After that, then we will head towards Filsand together, and the single way journey will take about 10 days.

Assuming that the negotiations or whatever else on that side take another 10 days, then 10 more to return to Senpu Village. Overall, it would take roughly a month to get back to Jiiteias Castle.

“Well then, Claura and Ted, I entrust you two with Elizabel's protection. Use the three soldiers as you see fit.”

“..... Very well.” (Claura)

“Roger!” (Ted)

“Irudo, you and I will be working on the negotiations with the dwarves. Leid, please continue protecting this room.” (Gio)

“Yes, sir.” (Irudo)

“..... Fun.” (Leid)

“My lord. What should I do?” (Leiha)

“Leiha, please investigate the Filsand Knight Order. If possible, we want to use this time to bring them to our side.” (Gio)

“Margils-sama?” (Elizabel)

Elizabeth looks doubtful at my instructions for Leiha.

“I’m sure they are fully aware that they have lost all chance of fulfilling the order by Agbeil, right? In that case, they should be amenable to persuasion.”
(Gio)

“Spoken as if my second stepbrother isn’t a popular leader. Not that it’s wrong, though.” (Elizabeth)

Elizabeth smiles with a nod.

Despite being the seed of a very thorny problem, she is going to be a very trustworthy ally.

Chapter 77: Ruined Village

The next day.

The results of everyone's efforts bore fruit.

Firstly, Irudo and I completed our negotiations with the dwarves.

After working out the finer details in regards to the trade route between Senpu Village and Jiiteias Castle, such as about the tax rates, the Zamuslon [Clan of Rulers] and I signed contracts on both that and the anti-Shadow Demon alliance.

The plan is to first prioritize the expansion of Jiiteias Castle and the construction of the road up to Senpu Village. Once that is done, and after gaining approval from Filsand, then we will begin the work on extending the trade route. While the work on Jiiteias Castle is going on, Dig Dug Worms will continue boring the tunnel through the eastern mountains, and the blueprints for the route expansion will be drawn up.

As for the trade with Filsand, Senpu Village will also dispatch their own negotiator.

Furthermore, a blacksmith and an engineer, as well as their respective assistants, are going to be deployed to Jiiteias Castle to be garrisoned there. I was given permission to use them as castle staff, for which I am truly thankful.



Leiha was able to make full use of her master intelligence gathering skills.

She caught absolutely everything, from the Star and Shield Knight Order's members' one on one conversations to their mutterings to themselves, and also checked everything in their luggage. All useful information was then conveyed onto Elizabel. Of course, the knights did not notice a thing.

From the information provided by Leiha, Elizabel was then able to guess each

of the knights' circumstances and personal relationships, then negotiate with them as needed.

Claura went along with her for protection, so there were no worries on that front.

The conclusion from Leiha and Elizabel's joint investigation revealed that this time's mastermind was indeed the second son of the Duke of Filsand, Agbeil. However, the presence or absence of the Duke's personal involvement remained undetermined.

Furthermore, it came to light that a significant number of the knights in the Order actually feel opposed to the method of assassination or to Agbeil himself. From among them, with consideration to their family lineages and peerage rank, their financial state and other factors that determined their relative distance from Agbeil, we were able to get a couple to defect..... no, to cooperate with us.

"I am truly very sorry!"

"From now on, I will swear my loyalty to Hime-sama!"

There are two young knights prostrating themselves before Elizabel.

From here on, they will feed us information from within the Order, and will take her side in case of any emergency.

Our pretext proved sufficient to prevent any hostile actions from the other knights on the journey back to Filsand.

Just in case, we told the Order to stay behind to transport the siege towers in question, and that we would go to Filsand first, so there shouldn't be any interference on the road or at Filsand.

"Good work, you must be tired."

"Not really..... Since I could bring out Margils-sama's name if I ever needed to, everything became very easy."

Elizabel, who is relaxing in my guest room as a matter of course as my 'betrothed,' shrugs her shoulders.

"Despite that, you don't look very happy."

“Negotiations conducted while having an absolute power at my back is no more than coercion, right? It doesn’t feel good at all.”

“Ahh, I see. And ‘do this if you don’t want that power to be turned towards you’ makes the negotiation sound even more like coercion.”

“Ara? Are you sure I can say that? This is your name we’re talking about, you know.”

In response to the young lady’s seemingly teasing tone, this time it is my turn to shrug.

Though I know it is coarse, times when it must be done, it must be done.



“Oh sprite, please use your secret arts to deliver this postcard to mine intimate friend. [Arcane Postcard]”

At the end of my chant, small grains of light gather above the table in front of me, eventually forming a postcard.

On that postcard, I write a report of our current situation, and also ask after the current situation at Jiiteias Castle. After I finish writing, I pick it up and throw it out the window while bringing Sedam’s face to mind. Immediately, a small sprite appears out of nowhere, catches the postcard, then flies off into the distance.

“..... That’s quite poetic for one of your spells.”

“So far, we’ve only been seeing giants and demons and large worms, so.....”

“Oh, leave me alone. Anyways, that postcard should reach Sedam in 2 or 3 days.”



Just like that, we each finished everything that we needed to do in Senpu Village.

The next day, with Elizabel-jou and the dwarven negotiator added to our party, we set off for Filsand.



Four days later.

“This..... is much harder..... than I had expected.....”

“I, I need a second.....”

At the present moment, we have no choice but to take the very twisty road that is the only pass through the eastern mountains standing between Senpu Village and Filsand.

This road runs between two high mountains north and south of us, so the elevation is not too bad, but the tons of rocks on the path makes it very tough going.

It's a given for Ted and the soldiers, who are carrying our camping equipment and all other luggage, but even the light-bodied Elizabel and Claura are struggling quite a bit.

As for me, I have the magic item Traveling Boots that enables me to keep walking without feeling any fatigue. However, I had decided to not wear it earlier on to be healthy, a decision which I am now thoroughly regretting.

“Don't worry, we're almost through the mountains. Going downwards is going to be a lot easier.”

“That may be true, but.....”

The dwarf composedly walking beside me is Fablu of Rimulon [Clan of Merchants], who had been our guide in Senpu Village and is the representative tasked with conducting the negotiations with Filsand.

On the road, he explained to us that the dwarves' gods are enshrined within these two mountains. This is all the more true for the northern mountain, a dormant volcano, which is regarded as the avatar of the God of Smithing.

While I was recalling that as I continue putting one foot in front of another, Leiha returns from scouting.

“My lord.”

“Thank you for your work. So, is there a problem?”

“I'm not sure if it is a problem. It certainly doesn't seem dangerous, but.....”

She's right in that it's difficult to determine whether this is a problem or not.

After we proceeded for about one more hour, we have reached what Leiha reported about..... the remains of a small ruined village.

"All clues indicate that this was a human village. To settle our holy ground as they please....."

"But well, the state it's in....."

Exactly, this was clearly a small settlement made by humans, concealed within the large rocks and meagre forest of this mountainous area.

It is located a slight distance away from the road connecting Filsand and Senpu Village.

However, the shabby buildings are either burned or destroyed, and there are corpses all around that we suspect were the residents.

"..... Muu....."

The last time I saw such blatant atrocity was when we went underground on our way to destroy that Shadow Demon nest.

The corpses all seem to be that of normal villages, but they were not simply killed — there are clear signs that they were thoroughly tortured. As I fight down the urge to empty the contents of my stomach, Elizabel draws close to one of the bodies.

"..... This clothing is what Filsand people wear....."

"I don't see any warriors or soldiers. To attack a village like this..... bandits, perhaps? Or else....."

Seeing Elizabel kneeling in shock next to a corpse that had suffered atrocious violence, Claura hugs her to her shoulder.

"Though faint, there is the smell of Shadow Demon."

The normally silent Leid suddenly speaks up.

On one hand, he is holding that orb with Shadow Demon blood sealed inside, the Sight Demon.

"Leiha, investigate the area one more time, more thoroughly."

“Yes, m-.....!!”

The moment Leiha nods, several arrows stab into the ground near our feet.

Chapter 78: Martial Chief

The sound of arrows slicing through wind comes from behind us.

Our current position is the plaza of the tiny ruined village. There is nothing nearby that can be used as cover, and the closest building is more than 10 meters away.

On top of which, we don't know where the shooters are lurking.

Actually no, scratch that, I just caught glimpses of quickly moving silhouettes among the burned buildings surrounding the plaza.

After hearing Leiha's report, it took slightly less than an hour for us to get here. More than enough time for these attackers to lay down an ambush.

Along with relief that I had cast protective spells on Elizabel and Fablu beforehand comes regret that my insight had still been too naive.

But now is no time to dwell on that.

“Da—ya—!”

“Haiya—!”

Six human figures jump out from the surrounding covered areas and buildings, shouting eccentric war cries.

Leather and fur armor, handaxes and spears in their hands.

With expressions filled with rage, they.....

“They are soldiers from the Shulz tribe!”

“They're humans! Do not kill them!”

Before Elizabel's shout, which had been almost a scream, and my instructions, everyone else had already begun moving.

“{Wind Wall}!”

Claura raises her staff and envelopes us in a barrier of wind to protect us from the arrows.

Ted raises his shield, and even the frightened new soldiers take up formation. Their formation is to surround and protect Elizabel, Claura, and Fablu.

Leiha has a dagger in either hand that I do not know whether to describe as dangerous or ominous and is covering me.

Finally, Leid is brandishing his greatsword, stepping in to close the distance to the enemy warriors.

“Gyaah!?”

I’m not sure if he heard my shout, but Leid uses the flat of his sword to sweep out the legs of the warrior in front. He is blown away as if a mine had gone off under his feet, then crashes against the ground.

“Gue!?”

“Gofuu!?”

Without stopping, his greatsword continues rotating, smashing into the second warriors’s head and the third warrior’s torso, taking them out of action with only a single hit each.

The combination of Leid’s gigantic body and the length of his greatsword gives him greater reach than even spears, so the warriors are all blown away before being able to get near him.

While noting the terrifying battle prowess of a War Tribe member out of the corner of my eye, I myself select the spell that I should use in this situation.

Claura’s magic will not last much longer. Let’s first shore up our defense against projectiles.

“Leiha! Protect me for 10 seconds!”

“As you command.”

Fablu and Elizabel and Claura are surrounded and protected by Ted and the three soldiers, which might be why they are being left for later as I see no arrows flying in their direction. Only after confirming that did I give my

instruction to Leiha.

Leiha adopts a low stance and charges towards the several warriors heading for me. Her figure is like a black panther that has been freed from its chains.

“You Dark Elf!”

“Die!”

Axe and spear are thrust towards Leiha’s position, but the split second before they land, her tanned body is flying in midair.

For the warriors, it might have seemed like she had just disappeared in thin air.

“Shaah!”

“Gah!”

I think the modern name for it is flying back spin kick.

Her beautifully extended heel smashes into the chin of a warrior holding an axe. The warrior next to him finally reacts to her movements and try to bring his spear to bear, but Leiha effortlessly steps within the range of his spear and unleashes a front kick.

“~~!?”

The warrior whose crotch was kicked with full force immediately follows his partner to the ground.

The remaining warriors also thrust and slice and swing their weapons, but they cannot keep up with Leiha’s movements, as she doesn’t stay in the same place for even a moment.

In return, they are rendered powerless one by one with strikes to their throat or crotch, or accurate cuts on their hands and legs.

I had felt a tinge of worry at giving the ‘no killing’ order despite the other side coming with full intent to kill, but it seems that my companions have more than sufficient ability to make that happen.

Aside from a true self-defense situation where “we will be killed if we do not kill,” I want to try my best to not kill any humans.

“Alright, to my side NOW!”

The moment the Inner World me releases the energy of chaos, I shout towards Leid and Leiha.

They each kick or blow away their respective opponent, then leap back to stand before me like a wall.

“By means of this spell, may there be a dome of force to protect us. [Wall of Force]”

Right after I finish chanting, a transparent force field in the shape of a dome surrounds us.

“You think you can get awaGUH.”

Seeing the falling arrows bounce off the dome, Claura lowers her staff and breathes out a sigh.

The warriors pursuing Leid and Leiha also smash full force into the dome, then bounce right back off.

“I was almost in danger of running out of magic power.....”

It would be stupid to be trapped inside my own force field, so I'd actually opened up a certain part. But well, the whole construct is invisible, so there's no way for the other side to tell.

“Thank you you two, that was an enormous help.”

“Fun.”

“I am thankful for your commendation..... However, it was my failure to do my job as a scout properly that got us into this situation. I am deeply sorry.”

“No, don't take it to mind.....”

While soothing Leiha, who is prostrating herself, I look around at the surrounding warriors..... at the Shulz tribe members.

After knocking on the force field and shooting a few arrows at it, they've understood that it cannot be destroyed, and thus taken to spreading out to surround us.

“Goodness, I wonder if we can even make proper conversation with them.....”

“Their aim is me..... I think. What are we going to do?”

Elizabeth looks up at me with an ashen face.

If I remember right, the Shulz tribe were the original inhabitants of Filsand, but were chased off by the army of the current Duke of Filsand. And up to this day, they are still throwing attacks against Filsand, and Elizabeth’s eldest stepbrother was killed while fighting against them.

As expected, there is strong hatred in Elizabeth’s eyes as she looks at them.

“..... For now, let’s try to talk to them. Nothing else can start otherwise.”

“Understood.....”

At that moment, the warriors surrounding us part left and right, revealing a person wearing equipment extravagant enough to identify them as the leader.

Armor decorated with white pelt, longsword at the waist. But what draws my attention.....

“I am the Martial Chief of the Shulz, Dianu! There is a guy name Gio among your party, right?! Gio Margils! Give him to us and we’ll let the rest of you off!”

This ‘Martial Chief’ person turns out to be a silver-haired young girl with her hair cut short.

However, those red eyes and facial structure..... Aside from the color of her hair and skin, she is almost a living resemblance of the Elizabeth that I am currently protecting.

“Wait a second! Why on earth does Margils’ name come up here?!”

“Ah.”

Occupied with comparing the two young girls with opposing atmospheres, I finally realize the other thing to be surprised about only when Laura says it out loud.

Chapter 79: Divine Sword

“What’s wrong?! It’s Gio Margils that we want! I bet it’s that weak-looking guy or that ossan over there, right?!”

(T/N: Ossan means ‘middle-aged man,’ but in an overly casual way that might be considered rude.) On the other side of the transparent wall made with [Wall of Force], the fierce-looking female warrior is pointing fingers.

It seems that she’s indicating me and Irudo. I wonder who’s the ossan, huh.

“Dammit, what is with this wall!”

“So hard.....”

There turns out to be a lot more Shulz members here than I’d thought. No, it looks like there are more and more showing up. There are already almost a hundred of them surrounding us.

But whatever they throw at the force field, be it fist or sword or arrow, nothing works.

My mind is slightly confused right now, so let’s take this brief moment to organize my thoughts.

Why do the Shulz know my name and are aiming for my life?

Why does the Martial Chief Dianu look like the splitting image of Elizabel?

Finally, what can we do to get out of this situation?

But since everyone’s safety is now guaranteed, the third one is honestly of little importance.

“I’m just asking this just in case, but that girl over there is not your sister, right?”

“Not really sure..... I think my mother had siblings, so perhaps she’s a cousin?”

So answers Elizabel with a doubtful look on her face. Because Leid's big body is in the way, the other side has yet to notice her existence.

"Alright, then next. Does anyone have any any idea why they are targeting me, by name?"

"That would be the bigger mystery. The only people in Filsand who know your name are only a small minority of merchants and nobles."

That is a clear indication of just how little contact there is between the Liius Union and the Kingdom of Feldi. And that is the very reason why I think there is value in opening up a trade route to Filsand, but.....

"How much longer do you intend to feign ignorance?! Get out here now!"

"Seriously, just do them all in already, Margils! After all, they've attacked us already!"

"..... Muu....."

While enduring the incessant onslaught of high-pitched female voices from both sides of the wall, I somehow manage to finish organizing my thoughts.

"I am the Lord of Jiiteias Castle, Wizard Gio Margils."

Taking a step forward, I name myself to the silver-haired female warrior.

"I knew it was the ossan. Making us waste our time! Just get out of there right now and offer me your head!"

"Before there, may I ask you two questions?"

"Shut up! I have nothing to say to a sneaky coward who is hiding behind a wall!"

Between the daughter of the Duke of Filsand and this warrior of the Shulz, it seems the only thing they have in common is their appearance.

Thoroughly exasperated, Dianu draws her sword from her waist.

"Ooohh. Dianu-sama's Divine Sword....."

"How sublime....."

"That's a demonic sword..... and an extremely high level one at that."

The surrounding warriors raise a stir. Clauro swallows her breath.

It's true that the blade of her sword is wrapped by a richly-colored aura, and it looks extremely powerful indeed.

“The Shulz claim to be the descendants of an ancient holy kingdom that was annihilated during the First Bleed more than 500 years ago. Seeing how they are in possession of such a demonic sword, that claim might not be a complete lie after all.....”

Still hiding in Leid's shadow, Elizabel conscientiously gives us all a commentary. Ancient holy kingdom? Sounds like something else that's going to spell trouble down the road.

“That's right! There is nothing that this Divine Sword of mine, Bloodsucking Snake, cannot..... cut!”

With a shout, the silver-haired female warrior leaps, lands before me, then swings down her demonic — wait, no, divine? — sword.

Her target is the force field standing between me and her.

Before anyone can react, the blade of her sword shines brightly, seemingly splashing rich colors all over the surroundings.

“OWWWWWW!?”

Of course, the [Wall of Force] that couldn't be destroyed by even [Meteor] wouldn't budge to something like a mere demonic sword. The effects looked flashy, but all it did was give Dianu's hands an extreme shock.

The silver-haired female warrior is cradling her sword hand while crouching on the ground.

Me, Clauro, and Irudo — basically, the ones who know about my wizardry — are composed, but Elizabel, Fablu, and the new soldiers have their eyes wide open in amazement.

But it was incomparable to the shock on the faces of the Shulz warriors.

“That's a lie, right?!”

“The Divine Sword that can easily cut through rocks and even iron.....?!”

“Is that guy a devil?!”

“SHUT UP!! I just underestimated it a little just now! When I get serious, a wall like this is not worth squat!”

With her face still distorted, Dianu stands up and yells at the buzzing warriors.

The unsettled warriors immediately quiet down with just that, so she must be quite popular among her troops. But when I observe more closely, I see puzzlement bordering on unease flickering on her face.

Looks like she still isn't able to completely control her emotions..... wait, no no no.

I've been around tough women like Claura and Elizabel so I've gotten used to it, but isn't this supposed to be the norm?

“Stop for a second.”

“Wh-, what is it.”

Smashing the butt of my staff against the ground, I re-tighten the atmosphere that had loosened up a bit from the comical exchange.

I need to properly settle the issue of this village's terrible state and also the issue of their assault.

“Two questions is what I mentioned. If you have business with me, first answer them.”

“..... Ask away.”

Though she looks reluctant, there is a note of relief in her voice. I'm sure she also wants to avoid the flow of events that would oblige her to make another pass at the wall.

“Firstly, was it you guys who attacked this settlement and massacred all of its inhabitants?”

Oh right, this kind of situation is when I need my ESP Medal. But unfortunately, it's still in my sling bag.

“Hah?! Like we know! Wasn't it just you guys taking revenge on those who managed to flee? Or maybe you were just trying to turn them into sacrifices.”

“..... Flee..... It’s true that these past few years, there have been citizens fleeing Filsand due to being poor. They might have indeed been those people.”

Alongside Elizabel’s quiet commentary, I look for markers indicating deception on Dianu’s face, but there’s nothing. It doesn’t seem like Dianu is lying.

“Very well, next question. Why are you targeting my life? Exactly what did I do?”

“Hah! Your secret’s been revealed, you Shadow Demon bastard! You’re a Demonist, aren’t you! There was a proclamation from the Shulz tribe’s Mystic!”

..... Is it my imagination, or have I heard a similar line before?

Chapter 80: One on One Duel

“Hey, Leid-kun.”

“..... What.”

“Is this Shulz tribe a branch family of the War Tribe?”

“Never heard of them before.”

“But it seems like the War Tribe’s miko and these guys’ Mystic are saying the same thing?”

“Like I know. Maybe you really are Shadow Demon or Demonist?”

With the [Wall of Force] in between, the Shulz female warrior Dianu and we are facing each other.

The ‘proclamation’ that came out of her mouth was almost the exact same content as what I had heard from the War General Kanbelis just recently.

Feeling fed up rather than surprised, I could not help but to poke the large body next to me with an elbow.

Elizabel is still hiding in that Leid’s shadow. Although she has a questioning look on her face, she doesn’t butt in. In exchange, she is straining her ears, and observing everyone on both sides with wide-open eyes.

“This seems too well down to be a coincidence.”

“Eh. Claura-san?!”

“..... Umu.....”

Irudo is surprised at Claura’s ruminative murmur, but I nod in agreement.

“Based on this, it seems to me that there is an agenda to set Margils up as a Shadow Demon.”

“..... That might very well be true.”

From the side of this world's common sense, when prophecies and proclamations pop up saying the same thing, then that would be accepted as the truth.

But Claura flatly denies that possibility, then shares what she imagines to be the most likely scenario. Even though I myself am still not sure of my own innocence.

“Oi you bastard! How long are you going to continue whispering among yourselves! I answered your questions already so get out here already!”

On the other side, the Martial Chief earnestly pounds on the wall.

From her point of view, because I'm a Shadow Demon or Demonist, so she probably wants very much to kill me as soon as possible.

However, from my point of view, I had originally intended on just peacefully chasing them away, but now I cannot do that anymore.

By all possible means, I now want to have a detailed talk with her. To be honest, I want to go straight to that 'Mystic' that she mentioned and question that person in detail, but I can't very well dive into hostile territory with Elizabel and Fablu in tow.

“Aniki, why doesn't Margils-sama just call giants or meteors and just get rid of these guys?”

“I know, right. Margils-sama can do it in just one blow, right?”

While I am thinking quickly as Dianu continues being noisy, I also hear the conversation between Ted and the three soldiers protecting Fablu.

“What are you guys saying. Margils-sama has his own thoughts, alright?”

“What are his thoughts, then? They only have numbers, it's like a fight between an adult and a child.....”

“And I'm saying that that's a really shallow way of thinking. When an adult fights with a child, the adult won't suddenly use his full strength, right?”

..... Fumu, I see, adult and child huh. Not just age-wise, but also in terms of our respective fighting strength.

When an adult fights with a child, he either purposely loses to the child, or else he uses the pressure of an adult to shut the child up without even getting into the same ring. When having a fair fight is not an option, I mean.

“I’ve had just about enou—”

With blood vessels becoming visible on her forehead, Dianu seems about to draw her sword again. At that moment, I raise a single hand.

“I have a proposal. This will be the last.”

“..... Let’s hear it. If it’s something stupid, I’ll smash you along with this wall.”

“You, me, one on one duel.”

“..... Hah?”

“Wai-, Margils?!”

My allies seem even more surprised than the Shulz.

As Claura is about to say something, I raise a palm to stop her.

“If you win, then you can have my head. If I win, you will become my prisoner.”

“Me..... and you? Not that big lump, or that sexy lady?”

“That’s right, I will be your opponent.”

Big lump and sexy lady..... Leid and Leiha look respectively look irked and raring to go, but I shake my head.

“..... Sure, alright! When I win, I’ll have your head! I’ll at least let your friends run away, so you can let yourself be cut by me with peace of mind!”

“That would be a great help. I, too, promise to not lay hands on your friends.”

“Is that guy an idiot? Does he really think that he can win against Hime..... against our Martial Chief?”

“He’s just going to become rust on the Divine Sword’s blade.....”

The silver-haired female warrior agrees delightedly..... more like, relievedly.

The surrounding Shulz warriors must also have a lot of faith in her strength, as

they are also acting like the fight was already won in their favor.

After confirming the terms of the fight, I stoop so as to get out of the [Wall of Force] through the prepared opening. As I do so, I accidentally exchange glances with Elizabel, who is peering out from Leid's shadow.

"..... You, will be fine, right?"

She only knows a small portion of my power. Her face tells me that she is struggling with whether she should be worried or not.

Come to think of it, she's currently entrusting her life to someone who she barely knows who is jumping straight into the tiger's mouth. Must be pretty hard for her too.

"Don't worry, this'll be over soon."

"Au....."

Without thinking, I reach out with a hand and pat her head a few times. I can't really call this the gentlemanly attitude of an ally of equal standing, though.

"Ah, sorry, sorry. Anyways, just stay there and enjoy the show."

"He's right. When it comes to this man, it's only a waste of time to worry about him losing or dying."

".....!!"

Claura kindly hugs Elizabel from behind, drawing her backwards.

..... Is what I think is supposed to happen, as I'm sure that Claura's arms being positioned strangely close to Elizabel's respiratory tract is just me overthinking things.

"Sorry for the wait."

".....Yea, I've been waiting....."

As the force field is transparent, she has no way of knowing whether I've actually left the area of its effect. However, after I have taken sufficient distance from my allies, she addresses me with what almost sounds like a purr from her throat.

Gio Margils has Mid Rank in Quarterstaff fighting. By D&B standards, this is about the same proficiency as that of a Level 4 to 12 Warrior.

Of course, this ranking is purely in terms of proficiency with a quarterstaff — my hitpoints and armor points are far from that of an actual Warrior.

As for myself, I have absolutely zero knowledge of actual martial arts. However, after being made to participate in practice sessions with the Carbanera Knight Order, and also from seeing Leid and Leiha fighting from up close, I believe I have cultivated a fairly discerning eye for warriors.

According to this eye of mine, the skill of this Shulz female warrior is..... well, she's weaker than Leid and Leiha. Which means it'll be fine.

“Sorry about that. Alright, let's get started. Come at me any time.”

I simply stand in place without taking any stance, but beckon with my hand to provoke her.

“The likes of a magician..... looking down on me.....”

She draws the Divine Sword from its scabbard, holding it upright.

The rainbow-colored aura covering the silvery white blade is shining stronger and brighter than before. The light reaching towards the skies in what looks like a swaying dance indeed conjures up thoughts of a snake.

“..... By means of this spell.....”

Considering the moment she drew her sword to be the start of the duel, I immediately begin chanting.

It will take 10 seconds until the spell activates.

Of course, that's enough time for her to hit me with that rainbow-colored Divine Sword more than ten times over.

“Da—YAH!”

Shouting the warcry unique to the Sulz, she kicks the ground.

However.

“What?!”

Her sword's downward swing is stopped by something roughly 30cm above my head.

[Invisible Demon].

Normally, this spell is for attacking purposes, such as to pursue a fleeing enemy or to kill a target. However, as the usage is to "bind an invisible demon to my will for an extended period of time and have it obey one order," it is still extremely effective when used defensively like this.

This time, my order is to "block any attack that would hit me."

Incidentally, before we arrived at this ruined village, I've cast this spell not only on myself, but also on Elizabel and Fablu.

"You bastard! This! What the hell is this?!"

The silver-haired female warrior brandishes her sword with an expression of rage, releasing cutting attacks from above and below and every which way.

However, the Divine Sword does not touch me even once. Every time it gets close, the invisible demon blocks or repels it.

The demon is Level 14. Attacks from any normal warrior wouldn't be able to deal even a tiny bit of damage to it, however amazing the sword they use. Conversely, against someone like Leid, the demon would be annihilated after receiving only the first blow.

In this case, the demon is gradually being weakened, which speaks to how Dianu's strength is actually quite a ways beyond common sense.

In actual fact, it's taking a bit out of me to withstand that beast-like glare and killing intent.

If I hadn't seen a top-notch warrior like Leid and the exceptional hatred of the Shadow Demons up close, my feet trembling would have been the least of my worries here.

"..... avatar of lightning and storms and the sea..... and be under my control for 30 minutes. [Create All Monster]"

However, I have finished chanting.

An extraordinary sense of oppression suddenly begins emanating from quite a ways above my head.

In actual fact, there is a huge shadow covering me, Dianu, and even all the Shulz warriors.

“GUOOOOOOOooooo!”

A roar that is high-pitched, heavy, and causes everyone to quiver in their shoes. It seems to be coming down from the sky.

“What..... on..... earth.....?!”

Dianu looks upward. The Shulz warriors look upward. Even my allies look upward.

What they see reflected in their eyes is an enormous blue figure crashing down behind me, causing a small earthquake with its landing.

“GUOOOOOOOOOOooooooooooooo!”

Dianu’s line of sight drops to a spot behind me, then gradually rises again.

What her eyes, and that of everyone present except for mine, behold.....

..... is the silhouette of a Level 32 monster, Huge Blue Dragon of Purple Lightning.

Chapter 81: Princess of the Shulz (Part 1)

(3rd Person)

On the Sedia continent, the country with the longest civilized history is Shulendal [Kingdom of the North].

Or so believes the majority of people living in the continent's central and western areas, but there are many who hold a different opinion.

According to them, the credit of being the founder of civilization belongs to the Shuzlus Holy Kingdom, which was located east of Shulendal, where present-day Feldi is.

The kingdom ruled by kings inheriting the blood of the Snake God of Creation prospered for several thousand years, but was erased 500 years ago during the First Bleed.

The citizens of the holy kingdom were scattered into hundreds of small tribes and small countries.

The blood of the lineage of the holy kings flows thick in the Shulz tribe, blessing them with powerful and charismatic leaders generation after generation. In 200 years, they managed to build up Filsand to its current size.

During the Second Bleed 150 years ago, they managed to protect their city, despite suffering significant losses. However, they were unable to do the same in the face of the next invasion.

In other words, the invasion of the Kingdom of Feldi, roughly 20 years ago.

The general Damund, who had led Feldi's vanguard in vanquishing several countries, killed the Shulz's Tribe Chief of the time, and successfully drove out all the Shulz people from Filsand. He eventually was granted peerage and authority over the city, becoming the Duke of Filsand.

The Shulz people fled to the barren lands in the south.

Mainly composed of rocky mountains and wastelands, the south was indeed a harsh place to live in. However, the new Tribe Chief led the tribe to raise mountain goats, catch fish, and cultivate small farms.

Though burning with ambition, the Duke of Filsand showed no interest in the barren, worthless lands in the south, so a few cold, quiet years passed.

The change came from the Shulz tribe side.

Roughly 5 years after being chased out of Filsand.

The wife of the Tribe Chief, a woman named Sheiru who was one of the daughters of the previous Tribe Chief, gave birth to a child.

The red eyes of the child that signifies that the blood of the holy kings flows strong in her caused the people of the tribe to remember their pride and their anger.

It can also be said that they realized that this land could not support their numbers, which had begun to grow again.

The males of the tribe took up weapons in between going hunting and farming, and began attacking Filsand.

At the time, the surviving population of the Shulz was about 3,000. In the middle of developing due to maritime trade, Filsand had a population of about 30,000. There was no comparing.

Despite that, the Shulz still attacked trade caravans and frontier settlements, aiming to hurt Filsand's wealth and power however much they can.

The daughter between the Tribe Chief and Sheiru, Dianu, was already mixed in with the boys by age 10, running around the mountains and joining in the hunts.

With red eyes and silver hair, she was expected to become a stunning beauty in the future. However, she loved hunting more than singing, weapons more than sewing needles.

"You are actually the princess of Filsand. The princess of that huge, brightly shining, wealthy city. That's why you must kill that hated Duke and my elder

sister, who shook her tail at that Duke, and reclaim that wonderful Filsand.”

Considering how every single night, Dianu was repeatedly made to listen to her mother’s pent-up resentment in place of lullabies, she actually grew up relatively well.

“The reason because mother and the Shulz people got chased from the city was because they were weak! I will become incredibly strong, then take everything back!”

So saying, she poured her energy into learning martial arts, leading the boys in her surroundings to do nothing but train to fight.

She was 10 years old when she experienced a real battle for the first time.

Her opponent was not soldiers from Filsand, but a monster.

It was a gigantic bat called a Rock Bat that was active at night, preying on small, solitary animals, such as humans.

The Shulz did not have sufficient resources to arrange for sufficient guarding, so every month, the Rock Bat would take away 2 to 3 children or elders.

Possessing a certain amount of intelligence, it wouldn’t show up when the security was tight. But when the soldiers grew tired, it would attack from an unexpected direction.

Hiding a short sword dipped in poison in her breast, the 10 year old girl crouched, alone, on a large rock at night.

The last attack had been 10 days ago. It was a night when no one else was about, when “it’s almost time for the next one” was on everyone’s mind.

As expected, the hungry demonic beast attacked the little girl.

True to its name, it was a bat with grey skin as hard as rock. However, it was a lot larger than any ordinary bat, and it possessed claws and fangs that gave it the ability to kill its prey.

Right when the bat with a wingspan of almost 2m tried to grab onto the young girl with both its legs.....

“Dayaa—!”

The young girl rolled to a face up position, grabbed one of the bat's legs and stabbed it with her short sword..... or not. Instead, she used all her strength to draw the bat's body towards herself.

“Giii! Giii!”

The demonic beast possessed overwhelmingly greater strength, but as it was in the middle of a dive, it could not help but to be pulled along.

The grey bat and little girl were almost close enough for their noses to touch.

“Dah!”

“GIGIGiiiiiii!”

The bat opened its mouth widely to sink its fangs into the little girl's throat, but the little girl was faster in plunging her sword into that mouth.

“GyaAHH! OW! It HURTS damn you!”

“Giii! GIGIGii!”

Of course, the little girl did not go unscathed. The hand that was grasping onto the Rock Bat's leg was stabbed and gouged by its other claw. She still has the scar from this wound.

The bat mustered all the strength in its wings to clobber her and wildly flailed its claws, trying desperately to tear her off.

Despite that, the little girl hung on, pushing the short sword deeper and deeper into the bat's mouth, twisting it the entire time.

In the end, the death match was over after several minutes.

The one who eventually rose from that rock that was covered in a sea of blood was the girl.

After that, she tried to sneak back into her own room the way she had sneaked out, planning to put on an innocent face while waking up the next morning..... ‘planning’ being the operative word.

Because of course, she was caught by her parents, everything came to light, and she was berated from head to toe.

It turned into one of those very rare instances when her father, who believed

in letting sleeping dogs lie and rarely raised his voice, and her mother, a prideful person who only ever spoke of their tribe's past glory, came to be in sync. To this time, the girl still remembers how they hugged her after the harsh scolding was over.

For the Shulz people, this episode became a beacon of hope.

For this people who was growing weary from the harsh life in the hinterlands and the fruitless fighting against Filsand, the appearance of a hero was what they desired for the most.

Furthermore, several years later, she became selected to be the wielder of the Divine Sword. More and more people came to adore her, and to entrust her with their dream..... the dream of returning to the bountiful Filsand.

Chapter 82: Princess of the Shulz (Part 2)

(3rd Person)

After being chased out of Filsand by the Kingdom of Feldi's army, the Shulz tribe fled southwards, and built a 'fort' on top of a precipitous, rocky plateau.

Dianu, and the other children near her age, spent the majority of their childhood living in that fort.

However, as the tribe's population gradually grew, they attempted to settle lands even further south.

Settling the desolate south proved to be extremely tough going, but along the way, they discovered the 'Garden of the Gods.'

Garden of the Gods was an ancient stone ruin the size of a medium-sized city, which could easily accommodate 1,000 of the Shulz. As such, the entire tribe moved to Garden of the Gods, and their fort became merely the base of operations for their attacks against Filsand.

The young girl spent almost all of her time in the fort, together with her father, the Tribe Chief.

She had very little contact with her mother, who led the people living in Garden of the Gods.

All she focused on was the sword, spear, bow, horseriding, and short sword. She also learned how to lead troops from the Martial Chief of the time, seeing off the warriors leaving to attack Filsand with cheers of joy.

Every single person believed with their whole heart.

That the Shulz tribe was the side that had been stolen from, and that they were nurturing their power to seize back what was rightfully theirs.

Around when the young girl defeated the Rock Bat and began gathering her

people's hopes, there was change on the Filsand side.

Beginning with the fort, they started to aggressively attack the Shulz people's lands.

Though it could be said that this was only natural after suffering from so many years of attacks, what motivated them was actually much more profit than retribution.

What they were doing, in short, was 'hunting for slaves.'

There was no way the Shulz could understand this.

All they knew was that periodically, Filsand would send soldiers to the south and seize people from settlements.

If they hadn't arranged to move more than half of their entire population live in Garden of the Gods, then the losses might have been even higher.

However, Garden of the Gods was also by no means completely safe. Casualties from stray Shadow Demons and man-eating monsters never ceased.

Within such a life, the young girl received a summons from her mother.

It was 4 years before now, when she was 12.

Her mother was waiting for her in the temple in Garden of the Gods, accompanied by the tribe's Mystic, who she had never met before.

"You have been chosen by the Divine Sword. You are the one who is the Warrior of the Holy Kings."

"Dianu, you must use that sword to destroy Filsand and fulfill the Shulz people's dearest wish, alright?"

"..... Yes I will."

With a smile, the Mystic gave the jewel-encrusted sword to the young girl.

Though her mother's words were no different from the usual, the amount of hatred lurking in her blue eyes was much, much, much thicker than before. Noticing this, the young girl could not help but to shiver.

At first, the young girl thought the Divine Sword slightly eerie, but once she got used to wielding it, she realized that that was simply an indication of the

sword's power.

But of course, to her, that was the only thing that mattered.

Use strength to push through her will. If she wants something, then use strength to seize it by force. If something is taken from her, then use strength to seize it back.

From when her father gave her permission to join the raiding parties when she turned 13 up until now, she had been completely faithful to that philosophy.

“Eeehh?! No wait, how can I duel with a girl?!”

Which is why she was so completely surprised when she attacked that trade caravan from Filsand half a year ago.

“Hah?! Are you an idiot? I'm the Shulz's Martial Chief! I'm saying that if you win against me, I'll let all the guys not holding weapons get away!”

It seemed to be a caravan carrying raw materials from a nearby mine.

The unwieldy caravan had several tens of carts and more than a hundred knights. Normally, the Shulz warriors would not attack a force of this size and this well-equipped, but for a certain reason they had set up an ambush.

Probably because the other side had let down its guard, the ambush was successful, and the knights were taken down one by one.

The young girl — no, by now she had grown into Dianu, a proper female warrior — identified the knight with the best physique and wearing the most extravagant armor and challenged him to single combat..... but to her shock, was declined with a single word.

“We won't resist anymore and just quietly retreat, so just let us go, alright? We'll leave all our weapons and the ores here, alright?”

“You bastard, and you still call yourself a knight?!?!?!”

The knight, who removed his helmet, turned out to be a young man with fair skin and a round face.

Dianu, who firmly believed in strength but wasn't particularly an evil person,

was taken aback at the truly troubled-sounding entreaty. She was taken back, but that was it.

“I never offered to let the knights and soldiers go. Even if they throw away their weapons, I’m still going to kill them of course!”

“Hii. Alright, then how about I’ll be your prisoner! I’m the eldest son of the Duke of Filsand, Balzard! Just having me as a prisoner would give you enormous leverage, alright?”

“HAHH?!”

And so that was how Dianu managed to capture the Duke of Filsand’s eldest son. Either way, during the exchange between Dianu and Balzard, most of the other knights had already managed to run away.

A prisoner as important as the heir of the Duke was sent to her mother at the Garden of the Gods instead of being kept at the fort.

Dianu wanted to keep him in the fort to drag information out of him, but this time’s ambush was a success due to the Mystic’s ‘proclamation.’ Her mother used that as a shield to forcefully seize custody, and there was nothing Dianu could do about that.

The Mystic that she had met 4 years ago had lately begun to give out information on the Filsand army and trade caravans in the form of ‘proclamations.’

By following those ‘proclamations,’ they’ve managed to conduct numerous successful attacks and raids. As a result, the Shulz warriors’ fighting spirit was fanned even higher. Dianu herself had never gone back to Garden of the Gods even once after receiving her sword, but it seemed to her that her mother was growing to place quite a lot of faith in that Mystic.

Her father was the only one who found it strange that the Filsand side never issued a demand for the return of Balzard, despite him being the Duke’s heir. Dianu, however, did not think it strange.

After all, if the Duke wanted his son back, he simply had to come in person to seize him back.

Then, several days earlier.

A new 'proclamation' reached the fort.

“ ‘The man Gio Margils, who will come from the west, is the emissary of the Shadow Demons who is coming to bring ruin upon the Shulz. Set up an ambush on the western road and erase him, at all costs.’ ”



“What..... on..... earth.....?!”

For the first time ever, Dianu felt her Divine Sword to be as untrustworthy as a tiny tree branch.

When she had thought the black-robed man to be muttering something to himself, suddenly this gigantic something had already appeared in front of her.

A gigantic dragon covered with dark blue scales.

Just its front leg was almost twice her own height. Its mouth was the size of an entire house, and looked wide enough to eat five of her in one bite.

In all 16 years of her life, Dianu had relied on her own strength to break through any and all obstacles in her way.

However, she knew instinctively that that meagre strength of hers would do absolutely nothing against the gigantic creature in front of her.

How did things before like this?

Wasn't this Margils person a mere Demonist?

Confusion welled out together with waves of terror.

“DRAGON!! IT'S A DRAGON!!!”

“..... Hiii.....”

Her teeth chattered, and she felt the area around her groin becoming wet.

The Shulz warriors that had been stationed all around have also either collapsed with pure despair or have run away while screaming.

For the first time in her life, Dianu felt terror in the face of an absolute power.

«Anything, is there anything that I can do?»

Feeling like crying, Dianu searched within herself for something to cling onto.

Both the hatred that she had received from her mother and the sense of responsibility that she had learned from her father seemed like nothing before the overwhelming fear.

«What is this..... I, to think that I'm actually this empty inside.....»

The realization of her hollowness actually enabled her to resume being able to think and move. Or perhaps she was just imitating what the heir of Filsand, who she had seen in a similar situation, did.

“Oi, ossan.”

“..... My name is Margils. So, what is it?”

With the enormous dragon behind him obediently awaiting his orders, the man calmly replied to Dianu.

Black hair and black eyes. Thought this combination is not that rare in the east, his demeanor that is absolutely absent of killing intent and hatred actually made him that much more eerie.

“I just want to confirm, even if I lose, you'll let these guys go, right?”

“Indeed, that is my intention. Of course, even when I take you prisoner, you will not be ill-treated. This I promise.”

“Then I'm re.....lieved!”

It wasn't that she had any particular tactic in mind.

She simply chose the most appropriate action from among all the techniques that she had learned.

After moving to the angle where Margils became positioned right in between herself and the dragon, she unleashed a slice aimed straight at him.

Chapter 83: After the Duel

“Then I’m re.....lieved!”

This female warrior of the Shulz tribe who shares the same face as the daughter of the Duke of Filsand releases a slash aimed at me without any hesitation whatsoever.

Without even looking at the gigantic Huge Blue Dragon of Purple Lightning at my back.

In comparison with the other warriors, all of whom have either fled in sheer panic or have sunk to the ground in despair, she cuts a very gallant figure indeed.

“DAYA—!”

“Hi-, Hime-sama.”

“..... Hime!”

The kiai of their Martial Chief splitting through the air jolts the surrounding warriors back to their senses.

I really must commend her on her split-second decision making.

By sandwiching me between the dragon and herself, I effectively become her shield against the dragon.

If this had been a different dragon, then her Divine Sword might possibly have reached me.

However.

“Blue Dragon! Stun Lightning!”

“GYUUOOOooooo!”

The dragon behind me opens its mouth so wide that in her eyes, it must look

like the dragon is about to swallow both me and her together.

And it must have been the same with the lightning shower that began as sparks deep in the dragon's mouth before enveloping her within the blink of an eye.

"Gyan!?"

Having been struck with lightning the full length of her body, the female warrior lets out a brief shriek before falling over.

Stun Lightning. A variety of the Blue Dragon's unique ability, Lightning Breath, this attack basically paralyzes the target with an electrical shock. The reason why I chose the Blue Dragon is exactly because from the very start, I had intended on ending this duel without anyone getting hurt.

"Uuu."

Thanks to her perfect position, I ended up being caught up in the Stun Lightning attack as well.

But of course, even though I was showered in the same lightning, I have the resistance of a Level 36 Wizard. Though I felt a bit of a shock, all it did was help improve my blood circulation a bit. However, it is largely due to Stun Lightning's effect description "Stunned if the Resist roll fails, No Damage if the Resist roll succeeds" that I could let myself be hit with such a carefree heart.

"Hime-sama?!"

"What the hell..... how can we even dream of winning against something like that....."

The few Shulz warriors who had managed to stand their ground instead of running away are now staring in shock.

I slowly walk forward until I am in front of the fallen female warrior, then powerfully strike the ground with my Wizardry Staff.

"As you have witnessed, the winner of this duel is myself, the Wizard Gio Margils! Per our agreement, she is now under my custody! Ah..... though the outcome is like this, she fought with honor, and thus I promise that no harm shall come to her! Oh warriors of the Shulz, begone from this place!"

“..... Uuu.”

“Kuh..... How can we just abandon Hime-sama here.....”

At my words, the warriors take one of two actions.

While some immediately drop their weapon in defeat, some gradually inch towards to me even while battling with the fear inside of themselves. If I had to say, the former is the majority.

When I turn around, I see the Blue Dragon still there, slowly undulating its head in intimidation. The fact that there are still some warriors proceeding forward in spite of that is a testament to how talented a leader Dianu is.

It seems like it would be an enormous waste of time trying to verbally convince them all, and it'd also be problematic if they have reinforcements coming.

“Blue Dragon, use Stun Lightning one more time. Knock them all out.”

“KyuOOoo.”



In the end, all of the Shulz warriors who remained were hit with lightning and knocked out.

Though that method of handling was a bit rough, they were the ones who first shot us with arrows without any questions or warning, so I'm afraid they'll just have to bear with it.

After all my companions exited the force field dome, we all left the place and returned to the road.

To be honest, I wanted to stay at the settlement a while to search for traces of Shadow Demons, but had to abandon that plan in case Shulz reinforcements show up.

Of course, we brought the princess of the Shulz, Dianu, along as our prisoner.



Several hours after we've returned to the mountain road and resumed heading towards Filsand.

According to our guide, Fablu, flat ground is only a short distance ahead, after which we will reach Filsand with 4 to 5 more days of walking.

“But still, I was very much surprised. To think that you could even call dragons.....” (Elizabeth)

“I agree with you totally. Margils-dono’s power is probably the equal of a whole army..... no, the equal of a large country’s entire military force.” (Fablu)

“You all have already seen me use giants and worms. It’s just the same thing.” (Gio)

After having come this far, it is clear that there are no signs of us being pursued. As such, Elizabeth and Fablu are engaging me in conversation. Fablu aside, even Elizabeth’s face seems flushed with excitement.

Well, as part of the highest class of monsters in D&B, it seems to have left quite the impact.

“Margils-sama is our Oluri. Something of that level is of no trouble at all.” (Leiha)

“I did think it curious to find a Dark Elf serving a human, but now I am completely convinced.” (Fablu)

Leiha talks to Fablu while looking like she’s boasting. These two were wary of each other at the beginning, but it seems that they’re getting along together quite well now.

But as we continue walking, the newcomer raises a voice of protest.

“Oi dammit, you bastards! What is up with this treatment?!”

“It doesn’t really hurt or pain you in any way, right? I think this is actually a pretty humane way of treating a prisoner though.”

“What part of this disgrace is supposed to be humane huh you bastard?!”

Disgrace? How rude of her.

All I’ve done is tie up her hands and feet to prevent her from running away or flailing about, then have [Sprite Porter] carry her.

Well, the Porter is carrying her over its shoulder, so from the side it looks like

the Shulz princess is bobbing up and down in midair with her body bent over and her butt raised high.

Hmm, this might be a bit embarrassing indeed.

“.....”

Next to me, Elizabel looks over at Dianu with a complicated face.

Though Dianu has realized that there is someone in our party with the exact same face as her own, she is opting to completely ignore Elizabel.

I took her prisoner because I wanted to ask her for more details about that ‘proclamation,’ but at the moment I can’t see her as anything other than the seed for trouble down the road.....



When we are almost clear of the mountainous area, we circle around a huge rock, after which our view opens up all of a sudden.

We can see an expansive plain, as well as the ocean to the south. Compared to the plains in the vicinity of Lake Liuus, the area here is not so green, and conveys a slightly starved impression.

While we are enjoying the view from our outlook, suddenly a shining piece of paper appears above my head and flutters down.

“Nn? Ahh, this must be my [Arcane Postcard].”

The piece of paper that naturally settles on the palm of my hand is the postcard that I had addressed to Sedam and sent towards Jiiteias Castle a few days ago. This postcard is capable of making a single round trip, so Sedam must have used that function.

“Let’s see, let’s see..... ‘Two fights to eliminate bandits. A small group of Shadow Demons appeared. Managed to crush it with the cooperation of the War Tribe and Carbanera Knight Order. Minimal damage. All else is smooth.’ is what he wrote.”

“..... It sounds to me like the Shadow Demon appearances have increased again.”

“.....”

At hearing Sedam’s report, Claura sighs pensively.

Leid stares at me wordlessly, while Leiha keeps a sharp eye on him. Though I feel like Leid and I did come to know each other a bit in Senpu Village, I know that we will never reach a true rapport until I am cleared of this charge.



“It has been a very long time since I last crossed these mountains.”

That night.

After we had set up camp and already had dinner, when I was massaging my legs that had become stiff from walking, I hear Fablu murmuring to himself. It seems like a good time, so I throw him a question.

“You mentioned that that area is considered sacred ground for the dwarves, but do Shadow Demons still show up every now and then?”

“The Shadow Demons show up everywhere, after all. Of course, once a sighting is confirmed, the Balbatoron [Clan of Battle] will be deployed to wipe them out.”

So it seems like this is not the first sign of Shadow Demon presence. In other words, it’s not that they suddenly started showing up when I showed up. Just knowing that gives me slight relief.

“What do you think about those humans arbitrarily settling there?”

“Of course, I don’t feel good about it at all. If we had found them, then we definitely would have chased them away. But we don’t have so much time on our hands that we’d go around searching for hidden settlements all around the place.”

“..... These past few years, the taxes have gone up quite a lot in Filsand. I’ve heard that some of the citizens have gone bankrupt, and thus either became slaves or have fled the city.”

“The taxes are so severe that citizens have to flee? I was under the impression that Filsand is a bountiful city.....”

Worry comes over Irudo's face in response to Elizabel's supplementary explanation.

"Due to the dragon people, shipping routes in the south have become very insecure. On top of which, the king of Feldi has demanded extraordinary tax several times already. This is why opening a trade route to Senpu Village and then even to Jiiteias Castle would be....."

"Hah! Just because you guys aren't earning enough, you come to plunder us! You greedy Feldians!"

From the slightly removed place where Dianu is having her dinner (I've assigned Leiha to be both her monitor and caretaker) comes jeering in a loud voice.

"....."

Aside from Elizabel, none of us feel any particular closeness to Filsand. However, as they are the party we are aiming to invite to our alliance next, we cannot help but to frown slightly.

"..... We took her prisoner to ask her questions in the first place. Though I feel reluctant, I'm going to talk to her now."

Chapter 84: Same Face, Separate Paths

“..... What are you planning on doing with me, ah?”

So asks the princess who had led the Shulz on many raids against Filsand, Dianu, with obviously ostentatious bravado while sitting cross-legged on the ground.

Her hand restraints have been removed, but of course her Divine Sword is still confiscated..

“First of all, the outfit you have on is hardly appropriate for a girl your age, don’t you think?”

“Oh shut it, Ossan!”

I couldn’t help but to chide her on that, but as expected, I was curtly refused.

Though I suppose it’s only natural for my values to be at odds with that of a young teenager her age.

“..... The next time you show disrespect to my lord, I’ll pull out your tongue alright, little girl?”

“Ugogo?!”

“My lord is not ‘ossan.’ According to human standards, call him an elder.”

“Ca-, can’t breathe.....”

Leiha must have considered Dianu’s words verbal abuse, as she appears like a shadow behind her and begins choking her. For now, let’s just have her calm down so I can have a proper conversation.

“Leiha, enough.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Geho, geho.”

“I don’t have any particular plans to do anything to you. Once you answer my questions honestly, then I don’t mind letting you go.”

To prevent this heartwarming scene from developing any further, I address Dianu again.

At that, she sits properly with her legs to one side, most likely due to now understanding how scary Leiha can get.

“..... I did lose the duel, so I can’t complain even if you kill me. Whatever I know, I’ll freely tell you.”

“Umu. Much appreciated.”

As I’d thought, Dianu has an honest personality. I secretly return the ESP Medal that I’d been holding within my sleeves to my pocket.

Of course, I have no guarantee that she won’t lie to me. If she ever begins acting suspiciously or becomes reluctant to answer a question, then I’ll consider using it.....



In the end, Dianu proved willing to cooperate to the end, and answered all my questions honestly.

I learned that my name and the claim that I am connected to the Shadow Demons was information that she’d received from a person called a ‘Mystic.’

I also learned that this ‘Mystic’ is in a place called ‘Garden of the Gods,’ located south of another place the Shulz calls their ‘fort.’

“Uumu.....”

And that the Duke of Filsand used to be a Feldian general named Damund, and that he had seized Filsand from the Shulz, which is what led to the unending fighting from then on.

This is only the testimony from the Shulz side, so I am sure there is some exaggeration, but..... all in all, it’s a pretty terrible story.

“..... Has that Mystic ever prophesied about the appearance of Shadow Demons or their nests before this?”

While I am silently mulling over what I've just heard, Leid, who has been silently standing behind me the entire time, suddenly cuts into the conversation. Well, since this is about Shadow Demons, I understand his interest.

"No, this was the first time."

"....."

Leid's handsome face that is at odds with his large body briefly distorts into a frown. It seems he thinks this suspect. In fact, I do too.

"Then there is need to meet that Mystic directly, is there not?"

"That does indeed seem necessary. But only after we properly escort Elizabeth to Filsand and complete our negotiations."

My reply was intended to reassure Elizabeth, who has been peeking from within Leid's shadow. But the one who responds first is Dianu.

"More like, what's up with her! The fact that she has the same face as me means that she's the daughter of my Aunt Sheira the traitor right? You bastard, figh-..... gofu."

So it seems she had indeed figured out Elizabeth's identity. Her face is dyed with rage in a split second and she tries to leap at Elizabeth, but Leiha restrains her firmly.

"Traitor, you say? My mother was made a captive! And then she was forced..... she didn't marry the Duke of Filsand because she wanted to!"

"Forced? If it was me, I would have torn Damund's throat to shreds and killed myself long before I gave birth to you! The fact that she didn't do that means that she betrayed her brethren for the sake of a life of luxury!"

Aside from fiction, this kind of weighty scene of carnage rarely takes place in modern Japan. Now that I understand the circumstances of both sides to some degree, I'm hesitant to take any side.

Claura and Irudo also have sad looks on their faces.

Leid sends me one of his rare eye signals, which I interpret this time to mean "pull those two apart." But.....

“She, she also stole Aniuë from me!”

(T/N: Apparently Elizabel calls her first stepbrother ‘Aniuë’ and her second stepbrother ‘Nii-san.’)

“Hah, that spineless young master? If it’s him, he’s probably getting thinner in his cell at Garden of the Gods!”

“Killing my kind Aniuë without any mercy and..... eh?”

..... Even when there are two people who could never fully understand each other, as long as they sit down together and talk, something might change. In this case, it may be if they both come to learn of that fact.

“Hold on, I heard that Elizabel’s brother — Balzard, was it? — was killed by the Shulz. Is that not true?”

“We haven’t killed him! I dueled him and won, so I captured him! We sent your side a missive!”

“How can that be? I’ve never even heard any mention of such a thing..... was the missive from the Shulz purposely smothered?”

The two girls with same faces yet opposite auras are now sharing the same look of puzzlement.

“..... It seems that I will need you to accompany us to Filsand after all.”

So I told Dianu.



After that, during the rest of the trip, Elizabel and Dianu continued talking with each other.

About trade, about Shadow Demons and the alliance, about the hostilities between Filsand and the Shulz. Also about the ‘proclamation’ that labeled me as Shadow Demon.

Getting to talk with her father used to be Elizabel’s one and only wish, but now saving her brother Balzard has been added to the list. Dianu’s intent to resume to fighting against Filsand after her release still hasn’t changed, but she agreed to cooperate with me because she had lost our duel.

As for me, as it became increasingly clear how much more complicated my task is than I had expected, my stomach felt heavier day by day.

Regardless of whether I help the Filsand or the Shulz, I would still end up with a bad aftertaste. Of course, I have the option to keep myself completely uninvolved in their conflict, but.....

In the end, we reached Filsand before I could come up with an answer.

This enormous fortress city that faces a bay seemingly gouged into the coastline.

Even greater in size than Lelis, with innumerable ships of various sizes busily coming in and going out.

At the tip of the narrow and long peninsula that maintains the shape of the bay is the castle where the Duke lives.

“In cases like this, we adventurers use the phrase ‘first defeat the guardian before worrying about the trap on the treasure chest.’”

So says Claura while giving me a light pat on the shoulder as I look up at the Duke’s castle with my hand pressing down on the area near my stomach.

Chapter 85: The Duke of Filsand

The peninsula that seems to reach out in protection of the bay that Filsand is located next to.

At its tip towers the castle of the Duke of Filsand, [Castle of Fortitude].

The peninsula rises higher in altitude the more one progresses down it, such that the castle commands a spectacular view of the entire city.

It seems true that this city was built by the Shulz several hundred years ago. The scale is greater than that of Lelis, but the city walls and buildings all look quite aged.

However, though the city itself might be old, it is also extremely prosperous. Trade boats are flowing in and out in an endless stream, and there are also large numbers of trade caravans passing through the main gate.

If Jiiteias begins trading with this city, then we will be sure to profit.

“Oh my, look in front of you. In front!”

As I am deep in thought about domain management, which feudal lords are supposed to do, I get poked in the back of my head by Claura.

“Umu.....”

I reluctantly look forward, then upwards, to see the architecture with an overwhelming presence approaching.

Needless to say, it is Castle of Fortitude.

Unlike the streets of Filsand, this castle is a recent construction. Though I say recent, I mean 20 years old, as it was built after Filsand became occupied by the Duke of Filsand.

“This is quite a splendid architecture, for humans.”

When Fablu — a dwarf — says that, then I’m sure it must be so.

“This castle has been assaulted many times by the Shulz and other military hosts targeting Filsand, but it has managed to repel them all.”

“Keh. How sickening.”

Elizabeth adds to that in almost a murmur. She has on a complicated expression, like she hates it, but she's also proud of it at the same time. Of course Dianu, whose hands are still bound behind her back to maintain her appearance as our prisoner, spits out her words in revulsion.

“Well then.”

We stop in front of the moat that surrounds the walls that in turn surround Castle of Fortitude.

Before our eyes is a small door protected by a defense tower. On the other side of the moat is a drawbridge, but naturally it is currently raised all the way.

There are lookouts in the towers, so I'm sure they've already noticed our approach. As I am thinking whether we are supposed to call out first.....

“The personage there! Are you the lord of Jiiteias Castle, Gio Margils-sama?!”

“..... Hmm?”

So asks the lookout from the defense tower in a loud voice. His tone doesn't sound like he's cross-examining me, and there is plenty of respect in his attitude.

If I remember correctly, Elizabeth said previously that “There are a few people in Filsand who knows the name ‘Gio Margils’.” I see, it makes sense that the Duke is among those ‘few’ people.

“It seems that my father has no intention of being hostile to Margils-sama. Though well, I should think it a matter of course if he has done a thorough job of gathering information on Margils-sama.”

“Does that mean that the Duke of Filsand's information network reaches Senpu Village, Yuule, and even Lelis?”

“I don't know the full details, but..... judging by the time, I believe there is a high chance that he's heard of what Margils-sama has been doing in Senpu Village.”

“Depending on the circumstances, perhaps he also knows about the commotion with the Shulz.”

Fumuu. The fact that he proactively gathers information and makes full use of it is similar to Elizabel. It seems that he really isn't a person who can be dealt with through ordinary means.

“What do you think we should do, Margils-sama?”

“..... There's no point in us staying quiet and staying here. Give him an answer.”

Claura taught me before to not suddenly address those of lower rank directly, so I nod at Irudo.

“That is indeed so! This personage here is the lord of Jiiteias Castle, the Great Wizard Gio Margils-sama and his entourage! Also present is an emissary from Senpu Village, Fablu-dono of the Rimulon! We ask for an audience with the Duke of Filsand, Damund-sama!”

“Duly acknowledged! Please wait a short while!”

The soldier responds to Irudo's stately proclamation without any hesitation. The drawbridge immediately begins coming down.

..... It seems that Irudo purposely chose to not raise Elizabel's name. Though I'm sure the soldiers must have recognized her themselves.

While waiting for the drawbridge that is wide enough to allow 3 horses to proceed abreast to slowly descend, I mentally confirm the defensive spells that I had already cast on Elizabel and Fablu, as well as the other ones that I have charged for today. These will have to do for now.

This time, I have the ESP Medal already hanging from my neck. Though it is an item that I generally am reluctant to use on people not hostile to me, this situation is one where I need any bit of information that I can gather.

With a heavy sound, the drawbridge falls into place. The castle gate beyond has also been opened, of course.

“..... Let's get going then.” (Gio)

“Understood.” (Irudo)

“All preparations are ready.” (Claura)

“As you wish.” (Leiha)

Standing at the head is Irudo, who is second to me according to the hierarchy of Jiiteias Castle.

Claura and Leiha are positioned protectively behind my back.

Leid is behind them. He’s more or less keeping an eye on Dianu, our captured Shulz princess.

Fablu brings up the rear, protected by Ted and our three newcomer soldiers.

“Even I do not know what my father is truly thinking. Please be on your guard.”

Elizabeth whispers to me from her position next to me.

To be honest, up to now I don’t even know what she’s thinking. So far, no one’s mentioned her presence, but depending on how the situation unfolds, there is a possibility that the matter of our ‘engagement’ might come up again.



“Welcome to Filsand. I am Damund, the lord of Filsand.”

Damund Feldi Filsand.

The lord of the Filsand territory of the Kingdom of Feldi. Also a Duke of said kingdom.

He is welcoming us in the audience hall of this castle of his which is surrounded by four huge defense towers.

“ “To the Great Wizard Gio Margils-sama, salute!” ”

The two rows of knights thrust their swords into the ground in unison. With their pure black full plate armor, they honestly look like bad guys.

My [Sense of Adept]-activated eyes tell me that they are mostly around Level 4. Considering how normal soldiers are Level 1, these must indeed be elite.

I then turn my eyes to the man looking down at us from his seat two dais above us.

His age seems to be similar to mine.

Black hair with streaks of white. His hair has been grown out, and is in a very formal-looking style. Solidly built physique, armor several degrees more magnificent than that of the knights, and a longsword resting on his knees.

His eyes are shining brightly. He is not looking at us like we are below him, and there is no hatred either. In actual fact, [Detect Enemy] is showing no reaction.

The strength in his eyes is most likely a reflection of his own strong will and ambition.

Anyways, he is turning out to be someone contrary to various expectations that I had held. Due to that, I was late in noticing the beautiful lady wearing a slightly high exposure dress standing beside him.

The empty seat next to the Duke's is most likely hers.

What I had expected was a greasy-looking noble with bulging fat, but..... I guess such a cliched villain character was too much to hope for.

When I take a closer look with [Sense of Adept], [*Human Male 43 Years Old Level 15 Warrior*] appears above the Duke's head. His level is even higher than *War General Kanbelis'*..... The lady next to him is [*Human Female 37 Years Old Level 7 Wizard*].

“.....”

As I inadvertently stare intently at them, Claura surreptitiously pokes me in the back. Oh right, thank you for the reminder.

Because the master of this place, the Duke, had named himself first, then I'm supposed to address him myself.

“I am the lord of Jiiteias Castle, the Wizard Gio Margils. We are truly grateful for having been granted the honor of this audience.”

I look up at the Duke, and nod slightly in way of salutation. Originally, this greeting is only acceptable between nobles of equal ranks.

“Oh, no, the honor is all ours. After all, our family will be welcoming the great hero who possesses an enormous amount of magical power as my son-in-law.”

“.....”

The Duke’s unexpectedly intimate tone causes several auras behind me to become discomposed.

We did not expect the Duke to be the one to first broach this subject. However, we did give some thought to the various possible ways for the Duke to react, and we understand that the safest option for him is to first take Elizabeth’s brag at face value and take me in.

“And so, since you are pretty much already family, this positioning is not appropriate, don’t you agree?”

“Come, Margils-sama. Please take this seat.”

The Head Chamberlain is indicating towards the seat placed next to the Duke’s.

“What is the matter? There is no need to hesitate. With your magical power and my brilliance in mind, let’s have a talk about changing the world map a little, shall we?”

After reading a few of his thoughts with my ESP Medal.....

..... It seems that this Duke apparently thinks I’m the same kind of person he is.

Chapter 86: Audience With the Duke (Inner Voice Included)

“Come, Margils-sama. Please take this seat.”

The place that the Head Chamberlain is smilingly directing me towards is the empty seat beside the Duke of Filsand.

The stunning beauty next to the Duke is also beckoning me over with a sweet smile.

The fact that the Duke called me ‘son-in-law’ means that Elizabel’s and my cover story must have already reached his ears. But it’s really hard for me to deny it now, since we were the ones who spread it around in the first place.

«So this is the great magician..... no, Great Wizard who made the Carbanera Knight Order and Liuus Alliance submit by calling down rains of meteors, built his castle with an army of giants, and routed a savage tribe with a gigantic dragon.....»

Though the Duke has a friendly smile on his face, it seems that he is thoroughly evaluating me.

«Those eyes of his that lack ambition..... all I can see it a low rank staff member of the Magician’s Guild.»

Not that it’s any of your business. You’re not far off, though.

«But on the other hand, I can’t imagine an underling being so relaxed in front of me and my army.»

“Come, there is no need to be reserved. According to what I’ve heard, you have helped out my daughter quite a bit.”

«I’ve now offered you a seat of equal authority to my own. How will you react?»

“No, I’m afraid I cannot do that at the moment.”

I don’t mind being equal, but I feel that becoming his son-in-law would be too dangerous.

While he is evaluating me right now, I need to get him to understand that I am a rational person who hopes only for peace.

“In regards to your daughter, there is much that I must discuss with you about. I do not yet have the right to sit on that seat.”

“Fumu..... If you say so, then it must be so.”

«He doesn’t want a position equal to mine? Guess he wouldn’t be satisfied if he isn’t at the very top.»

Why did you interpret it that way.

I seriously want to shout “Are your eyes made of glass marbles?!”.....

The Duke interprets my experience with the Carbanera Knight Order and the Lius Alliance as “he used his power to force them to submit.” It is true that I had used a [Meteor] to get the brass at White Sword Castle to believe me. In Lelis, I had spent a large amount of money and pressured the Council Chairman to do what I want, and acted quite audaciously in general.

If someone only looks at those facts, then I suppose I can’t really fault them for coming to the conclusion that I am someone who uses power to force those weaker than me into submission.

I have half a mind to lower my head profusely like when I was a salaryman, but that would ruin the ‘Great Wizard’ brand image that I’ve been working to build up this entire time, so I know I can’t do that.

“..... And so, I will stay here. Let’s talk at this place. It was us who visited all of a sudden, so there is no need to attend to us overly so.”

“No worries, my Castle of Fortitude is always prepared to welcome privileged guests. My apologies for not having been attentive enough.”

«So he’s telling me to welcome him with all I have if I don’t want his mood to go sour? Dammit, I get it already.»

“Head Chamberlain! What are you standing around for! Prepare the feast to welcome Margils-dono and his retainers! Now!”



Then the Duke’s command is carried out swiftly.

Several large tables are carried into the hall, and then innumerable plates of delicacies from both mountain and sea are lined up on top.

Musicians come in and begin playing elegantly, and beautiful women wearing sheer silk dance along.

I end up having to sit next to the Duke at the top of the table. Not as a son-in-law, but as a guest.

On both sides are my companions (with Elizabel looking decidedly uncomfortable at having been assigned the foot of the table) and the Duke’s subordinates. I see a few warriors and thieves in his employ who are Level 10 or even slightly higher, which confirms for me that his army is indeed extremely elite.

I wouldn’t really call it ‘by the way,’ but I also take the opportunity to read the consciousness of his Knight Captain and court magician.....

«I can only see a seedy-looking ossan..... does that mean that his true power is so great that I cannot comprehend it?»

«I don’t feel even a thread of magical power from him. However, if the information from the Duke’s intelligence operatives is true, then he is even more of a master than the first generation Magician’s Guild Guildmaster. If I offend him even a little bit, he might turn me into cinders.....»

..... and it is mostly that. Though they have some things right, in general they have been affected by the Duke’s attitude and think of me as a fiendish tyrant.

“Great Wizard-sama, please allow me to refill your cup.”

“..... Ahh.”

A waitress wearing an outfit with so much exposure that she’s almost half naked is about to pour more wine into my cup.

Troubled with where to look, I turn to my side, at which the Duke genially (pretending to) broaches conversation with me.

“Well then, what shall we talk about first? I also have a mountain of things I want to talk with you about, but..... as courtesy dictates, will you tell me your business first?”

«Fun. So he doesn't care for women. Dark Elf and female magician..... and he's even laid hands on Elizabel. It's a certainty that he likes women. I thought he likes big breasts, but..... does this mean that he's content with what he already has?»

This ESP Medal that enables me to read the other party's thoughts is without a doubt as useful for negotiations as it is unfair, but..... my heart is also receiving a lot of damage.

“Th-, thank you for your consideration. Very well then, I shall tell you my business. First is a proposal from both Jiiteias Castle and Fablu-dono over there in representation of Senpu Village.....”

With Fablu and Irudo providing the occasional supplement, I explain the development project of connecting Lelis, Jiiteias Castle, Senpu Village, and Filsand with a brand new trade route.

Although he should already have a certain amount of information, the Duke still looks surprised.

“Hou. That is a welcome proposal indeed. If goods from Senpu Village and Lius Alliance reach Filsand, then our ports would flourish that much more.”

«I've read the reports, but to think that he can talk about this as well. He understands not only the power of force, but also the power of money. If I have his power, then I really might be able to gain all of Feldi.....»

At this rate, am I going to be swept up into becoming accomplice to a revolt inside Feldi.....?

It's true that I want that trade route, but if it means becoming so deeply involved with his affairs.....

“Nn? Oh, sorry. Is this side show not exciting enough for Margils-dono? Oi,

send those musicians away! Bring out the prisoners in the underground jail and the monsters that we captured that time, and have them fight to the death!”

Misunderstanding my slight sigh, the Duke says something completely outrageous.

“NO, no, no, no. I do not wish to see such a sight. Rather than that, the music and dancing just now was splendid. I was only sighing in wonder at how good it was.”

“..... Is that so? Then that’s good. Oi, continue!”

«Speaking of which, this guy can freely summon and control monsters. Guess he got bored of watching that kind of show. Seriously, his blank expression makes him that much more frightening.»



I think I somehow get it now.

It’s not that the Duke is stupid. No, in fact, he is very perceptive, and has a very extensive information network. It’s just that his own beliefs and rationality renders him incapable of imagining someone like me — someone who possesses power but doesn’t use it for personal reasons.

There is still much that he and I will have to talk about.

Even while being welcomed with every courtesy possible, I find myself gently pressing on my stomach.

Chapter 87: Reflected Self

“GyuOOooo!”

The roar of a Huge Blue Dragon of Purple Lightning can be heard reverberating throughout the training grounds at Castle of Fortitude.

“ “!!?” ”

Aside from the Duke of Filsand, all the other vassals, knights, and soldiers lined up in ranks are dumbfounded.

The Duke is somehow managing to hang onto his dignity, but even the knight commander and court magician are shivering to the point where their teeth are audibly clattering. Rather, the fact that no one is running away or sinking to the ground is testament to how high their morale normally is.

In the middle of the feast, the Duke of Filsand said “I’ve heard so much about the power of your wizardry, but it all sounds so fantastical that I can’t really imagine it. If it’s alright with you, will you be willing to let us see that dragon with our own eyes?”

I still had the ESP Medal on me at the time, and confirmed that he wasn’t lying. I understood that he would always have lingering doubts if he doesn’t see it firsthand, so I agreed.

Once the Duke becomes sure of my power, I’m sure he would become even more aggressive in trying to take me in, but he would also be that less likelier to betray me.

And above all, I’d gotten a general grasp of the Duke’s personality through that conversation (supplemented with his inner voice). He believes in power. In order to have a proper conversation with him, I need to first show him power above his own.

“So..... this dragon is physically present and isn’t an illusion? It would do

whatever you command it to?”

“Yes, indeed. For example..... Blue Dragon, Lightning Breath!”

“GyuUOOon.”

At my command, the Blue Dragon faces towards the sky and lets loose.

Our eyes are then almost blinded by what looks like a blazing searchlight, while at the same time all our bodies are assaulted by a deep, heavy sound exactly like that of a real lightning strike.

“U-, uwah?!”

“Hiiii.”

A few of the knights’ and soldiers’ knees finally give way, unable to withstand any more.

“If the dragon fans its breath, it can take out several hundreds of soldiers at one time! On top of which, it can fly, can it not? Then even ten thousand soldiers would be no match for it! Invincible! You are invincible, Margils-dono!”

«Incredible. This is far too incredible. Is this truly the power of a human? This power defies the very logic of this world.....»

The Duke of Filsand is staring intensely at the dragon with dazzling eyes. I mentally give him props for calmly assessing the dragon’s fighting power instead of being frightened.

Furthermore, along with the excitement and desire in his heart, I feel awe towards me being born.

The ESP Medal can only be used 3 times every day. With the feast and now, that’s already 2 times. I truly hope that he’s gotten a bit more submissive after this.



That night, I find myself invited by the Duke to his personal room.

Though immaculate, his room is decorated by several dangerous-looking weapons. Along with the shelves overflowing with books on military strategy and the bear and wolf stuffed mountings, all of it felt to me like an illustration

of the kind of person that he is.

“Apologies that our talk was interrupted halfway in the afternoon, Margils-dono. That dragon did take me quite aback.”

“Don’t worry about it. I am not in a great hurry.”

I shrug my shoulders while the Duke pours expensive-looking wine into my glass. I am currently a lot more relaxed than I was in the afternoon.

Without a doubt, he is the kind of ambitious villain who doesn’t give a thought to stepping on others on his way upwards, but he treats really well those whose value he has acknowledged.

..... He must have used people like that, all the way up to where he is now.

If I hadn’t used the ESP Medal, I might actually have fallen for his act. I actually still have the Medal around my neck, but it’s not activated, because I only have 1 more use for today.

“Speaking of which, Margils-dono. What is it about my daughter that you like?”

“.....”

So asks the Duke with an interested expression while pouring wine into his own glass.

This is not a pleasant topic, but it is something that I do need to tidy up.

“Your daughter is very wise and kind. However, the engagement.....”

“Yes, I know. It’s merely a cover, right? It seems my family’s internal strife has caused you some trouble.”

Elizabel had said that it was her 2nd stepbrother who was after her life. And also that there was no way her father did not know. I’m sure I remembered that right.

“So you are aware that your son and daughter are fighting with each other, yet you are ignoring it?”

“To think that you would said something so principled!”

His face looks really surprised. Well, I guess he would be, considering his

evaluation of me.

“The ethics aside, I don’t see how it benefits you to allow the succession struggle to go on unchecked.”

“So that’s what you meant. Hmm, how should I put it.....”

He lightly shrugs his shoulders, then continues speaking in a matter-of-fact manner.

“I believe you also know that my eldest son is captured by the Shulz, right? I recognize that Shulz girl that you brought with you.”

So he really had noticed Dianu. More like, so he also knows that his eldest son is still alive.

“The thing about me, Margils-dono. I’ve actually been thinking of retiring soon. Seeing how Filsand currently is, to increase its power any further would require several decades of work. I’m already a bit too tired to do all that, considering my age.”

Draining the wine in his glass in one gulp, he then lets out a deep sigh.

Though the scale of the topic is on a completely different level, his sigh is the exact same one that I hear at company dinners and alumni reunions when people start talking about “at my age.”

“And when I was thinking about who to have succeed me, it came to me. Among my three children, not a single one of them feels exactly right to me. Even worse, I don’t even know them that well.”

“I see.”

His words sound like the epitome of irresponsibility, but I suppose this is how things are for those in his position in this world. In order to urge him to continue speaking, I throw in interjections like “ahh, yes I know what you mean” where appropriate.

“It was right around that time when my eldest son, Balzard, was taken prisoner by the Shulz. Well, the official story is that he died in battle, though. After that, it was only natural for my second son, Agbeil, to move for the successor position by targeting Elizabel, right? Which is why I decided to just let

the three of them do whatever they want.”

“..... In other words, whoever comes out on top after the fighting, you will make your successor?”

“Indeed, that is exactly it! As expected of Margils-dono.”

The Duke claps his thick hands in applause, but it doesn't particularly make me happy.

“For what it's worth, I had originally thought Balzard to be the one with the best prospect. If it's him, as long as he's not dead, he might very well unite all the Shulz and come back with them in tow. The most unpromising one was Agbeil, but he's desperately struggling so hard. As for Elizabel, well, she did manage to escape, didn't she? And now that she's drawn the honestly too powerful card that is you, she might very well come out on top. But I can't really make her my successor anymore, though.”

“I see.”

This is coming from me, who has never had kids before, but what a guy.

Normally, I have no right to be involved with their family's circumstances, but for my own sake I have to ask this.

“..... Elizabel's mother was Shulz, was she not? About Elizabel and her mother..... don't you think of them as precious?”

“Hou.”

Contrary to my expectations of having my words dismissed with a snort, he falls silent with an earnest face. After fiddling with the empty glass in his hand for a while, he looks straight at me.

“That was because Sheiru was a really good woman. Almost frightening so. Because she was such a good woman, I made her mine, and lavished all that I could on her. Is that not what it means to treat someone precious?”

To press any further would only negatively affect our cordial relationship from here on. But I cannot help but to ask.

“And what I'm trying to say is, was that not forced?”

“Was it? I had the power to take Sheira away, so I used it. There’s nothing strange at all about that, is there?”

Without even using the ESP Medal, I can tell that he meant every single word of that.

I see, it is as I had thought.

That day, if I had used [Charm] on Mora. This is who I might have become, a man drunk on his own power.

Chapter 88: Dialogue with “My Bad Self”

“..... I see.”

What would have become of me if I came to use wizardry for my own desires.

The Duke of Filsand is the answer to that question — a good-for-nothing tyrant. Either that, or already dead from assassination.

The current me has allies that I can feel safe entrusting my back to. In contrast, the Duke cannot trust even his own children, and is not trusted in return.

It is clear that he does not regret having led such a life, but as someone who has met two people who have fallen victim to the consequences of his choices, I cannot help but to think “I’m glad I did not become like that.”

“Aah, I get it now. I have no intention of commenting on your way of life. All men, at least once in their lives, dream of walking down that path.”

“Ku ku. Coming from someone with power on a whole different dimension from mine, I’m afraid I can only hear those words as sarcasm.”

This, too, he means from his heart.

Even I had adored villains from manga and light novels and military commanders from Sengoku works who burned with ambition.

By modern Japanese standards, the Duke is undoubtedly a ‘bad person.’ If he attempts to attack me, I would fight back and beat him down without a moment’s hesitation.

But due to some strange twist of fate, here we are, drinking wine together.

(T/N: Omg Fate/Zero episode 11 “The Grail Dialogue”!!!!)

And above anything else, he is a reflection of myself.

Even if in the future either one of us considers the other an obstacle and

moves to remove the other, that is no impediment to doing what we currently can, now.

“..... Since we’re on the topic of your succession. You said that you ‘have been thinking’ of retiring, so am I correct in believing that you no longer have such intentions?”

“Indeed. If I am able to join an alliance with someone possessing such incredible power as your own, forget retiring, I feel like my vitality from the past would be revived.”

Most likely due to having confirmed the power of wizardry in person, the light of ambition burning in his eyes is even stronger than when I had first met him.

“In that case, I have two requests..... no, I’ll call them conditions instead.”

“Hou?”

I purposely chose to rephrase myself to indicate that I am the one in the more superior position.

Even if he is feeling angry and humiliated, he wants my power bad enough to suppress it all in his heart.

In the first place, my goals are to get permission to begin trading with Filsand, and to invite him to join the anti-Shadow Demon alliance.

The former is already accomplished, so that’s good.

But as for the latter, I know almost for a fact that the Duke would proactively seek for a more military alliance. And if we form that military alliance, then he will use my wizardry to overthrow the Kingdom of Feldi.

In a way, I am almost envious of the strength of his ambition. But isn’t there a better direction that I can direct his ambition towards?

For the first time in a while, I spin those gears in my head as furiously as I can.

“Even if you and I join hands to face the world, we would still need strength.”

“Are you saying that the riches and might of this Filsand are insufficient?”

“Let me put it another way. Are you satisfied with only what you can grab with that amount of strength?”

“..... Hou.”

When I speak almost provocatively, his glance sharpens even further.

I feel a shiver down my back.

“The amount of time that you and I have left is 30 years at best. The issue is how effectively we can use those 30 years.”

“Indeed.”

“I’m sure that you also know this, but in order to use time effectively, we would need talented people. And your children, all of them are talented in different ways. First of all, being tripped up by this problem of succession would only be a waste of time.”

“..... You are quite right.”

His expression has softened a bit. It seems he’s taken my words to mean that I will lend him a hand with his ambitions.

“In that case, first repair your relationships with your children, and make them to want to work for you. That is my first condition.”

In other words, in order to make self-interested people do something, you simply need to explain to them how doing that thing would lead to their own benefit.

I know Elizabel’s problem with the Duke is more of an emotional one, but as I am but an outsider, this is the best I can do at the moment.

“..... I see. Very well. Seeing this squabble going on before my eyes would only be a distraction. I will speak to Agbeil and Elizabel tomorrow. However, what shall be done about Balzard?”

I didn’t expect him to agree so easily. I read his mind with the ESP Medal, but he is not lying. Or rather, it seems that the moment he decided to not retire, he’s already decided to put a stop to the internal fighting.

“As for Balzard-dono, how about retrieving him with an exchange of prisoners? If you use the Shulz princess that I brought back, would that be possible?”

“Fumu..... So that’s also within the range of your ‘condition’? In that case, I’ll use her as asked.”

As expected of him, still making sure to rephrase things so that he doesn’t incur a favor with me at this point in time. Well, not that I mind.

Which now brings us to the next problem.

The entire time I’ve been talking with the Duke, I’ve been thinking as fast as I can, but.....

“So, what is the second condition?”

“Umu.....”

I need a good idea to redirect the Duke’s ambition in a more constructive direction.

Somehow, a thought starts to take form inside my head.

Averting my eyes from the Duke’s powerful gaze, I notice the map of the Kingdom of Feldi and its surroundings hanging on the wall.....

“Mu.”

With a flash, a lightbulb goes off in my head.

Chapter 89: The Second Condition

“.....”

My eyes are irresistibly drawn to the tapestry depicting the Kingdom of Feldi and its surroundings.

Maps in the Liius Alliance, whose culture is derived from Shulendal's, depicts Feldi as “Kingdom in the East.”

But this map, naturally, has Feldi in the center. To the west is Filsand, and Senpu Village is in the corner.

The south is a great sea decorated with countless pictures of storms and sea serpents, the north is obstructed by enormous mountains, and the east is a large empty expanse colored with gray.

If one thinks of Filsand as the center, north is the Plains of Twilight occupied by the undead, and south is Ran Balt. The only way to expand is to either cross the mountains in the west and attack Senpu Village, or to turn towards Feldi itself. That is the geographical position of this city.

Then again, the barren land separating Filsand and Ran Balt is where the Shulz currently live, and there is even that place called Garden of the Gods, so it is not completely unviable as a direction for expansion.

While staring at this map, the thought that had come to my mind earlier gradually forms into a proper strategy.

“What is it? You have something else that you want me to do, right?”

“Umu.....”

So asks the Duke of Filsand in a slightly testy voice.

In the first place, he is not someone used to obediently listening to someone else's words.

I know a conclusion needs to be reached soon, but I do not yet have enough information to be sure.

I desperately search around my memories for all the information that I've seen and heard about that.

Right, it was quite a while ago that Sedam had given me a pretty detailed explanation, but.....

"..... I've changed my mind."

"What?"

"The first condition..... after you succeed at uniting your children, then I'll tell you the second condition."

Umu.

'Slow and elaborate is better than rough and hasty' is a modern Japanese idiom, right? So I decided to put a pause on the negotiations for a while.

"..... Very well. I will restrain Agbeil, and also immediately start the preparations for exchanging the Shulz girl for Balzard."

"Ahh, you do that."

I nod gravely at the Duke who is even now cursing me in his mind with «If this guy wasn't a Great Wizard, I would have already stuck him on a spike.»

With this, Elizabel's safety is guaranteed, and I have also earned myself some time.

"Nn, speaking of which, what are you going to do about Elizabel?"

"What do you mean by what?"

"The wedding. I know it was just a cover, but it would be more convenient to marry her anyways. After all, you've already had her, right?"

"Hell no!"

"?"

Oops, I accidentally retorted in my normal character.

"I, I am not so starved that I would lay my hands on a mere teenager. I have

not touched your daughter with even a finger.”

“She’s already of age to give birth, so I don’t really see what the problem is, but..... well, I think I understand what your preferences are now.”

Man, he has such a smirk on his face.

For now, I leave the matter of my engagement with Elizabel as vague and unsettled while retreating to the room that I had been allotted.



“Welcome back, my lord.....”

Returning to my guest room, which is even more lavish than the one I had in Senpu Village, I find all my companions gathered inside.

Incidentally, Fablu is in a separate room with Ted and the three new soldiers. Dianu is of course under strict guard, and thus is in a cell.

All the rest have apparently been waiting for me, in spite of the very late hour. I did them a bad turn.

More like, why does Leiha look so tired?

“What is it, Leiha?” (Gio)

“No, it is nothing much.” (Leiha)

“Assassins. While you were talking with the Duke, the first wife sent 1, and the second son sent 2.” (Irudo)

“And Leiha repelled all of them by herself.” (Claura)

“..... I’m sorry, it seems I really have incurred their enmity.” (Elizabel)

Irudo and Claura explain the situation, and Elizabel looks apologetic.

On my way back, I did not feel any traces of assassins and observers, which means the Duke has already begun moving.

“I see. That must have been a burden. You have done well.”

“Th-, thank you very much. It was all for the sake of my Oluri, Margils-sama.”

“Un un.”

Leiha is kneeling before me on one knee with her head reverently bowed, causing me to really want to pat her beautiful light purple hair, but..... having that done by an ossan would only feel gross, so I opted to pat her shoulder instead.



“Anyways, for now I’ve settled the talks with the Duke up to here. Elizabeth’s and my safety are both guaranteed for the while.”

I’ve succinctly related the content of my conversation with the Duke to my companions.

Everyone is honestly glad about having gained consent for the trade route. However.

“..... Did my father not say anything about me?”

Yes, I did not tell them what the Duke and I had discussed in regards to her.

I don’t really have the courage to tell her that the Duke had been standing at the side and watching her being targeted by her brother as if it was a game.

No, to be specific, I do have the courage, but in order to resolve — or at least alleviate — a family problem, it is important for the members themselves to work it out with each other.

“What the Duke and I had agreed on is to suppress the second son Agbeil’s recklessness, and to save his eldest son Balzard. With that, your safety has been guaranteed.”

“I, see. As for the rest, I need to ask my father myself, right?”

Elizabeth nods with a look expressing that she knows I’m holding something back.

“Exactly. So far, I have not yet cancelled our state of being engaged. If you really need to, you can use me as an excuse. Go speak with the Duke yourself and ask for his true intentions.”

“Alright, I’ll do that. When I think about it, I realize that I’ve never before had a serious talk with my father.....”

So murmurs Elizabel with a somewhat dry smile.

I don't have any spell that can help with restoring the warped relationship between a father and his daughter. And neither do such words suit me, as I am not that kind of hero.

But I've made this opportunity for father and daughter to talk. And I will also provide support where the situation needs it.

I do feel sympathy towards Elizabel, but part of my motivation is also because I arbitrarily feel guilty in regards to what "my bad self" had done.

"So what about the matter of the alliance?"

"What condition do you plan on imposing on the Duke anyways?"

"Umu. Before that....."

Indeed, I had wanted to discuss this with my allies first.

This idea that I had come up with within a few minutes needs to be examined for its feasibility under the light of everyone's knowledge.

I look around at all of the faces surrounding me, then.....

"Ugh, if only Sedam is around at a time like this....."

"Oh, how rude!" (Claura)



The next few days after that, we continued discussing and debating, and also went around inspecting the streets of Filsand, talking with merchants from other countries and adventurers based in this city.

I also went out on a few day trips using [Fly] and [Move Outer Plane] to investigate.

All of it was to gather the proof to show to the Duke for 'the second condition.'

During that time, Irudo and Fablu discussed with Filsand finance officials on the plans for the construction of the trade route, setting various things moving. The Duke also sent out a messenger to the Shulz in regards to the prisoner exchange.

“..... If it’s like this, it just might work, no?” (Claura)

“The premise is if we [.....]. At the very least, the Duke’s army will be busy for the next five years.” (Gio)

Right when we had finalized ‘the second condition’ and I was about to thrust it at the Duke.

“My lord. A large mob of Shulz are approaching Filsand from the south.”
(Leiha)

..... Indeed, just as I was moving, the world is also constantly moving.

Chapter 90: Defense of Filsand (Part 1)

Leiha's report was information brought back by the Filsand Knight Order's patrol.

South of Filsand, about 2 days away by horse, the presence of a large number of Shulz had been confirmed.

Why Leiha had used the word "mob" is because they are not an army nor a force of warriors, but actually mostly non-combatants like women, children, elderly, and farmers (though I still had a thought or two in regards to her using that specific counter). There are over a thousand of them, moving slowly but surely towards Filsand.

"Refugees, do you think?"

"I do not know. How is the Duke responding?"

I let slip the word that first came to my mind upon hearing this information, but of course no one knew the answer.

"It smells."

So muttered Leid, whose presence had been quite faint for the past while.



The next day.

I am called out by the Duke to the command room of the Filsand Knight Order.

"Things have gotten troublesome. The Shulz are apparently running away with Shadow Demons on their tail."

That is the first thing the Duke says upon my arrival.

I had thought this would be about how to deal with the Shulz, but it turns out to be this.

It seems that when it comes to Shadow Demons, Leid's intuition is quite reliable indeed.

Shadow Demons, huh. Considering that we had seen a settlement on our way to Filsand that we suspected of having been attacked by Shadow Demons, I did think this a possibility, but..... unpleasant things are unpleasant indeed.

"Even though we spent so much effort on the 'second condition' that Margils thought of, now it has to be shelved for a while."

"..... That's the way Shadow Demons are. Throughout all history, they've never shown consideration for history or anyone's convenience. They just show up, kill, then disappear."

Leid replies in a tone as if he understands it all in response to Claura's frustrated murmur. As someone who's grown up with the destiny of fighting against Shadow Demons ever since he was aware, his words ring heavy.

For this world, that is how much of a calamity Shadow Demons are.

Which means that this is the time for me, the Great Wizard, to get to work.

"According to the report from the scouts, the Legion [army of Shadow Demons] is further south of the barbarians. It appears that they are moving straight towards Filsand, but we cannot determine if that is because they are chasing the barbarians, or if they are actually aiming for this city."

"..... Scale?"

"According to the report from the scouts, there are about 5,000 Small Demons, several hundred Large Demons, and five Rock Demons. There is also one gigantic individual of a never before seen species. All heading straight towards Filsand."

" "!" "

Every single face in the command room grows pale at the Duke's dispassionate recounting.

Incidentally, those in the room are the Duke, his second son Agbeil, his knight commander and court magician, generals of his official army, the prime minister and other chief vassals.

“What is our military strength?”

“Yes, sir. 800 knights and 1,000 standard soldiers, but we can gather 1,000 more if we immediately conscript the populace.”

No one has the leisure of standing on ceremony. The general that the Duke indicated with a jerk of his chin replies immediately.

“The way this could go badly is if we have to split our forces to also remain vigilant against being attacked by the barbarians. And even though we can increase the size of our forces by 1,000, it would still take time.”

“Five or six thousand Shadow Demons isn’t enough to overwhelm Filsand and Castle of Fortitude though.”

Whereas the Duke is murmuring in deliberation, one of the knights replies with emphasis. His voice is hard, but is still filled with quite some strength. It’s true that the walls of Filsand and Castle of Fortitude are much thicker and sturdier than even the White Sword Castle’s.

However, according to the knowledge that I had learned as a TRPG gamer, it takes 3 times the number of troops to conquer a fully prepared castle. Which means the Shadow Demons already have more than enough to do so. Large Demons and Rock Demons are each equal to several tens of soldiers. Throw in the unidentifiable large individual, and our prospects look quite grim.

“How about letting the Shadow Demons catch up to the Shulz and eat them? Would they be satisfied with that and return to their nest?”

At the court magician’s words, which were uttered as if in flattery, Claura’s eyebrows shoot right up. She’s standing behind me, so I can’t actually see her, but I can feel it. Leid also probably has a really cold smile on his face.

More like, sacrifices are out of the question, but it seems like no one in this room has any intention of saving the Shulz.

Even if I go out and take care of the Legion before it reaches Filsand, how can I convince the Duke to provide protection for the Shulz?

As I am thinking about that, a messenger rushes into the command room.

“Reporting in. A m-, messenger from the Shulz reached us. They are

requesting an audience with Duke-sama.”

“..... At this busy time..... Did they say what is it that they want to talk about?”

“The messenger identified himself as Raslas, the Tribe Chief of the Shulz. He offered to exchange the, the young lord, Balzard-sama? in exchange for safe passage through our land and food provisions.”

Indeed, this is not a cheap game where you can get a ‘Happy End’ just by clearing all the lined up missions.

If I hadn’t wasted these past few days on the negotiations with the Duke and instead spent them for the Shulz, things might have been very different.

Chapter 91: Defense of Filsand (Part 2)

The Shulz's Tribe Chief, Raslas, turns out to be a steady-looking middle-aged man.

He has on armor reinforced with pelts, but I feel no fighting spirit emanating from him.

Nevertheless, more than a thousand refugees, huh. It seems that don't have a decided place to go, so will they go on to become nomads at this rate?

It's most probably impossible for Filsand to take them all in.....

"Fuu."

Since I'd expected the presence of Shadow Demons, I should have just gone straight to them and made contact.

..... And other such regrets are whirling around in my head. In an attempt to dispel them, I breath out a short sigh and slap my cheeks.

For a moment, I feel something soft on my shoulder.

When I look towards it, I see Claura's white hand drawing back.

I see anxiety in her blue eyes, so I show her a slight nod. This kind of thoughtfulness is one of her charms, but the fact that a youngster is worrying about me shows me that I still have a long way to go.

"We Shulz will leave this land. We will also return General Damund's eldest son, unharmed. In exchange, we request for guaranteed safe passage through your lands, and support in the form of food provisions."

I did say that he is not emanating fighting spirit.

However, there is no begging going on here. Despite being here in Castle of Fortitude, deep in enemy territory, the Tribe Chief shows not a shred of fear in his face.

Damund is the Duke of Filsand's name. Calling him by name, and his title of 'General' from before he received his duke peerage is probably his meager means of displaying his pride.

In normal times, 'guarantee of safe passage' is no big deal. But now, when a Legion is roaming rampant, it means the Duke must mobilize some part of his military to make that happen.

I can see how it makes sense to offer the life of the Duke's eldest son, Balzard in exchange here.

"Fun....."

But in contrast, the Duke is looking at the Tribe Chief with cold eyes, as if he is looking at mere garbage.

His eyes are such that he probably would have already executed the Tribe Chief if he hadn't promised me that he would retrieve his son and look after his children.

"You burglars, doing what you please....."

"If you wish to leave, no one will stop you."

The lined up vassals are also making no effort to hide their contempt and hatred of the Shulz. Although it was the Duke's side who had been the invading side, it seems that living here for 20 years has led them to think of Filsand as their own land.

"....."

Among the uniformly grim looks on all of the vassals' and knights' faces, the second son Agbeil looks the worst off.

He had been convinced of the death of his elder brother Balzard, and moved accordingly to assassinate his younger sister Elizabel. Now that he knows that that brother of his is still alive, I can't even imagine how uncomfortable he feels.

Then again, unlike the eldest son Balzard that I had yet to meet, and also the Elizabel whose general nature and abilities I've grasped, I honestly have no interest in him whatsoever.

"What do you say, General..... no, Duke?"

The Tribe Chief calls on the Duke with a face filled more with sadness than frustration.

By purposely calling Damund 'Duke,' he is implicitly offering to also acknowledge his sovereignty over Filsand as the previous inhabitant of the place. This move shows that he is quite good as a negotiator, but his atmosphere and the contents of the negotiation do not seem to match.

It seems the Duke is of the same opinion.

"You said your name is Raslas? Those terms, it was Balzard who suggested them to you, right?"

"Wh-?! No, that is not the case."

It is one thing to have courage, but it seems that this is his limit as a mere Tribe Chief.

He does not have the ability to deceive the eyes of a villain whose eyes have been cultivated on innumerable battlegrounds. He hurriedly shakes his head, but that's already enough as confirmation.

"It's that weak son of mine that we're talking about. Instead of getting away by himself, he offered himself as a negotiating chip to try to protect you all, right?"

"U, uu....."

If the Duke's words are indeed true, then it means his eldest son Balzard is trying to cooperate with the Shulz tribe. In order to protect them, no less.

The move seems a bit imprudent as an important person of the Duke's side, but is he doing this because he is the kind person that Elizabel told me about?

"But, hmm..... Margils-dono!"

"What is it?"

As I am thinking to myself while looking upon the people in the command room, it seems the Duke has reached some sort of conclusion. Called upon all of a sudden, I quickly redirect my attention towards him.

"As you have heard, a Legion of more than 5,000 Shadow Demons is

approaching our Filsand at present.”

“So it seems.”

“This can even be called a small-sized Bleed. Normally, a force this size is enough to wipe out one or two castles or fortress cities with ease.”

“D-, Duke-sama.....?”

“What are you saying?”

The Duke’s candid acknowledgement of the hopelessness of their situation causes those in the room to be astir.

It seems the Tribe Chief is also having trouble following along.

“But with you here, everything is different. Can I rely on you for this?”

Even in this situation, he is trying to bring me to his side?

The Duke’s ambition-filled eyes are the same as always. However, there is a note of desperateness in his voice. Or at least, so I think.

“Aah, of course. The Great Wizard Gio Margils fights against Shadow Demons and is the ally of all peoples.”

I put strength in my abdomen and answered with authority in the face of the Duke, his subordinates, the Shulz Tribe Chief, and also my own allies.

If I don’t constantly re-confirm my persona as a Great Wizard, I fear it might eventually peel off.

“In that case, until the Shadow Demons have been repelled, I place myself under your authority. Give out any orders you deem necessary. Naturally, that includes those guys too.”

When he said ‘those guys,’ the Duke indicated the Tribe Chief with his chin.

“Duly accepted.”

“Oi? Who on earth are you?”

Unlike the Duke’s subordinates, the Tribe Chief does not fully understand the situation, and thus his face changes colors due to the development. However, now we are in a race against time.

“Tribe Chief. I guarantee you the safety of the Shulz tribe. Dianu will also be safely returned.”

“Dianu will.....”

“Claura, stay here with Irudo to explain the situation to Tribe Chief Raslas. I want to grant the Shulz tribe’s wishes as best I can, but worse case scenario, we will accept them at Jiiteias Castle.”

“Fully understood.”

“Duke, temporarily take the Shulz refugees into the city. The costs can be billed to me afterwards. Assign Elizabel to handle the negotiations with the Shulz tribe.”

“..... Understood.”

“Leid, stick with me. We’ll bring Dianu along and regroup with the Shulz refugees. If we can confirm Balzard-dono’s safety at that time, then good. After that, we will scout out Legion and, if possible, smash them on the spot.”

“Sounds good to me.”

To be honest, I still don’t know how best to deal with the Shulz tribe. However, where my hand cannot reach, I simply have to borrow the hands of my allies. At least, that’s what I’ve begun to learn as of late. Which reminds me, when I was a salaryman, my juniors had also tediously scolded me to not take everything upon myself.

“Alright, let’s go.”

“Aah, please wait. I don’t know how, but you plan on going to where the Shadow Demons are now, right? If it is not too much of a burden, can you also bring this one along with you?”

“HAH?! Father?!”

Agbeil raises his voice in hysterics at this sudden development.

“It’s for the sake of using these guys like you said to. I want for him to see Shadow Demons with his own eyes.”

“But how can I fight at the front lines.....”

“Silence.”

“..... Yes..... sir.”

Though I have no interest in him, he is the son of the person with whom I plan on being allied to from here on.

For Elizabeth’s sake as well, it is not a bad idea to have a bit of contact with him.

While looking at the pale-faced Agbeil who had been pressured into silence, I mentally search for a spell that can allow 4 people to move at high speed together..... found it.

“Very well. I shall take your son into my care. We will be back tomorrow at the latest.”



The Phantom Horse that hasn’t made an appearance in a while.

It is a jet black horse enveloped with a black flame-like aura that can run through the sky.

It was lucky that I had Charged this spell twice, due to the frequent outside trips that I’d been making of late.

Right now, we are split up among two Phantom Horses and flying southward from Filsand.

“..... I, I still can’t see, everyonnnnnneee.....”

“Just hang on for a bit more.”

The one who is clinging onto my waist while trembling is the Shulz princess and Martial Chief, Dianu.

“I don’t want to die..... I don’t want to die..... I don’t want to die.....”

Behind Leid, who is controlling the other Phantom Horse dashing through the sky, is the Duke of Filsand’s second son, Agbeil.

While staring at the barren wasteland covered mostly by rocks and sand, several hours pass by as we travel several hundred times the speed of a normal horse.

“That must be them.”

Leid spots the large group of people hiding in the shadow of a small hill.

Is that really a thousand people? I can't count so fast, but the line of people carrying or dragging luggage and looking exhausted almost to their limit stretches on far, far into the distance.

With the Phantom Horses' speed, it will take us no time to reach the head of the line.

“Those really are the Shulz people! Guys! Oo~~i! Oo~~i!”

Dianu abruptly returns to being energetic and shouts at the people below while waving her hands furiously. However.

“Look forward.”

Leid's voice sharply rings out with caution.

Even further behind the line of humans.

A black carpet covers the entire earth, composed of moving creatures that are even now nipping at the heels of the tail end of the line of refugees.

Chapter 92: Defense of Filsand (Part 3)

Even though the Legion is almost upon them, the steps of the thoroughly exhausted refugees are heavy.

In contrast, the pursuing Shadow Demons are dashing at full speed to the point of stepping on their own companions while raising piercing shrieks.

The Shadow Demons must have just spotted the refugees.

..... Seems we barely made it in time.

“Glllll!”

“GIGIGI!”

Probably for the sake of chasing the refugees, the composition of this Legion is mostly Small Demons.

Small stature of about 1.5m, jet-black bodies like as if they had been painted head to toe with tar, and large eyeballs glittering with hatred. As I had remembered, they are far more repulsive than any villain I’ve ever seen before.

There are roughly 500 to a thousand Small Demons, brandishing crude wooden spears, stone axes, or rusted swords.

The refugees are too close for me to use [Meteor], but casualties would show up if I waste time picking them off with spells with low firepower.

“..... Dianu, I will now return you to your people. Make sure they do not disperse under any circumstances, and head straight towards Filsand.”

“Tsk. I know it already!”

On our way here, I’ve already explained the situation to this Shulz princess. She nods even while clicking her tongue.

“Leid! We’ll head for the tail of the line and engage the Shadow Demons!”

“Ahh.”

“..... Gonna die, gonna die, I don't wanna die.....”

Leid has a small ball on one hand, which he looks at first before nodding.

It's that Sight Demon that is composed of sealed Shadow Demon blood that would react to nearby Shadow Demon presence. The ball that is supposed to be almost transparent is now glowing red.

Agbeil-kun..... he's clinging onto the Phantom Horse with a completely pale face, so I don't think he'll get in the way.

“So why?”

“Nn?”

As I'm heading towards the head of the line and getting ready to land, Dianu suddenly shouts out while still clinging onto my waist.

“Why are you helping us?! You don't stand to gain anything from doing this, right?! I mean, not that I'm not grateful, though.”

The same question that her cousin had asked. Is this also due to their blood connection? The muttered thanks added to the end means she's the more honest one, though.

However, I'm afraid I don't have time to give her a proper reply.

The Shulz tribe has noticed us approaching from above and are confusedly pointing towards us and shouting things.

I land beside the old man seemingly leading the refugees, and give her a quick answer.

“Children shouldn't be talking about loss and gain. I'd just feel bad if I didn't save what I could have saved.”

“Owah?! Bastard!”

There is no time to land properly and explain everything at length. I let her off the horse in an almost throwing action, at which she nimbly lands like a cat before starting to run next to the old man.

“H-, Hime-sama!”

“So you were safe!”

“The fort..... the fort!”

“I leave the rest to you. Don’t take your time!” (Gio)

With that, I leave Dianu encircled by the nearby Shulz and showered with questions as I turn the Phantom Horse’s neck back.



“Aaaaaan! Aaaaaan!”

“Uwaaah, h-, help!!!!!”

I fly along the line in the opposite direction as the refugees run onwards as if they are being whipped. In the precious ten seconds that it takes me to reach the end of the line, I’ve finished chanting a spell.

At the very end of the lines, I see a white-skinned young man with a large build who is obviously of a different race from the Shulz. He is running on with tottering steps with an old granny on his back and also pulling along a child in one hand.

The “Help!” was obviously directed towards me.

In such a pressing situation, calling out to a suspicious person wearing a black robe on a horse cantering through mid-air to ask for help — does that mean he has a good eye for people or not?

“Kllllll!”

The single Shadow Demon at the front of the Legion makes a sudden leap towards that young man. The tip of the spear glints dully.....

“Shi!”

“Gyan?!”

Jumping down from his Phantom Horse, Leid’s greatsword horizontally bisects the Shadow Demon.

There is no strategy or anything. The only thing moving them is their vindictive desire to bury their weapons into the first despised human that they can reach.

“Gigyan!”

“Gofua?!”

But because of a certain rock-like giant warrior, the jet-black tide cannot lay even a finger on their target.

With a large build more than 2 meters in height, Leid spins with great force, slicing apart any Shadow Demons that come into range.

Before, I had confirmed with [Sense of Adept] that Leid’s relative D&B level is 21.

By D&B standards, he had already long surpassed human boundaries, possessing enough battle strength to go toe-to-toe with dragons and cyclops. No matter how vicious or cruel they are, these Small Demons of Level 1 or 2 cannot do anything even if they gather in the hundreds (though there is still the issue of exhaustion).

However, regardless of how strong he is, there is a limit to what a single person can do.

Several hundred Shadow Demons surge on pass Leid on his left and right, aiming for the young man at the back, as well as the other Shulz at the end of the line.

Or so they intend to, but here is where the spell that I had finished chanting comes into effect.

“ “GAAAAHHH!” ”

Two roars resound with enough force to make everyone’s eardrums vibrate.

In accompaniment with explosions and shockwaves, two pillars of flame descend from the sky.

“Gyaaa!”

“Gukyaaa?!”

These are the Fire Breaths released by the two Large Red Dragons that I had created with [Create All Monster] in mid-flight.

This spell enables the caster to create a batch of monsters with levels

corresponding to the caster's own cumulative level. Rather than a single Huge Dragon higher than Level 30, in this case it is more effective to create two Level 18 Large Dragons. And my expectation is proved correct.

“GyuOOOooo!”

Thanks to the two two dragons flying freely through the sky and letting out Fire Breaths that each reduces several tens of Shadow Demons to cinders, the Legion is whittled down at a visible pace.

Of course, I've already ordered them to prioritize attacking the ones closing in on the refugees, so there are still no casualties so far.

“By means of this spell, may there be a fireball 8m in width that would burn my enemies to nothing. [Fireball]”

“ “GyaaAAA!” ”

Even with Leid and the two dragons rampaging about, the Shadow Demons' numbers are still too great. The Shadow Demons that have managed to slip past sword and breath are still gripped more by hatred against humans than fear against the dragons, and thus still trying to catch up to the refugees.

It is my role to take care of these stragglers.

Unexpectedly, this is my first time using this spell, even though it is so representative of D&B Wizards.

As it is a Level 3 spell, it isn't of much use in high level scenarios. But now that I see it like this, fireballs the size of a small house enveloping Shadow Demons makes for a pretty incredible sight.

“..... They've scattered quite a bit..... [Mana Bolt].”

The Shadow Demons' attention is focused on the dragons and refugees, so they have no leisure to pay heed to the single person on a horse flying here and there above their heads. Thanks to that, I can freely use my spells.

[Mana Bolt] is a Level 1 spell that creates literal arrows made of mana. However, the number of arrows is proportional to the caster's level. When I use the spell, 18 arrows shoot out and pursue separate Shadow Demons, riddling them with holes.



“..... Are there still anymore?”

By the time the 30 minute duration of [Create All Monster] wore off, every single member of the Legion is either all sliced up or mere cinders.

Right before the dragons disappeared, I had them search the nearby area for Shadow Demons, but there are no more to be found.

“Well done.”

“..... I merely did the job I’m originally supposed to do.”

I land next to Leid, who is now all covered with fresh Shadow Demon blood.

“Awawa..... Awawa.....”

The other Phantom Horse also lands, but Agbeil’s eyes are wide open with fear.

..... I don’t know if this was what the Duke was hoping for, but oh well, I’m sure this was a good experience for him.



We proceed forward and catch up to the Shulz to find them resting at a removed place.

..... Or rather, seeing as how they are collapsed on the ground with sheer exhaustion, ‘dropped to the ground from having reached the limit of their stamina’ would be much more accurate.

To not surprise them, I dismount from my Phantom Horse, then walk towards them while waving a hand in a friendly manner.

“Gyaaahhh!”

“Demon God-sama!”

“It’s Demon God-sama who summons dragons!”

The majority of the refugees are women and children and elderly, but all of them scramble to press their faces against the ground in prostration.

“Ahh, wait a moment, wait a moment! It’s fine!”

“Don’t panic, everyone! He’s not a Demon God.”

The young man from before and Dianu both try hard to soothe them, but it still takes quite a while before I can finally talk to them properly.

Chapter 93: The Elder Brother's Story

“We are so grateful, we are truly so grateful.”

“Demon God-sama. Please, please grant us Shulz, the descendants of the Holy King, your divine protection.....”

The young man who had been at the end of the line of refugees indeed turns out to be the Duke of Filsand's eldest son, Balzard.

The old man beside him who is lowering his head again and again in prostration is the Shulz's Tribe Chief from two generations back (in other words, Dianu's grandfather), Kolbel-shi.

The entire Shulz tribe is dead tired from running away from the Legion, and are currently all collapsed on the ground.

At the moment, the only people around me are Leid, Agbeil, and the old man. Dianu is off looking after the refugees.

“Nii-san..... so you really are still alive.”

“Agbeil, I didn't think that you would come to get me!”

This is the touching reunion between the elder brother who (officially) died in battle and the younger brother.

Balzard is tightly hugging Agbeil with tears in his eyes. In comparison to the well-rounded elder brother, the comparatively slender young brother has a complicated expression on his face.

Well, up to a few days ago he had been aiming for his brother's emptied spot by trying to assassinate his younger sister, so I'm sure he must be feeling extremely uncomfortable.

I want to get straight to the main topic, but thought it a good idea to know a bit more about these two brothers' personalities and relationship, so I'm letting

them have their moment.

“Are father, mother, and Elizabel all well?”

“Yes, they are all full of life, just as before. Elizabel looks kind of down, though.”

“I see, I see. Seems I’ve done her a bad turn. Ahh~, I wanna meet everyone soon.”

“You’ve grown quite a lot thinner, Nii-san. Everyone’s gonna be surprised.”

Going by tone and expressions, it seems that Balzard is truly worried about his family. What surprises me a little is the fact that even Agbeil’s expression grows softer while speaking with his brother. Is this an indication of Balzard’s personal virtue?

“Rather than that, why is Nii-san trying to help the Shulz? Or perhaps are you just pretending to be on their side to take advantage of them?”

“No, ‘taking advantage of’ is a bit.....”

When Agbeil uses the phrase ‘taking advantage of,’ there is admiration rather than censure in his voice, but Balzard and Kolbel both vehemently deny it.

“That is not the case at all. He managed to escape from Garden of the Gods to The Fort all by himself in order to warn us of the approaching Legion. Above that, he even suggested to us to use himself as a bargaining chip with the Duke.....”

“It’s true that I’m cooperating with the Shulz. After all, Shadow Demons have appeared. It’s no time for humans to be fighting against each other.”

If I remember correctly, ‘The Fort’ is the Shulz’s forward base, and ‘Garden of the Gods’ is their current home base. Just as Dianu had told me, it seems Balzard really had been held at Garden of the Gods.

..... Be that as it may, to think that Balzard is thinking the same thing as me. How wonderful.

“Is it about time you tell us what you know about the Legion?”

“Ah, yes I will. Actually.....”

What Balzard tells us can be summarized like this.

After he had been transported to Garden of the Gods, he was locked up in a dungeon underneath the temple.

While there, he had been forced by the man called a 'Mystic' to participate in a certain ritual several times.

It was an extremely eerie ritual that consisted of offering prayers to what looked like the skull of a Shadow Demon placed on top of an altar for several hours on end that took place in a secret room made by joining bones together.

..... This is clearly that, isn't it.

"That person is a Demonist. There is no doubt." (Leid)

"Aah. I saw the exact same thing in Lelis." (Gio)

"..... I, see. I had suspected as much." (Balzard)

Balzard nods in response to Leid's and my words. His face color is bad, probably due to recalling those experiences.

"The Mystic..... as well as Sheira, the wife of the Tribe Chief, they were both very enthusiastically telling me to hate the world, or hate the father that abandoned me, things like that."

"That's how they increase their numbers."

Leid turns sharp eyes onto Balzard.

I also peer into his face just in case, looking for the golden light that had been in Baron Koval's and Leiha's eyes when they had been brainwashed, but Balzard's eyes are only blue like his father's.

"That continued on for, oh, 10 days I think? Suddenly all my surroundings grew clamorous. Apparently Shadow Demons had appeared in large numbers in Garden of the Gods. My jailer let me out, and I was escaping with him and others, but along the way....."

And that's how he reached The Fort by himself, then managed to warn the Shulz and convince them to run away together.

The story is easy to tell, but his actions were quite heroic indeed.

I gaze at his face with admiration and a slight bit of suspicion. But Old Man Kolbel is nodding along with 'un, un' so it means at least his story is consistent.

"..... Don't move."

With that, Leid pulls out a small crystal — his Sight Demon — and thrusts it before Balzard.

"Wh-, what is that?"

"..... I'm sorry, but please do as he says."

Balzard lets out an alarmed voice, but I restrain him and join Leid in staring intently at the red mass within the crystal ball.

Leid already has a hand on the handle of his greatsword.

"....."

If the clump of Shadow Demon blood spreads out and begins glowing faintly, then it would mean that Balzard is under Shadow Demon influence. The War Tribe calls that being 'Haunted.'

As we wait with bated breath, eventually the clump of blood gradually swells up to several times its original size.

".....!"

"Hey, what is th-....."

Hearing me gulp, Balzard involuntarily backs up with a cold sweat.

Leid continues looking into the Sight Demon with a sharp gaze, but.....

"I'm not a Diviner, so I can't make an official judgment. But it looks to me like he isn't Haunted."

Indeed, the Shadow Demon blood isn't showing any further change. It's not glowing, but it did react a bit. What does that mean?

".....Oi."

Leid jerks his chin towards Balzard. I think he wants me to do something to him?

Mu, I see. That thing?

“I’m sorry, but please stay still, Balzard. By means of this spell, may all evil affecting this person’s mind be purified. [Curse Break]”

I cast the spell that had released Leiha from her brainwashed state.

A white light envelops his body, then.....

“Wah..... uhya?!”

Balzard lets out a yelp like ice had suddenly been shoved down the back of his shirt, then curls up.

At the same time, a black mist flows out from the area near his head, which dissipates upon touching the white light of the spell.

“..... Wh-, what was that.....?”

“Hmm, I’ll explain later. Do you feel any different?”

“U—n..... not particularly..... guess I feel a bit more clear-headed now?”

It seems that Balzard’s consciousness really had been slightly corroded by Shadow Demon influence.

Considering the fact that his personality and emotions were unchanged, he was either in the middle of the brainwashing process, or it was the kind of spell that would only control him when needed.

“Seems this entire commotion is indeed the work of Demonists.”

“..... We have never heard of Demonists controlling a Legion before though.....”

Leid agrees with my conjecture, but has a grim look on his face.

Up to now, Demonists and Haunted have purely been on the worshipping and controlled end, and there has been no known instance of Shadow Demons obeying them.

Be it this Mystic who called me a Shadow Demon and tried to have Dianu kill me, or other information that even the War Tribe did not previously know, I have a feeling that we are on the verge of something that will reveal a new aspect of our fight against the Shadow Demons.

Chapter 94: The Younger Brother's Warning

“Uun..... it's a really weird feeling. It's like, something that had been deep inside my head is suddenly gone.....”

Balzard is scratching and tilting his head.

It seems that the Demonist or the Shadow Demon itself had been affecting his consciousness without him being aware of it.

After that, the Sight Demon that is a Shadow Demon detector for the War Tribe has stopped reacting to him. Eh, could this possibly be applicable to me as well?

Let's secretly cast [Curse Break] on myself some time later.

“.....Fuu.”

“What?”

“Aah, no, it's nothing. Elder, this is delicious.”

“Fumu.....”

Me brooding causes Leid to turn a suspicious gaze upon me.

I hurriedly praise the sweets that Old Man Kolbel had shared with with us.

“It's fruit of rutsu preserved in sugar. Though it is too humble a thing to offer to Demon God-sama, I am glad it suits your taste.”

These brown-colored lumps don't look that good, but I like that they've got the springiness of figs and are almost sweet enough to numb the tongue. This region is dry and the sunlight is very strong, so I can see why they would need high-calorie snacks.

“..... So, are we really going to bring these people to Filsand?”

So asks Agbeil after grimacing from a bite of rutsu fruit.

“That is indeed the intention. As for the method of transportation, I have just the perfect spell for it, so there is no need for worry.”

“That’s not what I was asking though.....”

This will be my first time using it in this world, but [Forced March] seems just right for this situation. I replied with confidence, but Agbeil shakes his head with a frown.

“What do you mean?”

“He’s right, the most important thing now is to get all of them inside Filsand to make sure they’re safe.”

“Hah~”

The younger brother sighs in response to my and Balzard’s words.

“Listen closely, Margils-dono. What I am going to say, I will say because I don’t want to make an enemy out of you.”

“..... Umu?”

From his crouched position, Agbeil looks up at me with dark eyes, then continues.

“Firstly, you and Nii-san do not fully grasp the depth of the enmity between Filsand and the Shulz.”

“That’s.....”

“Nii-san, what did you see at their base? Not everyone is a good person like you, alright?”

“.....uu.....”

Balzard is struck speechless before Agbeil’s sharp and irritated reproach. His sad face indicates implicit admission of his younger brother’s words.

“Take a better look at the eyes of the bunch collapsed over there. The feelings of having been oppressed single-sidedly this entire time..... is something that Nii-san doesn’t fully understand, right?”

“.....”

Balzard is silent. So am I.

Indeed, I cannot possibly claim to truly understand the Shulz's pain and bitterness.

I look at the exhausted refugees in the distance.

Dianu is incessantly trying to cheer them up, but their expressions are still dark. I had chalked it all up to the run for their lives while being chased by a Legion, but..... I had not given consideration to the deep hatred that must be swirling inside their chests.

"I'm sure there are those who would be willing to yield to Filsand if it means being safe. However, I'm also sure that there are some who would act on their resentment the moment they get inside Filsand, resolved to discard their lives for that single bit of revenge. Am I right?"

Agbeil looks not to his elder brother for confirmation, but to the previous previous Tribe Chief of the Shulz tribe.

"..... Yes you're right. A lot of them have had family members killed or kidnapped and sold into slavery by you Feldians, after all. It is only natural for those who think that way to be present."

Kolbel sighs deeply while replying. Even in his voice, I hear bitterness that he tried to suppress but failed to. In the first place, during his generation, the Shulz had still been living inside Filsand, and one of his daughters had even been seized by the Duke of Filsand.

"And on our side too, there are those with this thought of killing to avenge the deaths of their own loved ones."

So admits Agbeil instead of criticizing Kolbel.

"..... However, I intend to stop that. I cannot let the Shulz tribe be eradicated. My son also knew that when he went to the General."

Indeed, it seems at least the current Shulz Tribe Chief Raslas, this Kolbel, and Dianu will all be trying to keep the refugees in line. That's why I requested the Duke of Filsand to offer protection to these people.

However, what Agbeil says next exceeds what Balzard and I could have

imagined.

“Father is not a virtuous person who would simply accept that. He would probably use a few operatives to set off some bombs, then use that as pretext to kill everyone. And that way, even Margils-dono would have an excuse.”

“Wh-, what.....”

“..... So that guy really was thinking something like that.....”

I’ve lost all words as the second son matter-of-factly deduces his father’s evil plan.

“Of course, the aim is not just for revenge. More like, I’m sure my father doesn’t care at all about the whole revenge thing. His aim is the ‘Garden of the Gods’ that would be empty after getting rid of all the Shulz. Since the Shulz had developed that place so much that it’s now even able to produce fruits like this.”

I’m sure Agbeil’s words are spot on.

For me, the worst part about the Duke of Filsand’s personality is this cool-headedness. If he is a ‘true villain’ who simply enjoys massacring the Shulz, then I think I would have already defeated him. However, all he is is someone who doesn’t choose his methods in pursuit of a goal.

If I defeat him here, then from now on, I would need to defeat every single feudal lord in this entire world.

“But..... then what should we do? I will convince fa-..... no, that’s impossible. How about keeping me together with the Shulz, as a hostage?”

Balzard’s face has grown pale and he is desperately spinning his mind, but I continue giving Agbeil my attention.

He had said that he ‘didn’t want to be [my] enemy.’ I don’t think he simply meant exposing his father’s plot.

“Which is why what we should do now is eliminate the Filsand operatives currently among the Shulz.”

There are already operatives here?

In that case, then they are not newly deployed, but must have been buried within the Shulz for a long time already.

“Actually, I know the faces of the operatives. The reason why father had me accompany Margils-dono is so that I can contact those operatives..... or maybe he foresaw that I would do something like this. I don’t know which.”

“..... In other words, you are cooperating to forestall the possibility of a pretext for attacking the Shulz?”

“That is what I’d intended ever since I brought this up. No matter how I look at it, you are far more frightening than my father.”

..... I am grateful for his cooperation, as he is familiar with the Duke’s modus operandi.

I’m sorry for saying earlier that I have no interest in you.

There is no mistaking that he is indeed a villain who tried to assassinate his own sister in order to protect himself. But at the very least, he possesses what I’ve overlooked so far — the perspective of the weak.

“I have one more important thing to say. The best way to make people forget their bitterness is to show them ‘hope.’ It doesn’t matter how ridiculous it is. If it’s Margils-dono, I’m sure that it can be done.”

Chapter 95: The Job of Giving Hope

“..... Hope?”

I am slightly surprised at this word coming out of Agbeil’s mouth, so out of odds it is with the dark expression currently on his face.

“That’s right. Everyone here has seen a more than sufficient demonstration of your power. It is clear to all that you are above the Duke of Filsand..... far, far above, at that.”

“..... For what it’s worth, in the alliance I’m hoping to form with him, we will be of equal standing though.”

The matter of the anti-Shadow Demon alliance is currently on hold.

“That may very well be so on paper, and that’s fine. But I’m sure even my father understands in his heart that you are above him. No one will be able to raise a word in complaint if that fact is taught to the Shulz.”

“Though not the main force, you did just wipe out a whole Legion, and by controlling dragons no less. Lining you up next to any earthly ruler just sounds ridiculous.”

“When you guys put it that way.....”

Both Balzard and Kolbel indicate agreement with Agbeil’s analysis.

..... I feel like it makes me sound like a really bad person, but I guess they’re not wrong in regards to the power difference. This is especially applicable towards the Duke, whose main standard that he measures everything by is strength.

“Alright, even if that’s the case. What is this about the Shulz’s hope?”

As I very, very reluctantly prompt the continuation of the conversation, Agbeil spits out a piece of rutsu fruit and replies.

“Oh, anything, really, as long as it comes from you. For example, ‘In the future I will definitely take Filsand back for you all’ or something like that.”

“You mean, deceive them?!”

“It’s fine, isn’t it? They should be obedient enough for a while.”

“I’ll get found out soon enough though.”

“Even if you do, no one can raise a word in complaint. That’s what I’ve saying the whole time.”

.....It sounded good until halfway through, but I guess Agbeil is just Agbeil.

I mean, if we don’t care at all about the consequences, that’s a plan that might work. But how are you going to handle the aftermath oi.

“..... I’m sorry, but that plan is rejected.”

“Uun. But I don’t think what my younger brother said is totally wrong, Margils-dono.”

So says Balzard while rubbing his round chin.

“What do you mean?”

“The fact that at the moment, the Shulz will lend an ear to whatever Margils-dono has to say. If only we can think of a good recompense for them after this whole commotion is over.....”

“Fuumu.”

If they knew for a fact that the insecurity and inconvenience of their lives would be resolved, then I’m sure they would be able bear with their current bitterness and unease for a while longer. Even with that, I don’t expect their resentment to dissipate 100%, but I see the logic in what they’re saying.

“..... If Demon G-..... Margils-sama would become our ally, if you can have Damund chased out and Filsand returned to us..... But if that cannot be.....”

Old Man Kolbel’s deeply wrinkled face distorts even further.

“..... If that cannot be granted..... at the very least, if you can make it so that we wouldn’t be chased around anymore..... for the sake of that, I would even be willing to kneel to Damund.”

“.....”

Old Man Kolbel purpose phrased his words as “if you can make it so” instead of “we want it so.”

With that, he doesn't oblige me to help them.

However, I'm always open to 'helping each other out.'

“I am the ally of all peoples resisting the Shadow Demons. If your people would cooperate with me to that cause — within your means — then I can indeed ensure that the Duke of Filsand never lays his hands again on the Shulz tribe. But of course, that's with the assumption that you can repress the Shulz's resentment.”

“O, ohh.....”

“Furthermore, and this is something that you will need to run by the Tribe Chief and others, but depending on the case, I may be able to offer the Shulz a new place to settle.”

“Is, is that the truth.....?!”

With his breath taken away, Old Man Kolbel looks up at me. In his eyes, alongside the doubt, I indeed see the light of hope shining within.



After resting for about an hour, when the refugees' stamina has mostly recovered, I stand in front of them all.

If we waste too much time here, there may be more Shadow Demons on their way from the Legion main force.

“Everyone of the Shulz tribe. Allow me to formally introduce myself. I am the Wizard Gio Margils.”

“Demon God-sama.....”

“Oh, please save us.....”

The dirt- and dust-covered refugees — mostly elderly, wounded, women, or children — turns towards me and prostrate themselves like it's the most natural thing to do.

It seems I have gotten slightly more used to this kind of treatment. Without being too nervous, I look over them, then nod.

Though gathered in one place, this is a crowd with almost a thousand people.

To make sure that my voice reaches everyone, I've casted [Project Illusion] in advance. This is a spell that creates illusions, but its capabilities also encompass sound control. Amplifying a person's natural voice is not its original usage, but I've used it like this quite often back when playing D&B. Mostly in situations like this.

From a slight distance away, a silver-haired female warrior, Dianu, stares intently at me.

"As you have all seen, I fight to protect this world from Shadow Demons. Currently, you are all being threatened by Shadow Demons. I intend to lend you all a hand with that."

I hear a child's voice ringing out in joy. Many of the adults' faces also grow lighter.

But I suppress that atmosphere by stabbing the ground with the butt of my Wizardry Staff, causing a high-pitched sound to ring out.

"However, you of the proud Shulz tribe do not possess the insolence to demand to be saved one-sidedly. Now, I will lead you all to Filsand. Until the Legion this time is completely eradicated, that will be your reservation. Naturally, I will make sure, through the Duke of Filsand, that no one will lay a finger on any of you."

" " " "

The Shulz people's faces grow stiff, not comprehending what I'm saying.

I even see a child opening his mouth to shout something out, and his mother covering his mouth before he could do so.

"After the Legion has been defeated, I swear that I will help you all to find a land where you can live in peace! If you wish to return to The Fort or Garden of the Gods, then that is fine. If you wish to come to my own castle and develop new land there, then that is also fine. Either way, if you are ever attacked by an

external enemy again, that enemy shall be my enemy as well!”

“N-, new land.....?”

“If Demon God-sama will protect us, then.....”

“In exchange, I will need people to support me in my ongoing crusade against the Shadow Demons. Those who can fight, with your sword. Those who can work, with your strength and skills. Those can cannot do either of those, with your prayers. This can be after you all have rebuilt your livelihoods, and I do not mind if only those with the will come. In order to protect all Sedia from the Shadow Demons, please lend me your strength!”

“ “!” ”

After saying everything that I have to say, I look around at the crowd that is staring at me with their jaws hanging open in astonishment while still on their knees.

Just as Old Man Kolbel had said, if I become their ally in the true sense, then I would help them drive out the Duke of Filsand. Which is why what I’m doing can actually be said as taking advantage of them when they are weak. However, this was the only method that I could think of to offer them help without showing contempt for their pride.

The Shulz people begin to buzz, exchanging looks with every other.

On their faces I see hope, unease, misgivings, and a myriad of other emotions all mixed together.

“..... I will take you up on your offer, Wizard Margils!”

A clear voice that makes everyone listening to it straighten their back cuts through the buzzing.

All eyes gather on the female warrior who is raising high a Divine Sword clad with a rainbow-colored aura.

“If you truly guarantee the safety of all Shulz! Then I will entrust my sword and life to you! Know that the arm and sword of this Martial Chief does not come cheap!”

Her originally cute face is pale, and I cannot read her true intentions.

However, how can I doubt the words of someone who would even stand up against a Huge Dragon for the sake of her allies?

“I welcome you, princess of the Shulz.”

“.....I, I will also join Hime in fighting for Margils-sama!”

“Let’s kill us some Shadow Demons!”

“M-, me too.....”

Though few in number, warriors stand up one after the other.

Women and elderly also raise their faces, will shining in their eyes.

All this does is gloss over the problem of the discord between the Shulz and the Duke of Filsand.

However, neither I nor they have the time to waste looking for a proper solution for a problem that has no proper solution.

“Those words, we have received them! As of this moment, we Shulz are allied to the Wizard Gio Margils! Let us fight together!”

“Da—yah—!”

“Haiya—!”

“Margils! Margils!”

“Dianu!”



And thus I fulfilled another job as a Great Wizard, still feeling slightly guilty even though this is how it always ends up.

After this, there is the even more crucial job of eradicating the Legion.

As planned, I used [Forced March] to transfer the refugees to Filsand.

For now, I entrusted the Shulz *Balzard* Agbeil matter to Irudo and Claura, told the Duke in no uncertain terms that the Shulz are not to be touched at all, then began preparations to fight against the Legion.

Turns out the Legion main force really is heading straight for Filsand.

We have two days before they are upon us.

..... That is more than enough time.

Chapter 96: Defense of Filsand (Part 4) (3rd Person)

It has been three days since [Great Wizard] Gio Margils led the Shulz to Filsand.

The court magician of the Duke of Filsand, Kaneigin sel Radol, is a graduate of the Magician Academy of Shulendal who had been called a genius.

Those with the ability to easily master the higher level magics are fewer than 10 even at the main institution, and he is one of those 10.

As fate would have it, he entered service at Filsand 10 years ago, after which he continued devoting himself to study, and also accumulated real battle experience against both Shadow Demons and barbaric tribes.

This magician who is a veteran of numerous battles is currently in the command post set up above the main gates of Filsand.

On top of the huge doors more than 20 meters in height, he has his eyes turned south. The jet-black host that seems to blanket the parched earth is in formation and marching towards the city's main gates.

This host that carpets the ground from horizon to horizon is, needless to say, Shadow Demon. It is a Legion.

Underneath the great gates, on the outer side of the moat that encircles the city walls, knights and foot soldiers from Filsand have taken up position. However, when compared against the overwhelming numbers of the Legion, they seem very unreliable indeed.

According to Kaneigin's memory, the composition of this Legion is 4,000~5,000 Small Demons, 200 Large Demons, 5 Rock Demons, and one new species of Shadow Demon even greater in size than a Rock Demon.

Though this scale cannot be called a proper Bleed, which has only happened twice in history, but it is more than enough to eradicate an entire country.

“Well then. I’ll leave the rest to you.”

“Leave it to me.”

The Duke of Filsand, clad in a suit of jet-black armor, is sitting on a throne placed in the middle of the command post.

Standing beside the Duke is the person that Kaneigin is currently the most wary and fearful of, [The Wizard] Gio Margils.

“Take care of yourself.”

“You sure you don’t need my help?”

Two young girls as alike as two peas in a pod offer him their respective words of concern.

The blond-haired one with twintails is the Duke’s daughter, Elizabel. The silver-haired one with a short cut is the daughter of the Shulz’s Tribe Chief, Dianu.

“May the fortunes of war be with you.”

The woman who draws Kaneigin’s attention even more than the two young girls of opposite charms also lowers her head reverently towards Margils.

Kaneigin knows the name of this female magician, Claura.

What surprises Kaneigin is that Claura is bowing with both hands placed on her chest. Among magicians, this position is called the ‘sage bow,’ and is a gesture only performed towards someone of a much higher rank, such as one’s master’s master.

“There’s no need for worry. It will all be over soon.”

From what Kaneigin had heard, that female magician is from a famous family connected to great nobles in Shulendal, and that she holds a high position in the Lelis branch of the Magician’s Guild. On top of her pedigree and talent, she is also a stunning beauty whose curvaceous body makes one swallow their saliva. Her degree of beauty is rare even within the imperial court.

Such a woman is directing the highest possible bow and eyes filled with deep affection not towards Kaneigin.

«To receive a bow that is almost a demonstration of subservience from that great a woman, and still maintain a calm face..... What an outrageous man he is.....»

“Oi, Kaneigin?”

Furthermore, Margils also has in his service a Dark Elf, who is currently not present.

As a fellow man, and as someone who engages in magic, Kaneigin feels hot jealousy welling up from within his stomach. Noticing his unnatural behavior, it was the Duke who called out to him.

“?! S-, I’m sorry, my lord.”

“Even though we have entrusted the battle flag to Margils-dono, it is no time to be spaced out. If you are also a magician, grasp this opportunity to burn Margils-dono’s wizardry into your eyes.”

“..... As you say.”

Kaneigin gives the Duke a bow while feeling cold sweat run down his back.

He once again turns his eyes toward the Legion beyond the main gates. Confirming the figure highly conspicuous even among the jet-black army, the super large Shadow Demon from the scouts’ reports, he suddenly realizes something.

«I, what was I..... Even while the threat of something like that which has never even been heard of before is closing in, to be jealous about women.....»

“..... [Phantom Horse]”

With disregard to Kaneigin’s discomposure, Margils chants a spell to create a jet-black horse on the spot. A small stir rises up among the Duke’s guards and chief vassals.

No matter how much this court magician strains his eyes, he cannot see any trace of magical power around the wizard’s body, or even anywhere in the air near him.

He is assaulted by a sense of despondency, as if realizing how diminutive his own existence is, in spite of all the knowledge and technique that he had dedicated his entire life to acquiring.

«But, I see..... that I could forget my fear..... no, that I could forget the existence of the Shadow Demons for even a moment.....»

“Well then, everyone, wait a while. I’ll be back after cleaning them up.”

«I get it, it’s because that man is here. Because I know for a fact that that man is on our side, I.....»

Still wordless, Kaneigin sees off the wizard riding a black horse running off into mid-air.



“Ooi, th-, they’re al-, almost here.....”

“I, I know that already.....”

One of the foot soldiers of Filsand, a pikeman named Baik, raises a similarly hollow-sounding voice in response to the comrade standing next to him, Bond.

The two of them are currently at the very front line of a square formation composed of 1,500 foot soldiers.

It’s been 3 years since he’s joined the army. He has experience being in real battle, and his considerable wages has helped his family to live in relative ease. By this point in time, he won’t think of deserting.

But still, he is not able to ignore his fear.

The scene of this black wall pressing steadily closer is the very definition of a nightmare.

“More like, what the hell is that giant lump! It’s even larger than the statue of the Duke in the plaza!”

How many times larger is it in comparison to the statue of the Duke that lords over the central plaza in Filsand.

That large figure that stands out even within the black wall composed of Shadow Demons is taller than even the city walls.

Its legs are fat and short, while in contrast its arms are long. With its back bent, it is almost walking on all fours.

Its movements are heavy and dull, as appropriate to its enormous bulk, but once it arrives, the city walls will be broken through in no time at all.

The impact of that gigantic Shadow Demon is such that it gathers almost all attention, but there are also 5 Rock Demons that are about half as tall as the city walls, and there are also numerous Large Demons, each of which they've been told equal more than 20 soldiers in terms of fighting strength.

"Are we seriously, really seriously going to be alright? Before, I've seen a whole company partially wiped out fighting against even a single Large Demon."

"Th-, the Duke-sama is watching from over there so I, I think we'll be alright..... maybe."

Bond is saying that it'll be alright, but Baik himself is not of the same mind at all.

According to what their commander office had explained to them before deployment, the Duke has a guest called 'an incredible wizard' who will defeat the Legion, and the job of the army is to make sure that no Shadow Demons escape by killing the stragglers. But.

"Y-, you know, it's that wizard who called up that dragon in the castle, right? I'm sure he'll do something about it!"

"I, I guess....."

There is a rumor going around that some of the residents from Filsand had also seen that 'dragon' from afar, and even the knights seem to believe it.

«Something like, no way it exists. Could it be that the Duke who is currently in the command post is a body double, and that we are only being deployed as fodder to slow the Legion down.....»

"OOOOHHHHHHhhhhh——!!"

Baik's thoughts are interrupted by the super large Shadow Demon's roar, which shakes not just the air, but also the ground.

"Gii———!"

“Gyaaaaaaaa!”

“Gooh! Gyauoh!”

“H-, hiii~!”

As if in concert with the super large Shadow Demon’s roar, all members of the Legion also give voice to their hatred, such that the sound fills the atmosphere.

The humans ranks staring at the black wall can see a countless number of lights burning within. Baik knows almost instinctively that they are the Shadow Demons’ eyes.

The super large Shadow Demon raises one of its long arms.

The moment the arm drops in the direction of Filsand, the flood of Shadow Demons filled with killing intent begins to charge.

“TH-, TH-, THEY’RE COMING!!!”

“Let’s, LET’S DO THIS!”

“WE WON’T GO DOWN WITHOUT A FIGHT!”

The resolve to die fighting present on the faces of all the Filsand foot soldiers is proof that they are no mere ragtag rabble.

All of them ready their weapons, almost instinctively. But at that moment.

Baik notices white and shining clumps passing overhead at the edge of his vision. The white lights are leaving 8 trails in the sky.

Hyuun.

The sound of air being cut apart also reaches his ears.

The eight lines of light head toward the area where the super large Shadow Demon is, then stabs into the army that is like a black carpet—

Baik’s vision is dyed pure white.

Chapter 97: Defense of Filsand (Part 5) (3rd Person)

“OOOHHHH!”

“Hiii?!”

From his position in the command post, court magician Kaneigin had a great view of the 8 meteors falling right into the thick of the Legion.

At the landing points of each of the meteors, a gigantic fireball erupts, creating thunderous noise and shockwaves that envelope even the command post.

Even the stout and durable great gates that they are currently on top of are shaking violently, causing Kaneigin and the other vassals to need to brace themselves in desperation.

“So that is Margils’ meteor.....”

It is very rare to see the cool-headed Duke of Filsand overcome with surprise. More like, Kaneigin thinks it admirable that he didn’t even scream at all.

The only person looking nonchalant is that wizard’s close aide, the female magician.

“L-, look! That big one.....”

“What incredible magic this is.....”

Even without the chief vassals’ and knights’ cries, everyone can see it for themselves.

The super large Shadow Demon with a majestic appearance rivalling even Filsand’s main gates that had been closing in is now rolling on the ground, reduced to almost only the lower half of its body.

One of its arms that had been torn off is now pasted onto the city walls like a pressed flower, while the other is just lumps of meat raining on the soldiers.

The spread out crowd of Shadow Demons that looked like a black blanket now has 8 big holes in it, areas where the ground underneath is visible.

“W-, wizardry. So this is the might of wizardry.....”

So mutters Kaneigin with a shudder.

He had been present when Margils had created that dragon. At that time, he had also felt astonishment and fear, but the impact from this time is even greater.

Unlike the chief vassals and knights, this man who had been called a genius at the main campus of the Magician Academy of Shulendal is not simply surprised at the might of the meteors.

He has realized that Margils’ ‘Wizardry’ is not just techniques specialized in a certain direction, like ‘creating dragons,’ but most likely a whole set of techniques with a wide range of application.

“..... I-, if it was me, casting a spell only half the firepower of one of those meteors would already cost me almost all of my magical power.....”

As a magician, he cannot help but to make comparisons to ‘magic.’

Magic is ‘activating something by depleting magical power.’

For example, Kaneigin’s Magic Board currently indicates that his magical power is at 322. It is a number that places him within the top few percent of this world’s magicians.

The most powerful spell that he can cast is {Thunder Vortex}, which costs 300 magical power. In other words, after using {Thunder Vortex} even once, his magical power would drop from 322 to 22, which is an amount barely enough to cast a single mid rank spell.

Even that super rank magic {Thunder Vortex} is less than half of a single meteor in firepower (for what it’s worth, this will be said for his honor’s sake, but that {Thunder Vortex} is powerful enough to defeat a Rock Demon).

In short, if what Margils just did is to be matched with magic, it would cost

4,800 magical power in total.

“A single person possessing almost 5,000 magical power..... is unbelievable.....”

The strongest magician that Kaneigin knows, the Grandmaster of the Magician’s Guild, only possesses around 1,000 magical power. Kaneigin can do nothing but to limply shake his head at the absurdity of the power of the man they have as a guest.

“Oi, that big one, it’s.....”

“Moving..... wait, no, it’s r-, regenerating?!”

“And there are still so many Shadow Demons left..... ahh, I can still see two Rock Demons!”

“..... How much can our knights and soldiers handle.....”

The super large Shadow Demon had been toppled over and left with only the lower half of its body, but at the gaping wound from which its internal organs are spilling out there is dark red meat bulging out. Though the speed of regeneration is not to the point where it is visible to the eye, at this rate, this Shadow Demon should make a full recovery with half a day.

Furthermore, though the power of the meteors was indeed incredible, it was insufficient to defeat all five thousand Shadow Demons.

At a quick glance, it seems around half of the Shadow Demons are still uninjured, and after stopping for several tens of seconds after the meteor crashes, they’ve resumed their advance. Even the Shadow Demons bearing injuries that would take a human soldier out of commission are literally dragging themselves along, determined to reach the soldiers defending Filsand.

«That Rock Demon over there, I can somehow take care of. As for the other one, if the other magicians and soldiers focus on it, then.....»

Kaneigin regathers himself and begins considering strategies. But at that moment.....

Hyuun.

Once again, eight meteors pass by overhead, diving straight into the Legion.

“Wh-, WHATTT?!”

“UWAAAHH!”

It hasn't even been 30 seconds since the previous time, but once again the scene of 8 fireballs roasting Shadow Demons is reproduced.

What's different this time is the number of Shadow Demons remaining.

The super large Shadow Demon that had begun to regenerate was blown to smithereens, and the same went for the two leftover Rock Demons.

The army that is now reduced to being only composed of Small and Large Demons has been downgraded from a black carpet to stains here and there. There are probably not even a thousand left.

“Th-, th-, that's im-, im-, impossible! Impossible!!”

The one who had shouted out while clutching his head was Kaneigin's disciple, who is currently standing behind him.

The few other magicians and a portion of the knights are in the same state. The chief vassals, who know almost nothing about magic or battles, are just honestly being glad. However.....

“An estimate of 10,000 magical power?! No way in hell there's such an existence!”

“If, if Margils-dono felt like it, how easily could he destroy our Castle of Fortitude.....”

“Not just a single castle! He could actually erase an entire country.....”

“.....”

Honestly, Kaneigin is filled with the temptation to wail and moan alongside his disciples. However, his sense of responsibility as Court Mage allows him the bare amount of reason to continue thinking.

«With this, I truly have no choice but to admit that that is something completely different from magic. ‘Wizardry,’ was it? A completely different set of techniques drawing from a completely different source of power.....»

Kaneigin had been able to feel magical power ever since he was aware, and

had been able to recognize his Magic Board not long after the start of his training. For him, this conclusion is on the same level as recognizing that someone is walking in the full sense of the word, but with a different organ than the feet.

This conclusion, which no one else has yet to realize, was so easily acceptable to him because he has enough ability to have been called a genius. Furthermore, this is why he arrived at the questions “In the first place, what is magical power? What is magic?”

“Meteors, a-, again!!”

Right when Kaneigin was about to sink into deep contemplation, a third round of meteors whistle by overhead.

“..... I don't even..... I swear I'm not going to be surprised anymore, no matter what happens next.”

This declaration which was uttered with the last dregs of someone's stubbornness are, of course, going to be overturned quite soon.



“..... Hey man, are we not actually dreaming right now?!”

“Who the hell could come up with a dream as screwed up as this?!”

Among the Filsand foot soldiers all currently laying flat on the ground, Baik and Bond are screaming back and forth.

By the time of the third thunderous roar, their eardrums have gone completely haywire, to the point where they cannot hear each other otherwise.

A mere 30 seconds ago, they had been staring down the huge black wave that is a Legion, resolved to die.

But now, the only thing covering the vast ground are scraps of dismembered Shadow Demons. Actually, no, a closer look tells them that there are still several hundred Small and Large Demons moving about. Almost all of them are suffering from grievous wounds, with instinct being the only thing driving them to continue tottering towards the direction of Filsand.

“That just now..... was done by..... that guy, right?”

“Idiot! Don’t say ‘that guy’! What are you going to do if he hears you?!”

Baik looks up. At the far, far end of his vision is a tiny figure of a man astride a black horse.

For Baik, whose experience with magic had only ever been fire arrows or wind blades strong enough to kill one Small Demon, that figure is an existence beyond his imagination.

And so when his companion Bond referred to such a personage as ‘that guy,’ Baik could not help but to poke him. If in the one in a million chance they sour that personage’s mood and a meteor falls on top of their own heads — Baik can hardly be faulted for thinking along such lines.

“..... Th-, the Shadow Demons are already on the verge of collapse! All units, ready yourselves! We’ll soon be cleaning up the remnants!”

His commanding officer’s voice resounding from behind was also slightly off-pitch from usual.

Indeed, though the Shadow Demons’ number has been drastically reduced, their current number is still one that cannot be overlooked. The meteors are powerful indeed, but now that the Legion has been spread out so thinly, its effectiveness drops.

His commanding officer’s decision was correct. Baik and the rest of the soldiers also desperately stand up while still quivering.

“Al-, alright, with just those numbers, we can somehow handle it!”

“We’re not going to let a single one into Filsand!”

Zuun!

The foot soldiers point their weapons towards the bands of Small and Large Demons that are now only several tens of meters away.

But at that moment.....

Before Baik’s very eyes, a ‘wall’ suddenly appears. The heavy sound was when the ‘wall’ had landed and caused a small ground tremor.

“Wh-, what..... GYAAHHHH!”

“UWAHHH!”

“Sh-, Shadow Demon?!”

As Baik and Bond look up following the wall, what eventually registers in their eyes is the figure of a warrior wearing full armor. In other words, what they had thought to be a ‘wall’ is actually the warrior’s leg.

“G-, g-, g-, GIANT?!”

These are three Forest Giants that Margils, from atop his Phantom Horse up in the sky, had created with the [Create Monster] spell.

The giants are lined up in a straight row, standing between Filsand’s main gates and the Shadow Demon remnants. Facing a whole Legion almost 5,000 strong would have been one thing. But now that there is only a handful of stragglers left, Margils had determined that these three would be sufficient to prevent even a single Shadow Demon from reaching Filsand.

“Were these guys also created by tha-..... I mean, Margils..... Margils-sama?!”

“..... I, I guess so.....?”

“More like, look what these guys are holding!!”

“Oi, don’t tell me.....”

The three giants are all wearing proper armor. But what they have in their hands are not proper weapons.

At the end of a long handle is a countless number of sticks bunched up and tied together..... to get to the point, those are brooms.

“ “ ” ”

The giants brace the brooms in their hands in unison as if they were triplets, and begin to sweep.

Of course, it is the Shadow Demons heading their way that are being swept.

“Uwah?!”

“Hii!”

At this point, if the giants’ movements are as dull as their size implies, a few of

these persistent Shadow Demon burning with hatred might have actually gotten past and reached Baik and the soldiers.

However, the giants are changing their standing positions with nimble steps, raising turbulent winds strong enough to blow a child off its feet while quickly moving their brooms back and forth.

«That’s exactly the way my mom sweeps the floor.....»

Still on his butt, Baik dazedly recalls the figure of his mother, who he hasn’t met much recently.

“Gyaaaahh?!”

“Gyahi!”

But of course, falling on their hindsides is hardly the Shadow Demons’ worry.

Some are being flung tens of meters into the air, some are being grinded to paste between the ground and the broom, some are being skewered by the bristles.....

Baik is thinking more and more how lucky he is that the clouds of dust being whipped up is preventing him from seeing most anything.

“Th-, there are giants there too!”

“That side also!”

The soldiers, who have all sunk to the ground, watch on as more and more giants appear.

They can’t tell due to the clouds of dust, but there are now 3 giants positioned on each of the four sides of a square, boxing in the entirety of the Legion.

“What is this even..... am, am I supposed to laugh? I feel like I’m supposed to laugh.....”

“I, I guess.....”

Several minutes later.

When the 12 giants have fastidiously swept together all the remaining Shadow Demons.....

“GyuuOOOoooo!”

What resounds through the sky is not the sound of meteors slicing through air, but the roar of a dragon.

A single gigantic dragon the size of one of those large model sailing vessels that dock at Filsand’s port comes flying in.

“This time it’s a dragon.....”

“Seriously, who on earth is Margils-sama? The Demon God that the barbarians always speak of?”

The Shadow Demons and Shadow Demon remains that have been gathered into a small mountain thanks to the giants are now being incinerated from the dragon’s searing breath.

The scene has already departed from the realm of reality and become legend. Baik and the soldiers are a given, but even the knights are paralyzed and cannot move.

Starting with Baik, every single person present is praying “may the Duke never anger Margils-sama” from the bottom of their hearts.



“..... If this is a dream, I wish to wake up.....”

“Do you want to take a dive into the ocean, then?”

One of the newest models of large sailing vessels currently standing by inside the bay waiting to set sail.

The two men standing in that ship’s crow’s nest are whispering to each other in nervous, stiff voices.

One man has a blue sash thrown over his shoulder to indicate that he is a merchant from Shulendal. The other is this ship’s Captain.

The one who had spoken while peering into a telescope that he had purchased from a dwarf at a high price was the merchant.

“I don’t know the full details, but the one riding that horse flying in the sky must be Gio Margils. And the rumors about him calling down meteors and

controlling giants and dragons..... are apparently real.”

“I still find it hard to believe..... a single magician performing such outrageous deeds.....”

“Even after all the information gathering that we had done, and even after seeing it with my own two eyes, I still think the same way. It’s only natural.”

The man with the sash wipes away his cold sweat and sighs deeply. Actually, him being a merchant is merely a front, and his true identity is an intelligence operative in the service of a certain important person of Shulendal.

“I’ve also seen Purgatory Flames fighting in the arena in the capital, but..... different dimension is all I can say.”

“Even the strongest adventurers can’t annihilate an entire Legion after all.....”

Even the adventurer party called ‘the strongest’ in Sedia, Cabran of the Purgatory Flames, cannot hold a candle to [Wizard] Gio Margils. This is the conclusion that this operative naturally arrived at.

“Captain, full speed. Cancel all trades planned on the route. Worst case, we might even need to discard all our cargo. Our priority is to return to the capital as fast as we can in order to give our report.”

“..... If we do that, we’ll be deep in the red though.”

Though their job is only a front, the maritime trade route from Filsand that connects Ran Balt, Reind’Dal, and Shulendal generates massive profits.

Their journey this time was also planned to bring in not only information, but also revenue.

“Right now, the information we have grasped is the most valuable cargo we have onboard, Captain. This one man who possesses so much power, whether the Kingdom becomes his enemy or his ally..... it would be no joke to say that that choice would literally determine the life or death of Shulendal.”

The Captain swallows after hearing the words of this veteran operative who has survived many a battlefield.

“I am sure that many in the same profession as ours would also be bringing this information home, but..... the only person who would take it seriously is

probably only our boss, right? If some other stupid noble meddles with him and angers him.....”

“Ugeh, I can certainly imagine that happening.”

The operative man, through the Captain, has several subordinates lowered in a small boat with orders to continue gathering information on Margils.

He is truly relieved that he didn't escape Filsand several days ago when word spread about the approaching Legion.

He has been active as an operative for many years, but this is his first time handling information as important as this.

“What happened today might actually move history itself.....”

At this moment, this operative is thinking that this is the climax of his career.

It will be much, much later when he realizes that this is merely the harbinger of the climax.

Chapter 98: Interrogation

“Is this fine now.....?”

I’m muttering to myself while leisurely flying through Filsand airspace on my Phantom Horse.

Under my eyes, the giants are methodically sweeping the land, gathering Shadow Demon remains into one place.

The small mountain of remains are thoroughly incinerated with the Fire Breath of a Huge Red Dragon.

If such a large amount of Shadow Demon corpses is left to rot, they might become the source of an epidemic or become undead, so I make sure to be thorough.

“Un. It’s fine now..... I think.”

Just now, I had been fully indulging in the situation of mowing down an overwhelming enemy army by oneself, something that would get any man’s blood boiling.

But after the momentary high, I find myself still thinking of various worst case outcomes.

I would like to think that I’ve been getting by so-so ever since I was transferred over by The Overlooker. I would, but the truth is that the fear of making a fatal mistake somewhere has yet to fade in my mind.

Several tens of minutes later, thanks to the efforts of the giants and dragon, there is not even a trace left of all those Shadow Demons that had been there not long ago. The only thing left is an especially flat piece of parched land.

Now that there are no more visual vertiges, my heart somehow also grows lighter.

I head back towards the command post set up above the city's main gates, giving the soldiers in position outside a big wave while passing by.

“MARGILS! MARGILS! GREAT WIZARD MARGILS!” ”

The entire time until my Phantom Horse lands at the command post, the soldiers are thrusting their fists and weapons into the air and shouting acclamation towards me.



“That was wonderful, Margils-sama.”

“Umu.”

The only person who addresses me as I get off my Phantom Horse is Clauro.

She normally speaks to me on the same level, but in a formal occasion, she makes sure to show me respect. Having a beautiful lady value my work really speaks to my nature as a man. I feel like I understand why CEOs keep a pretty secretary by their side.

On the other hand, for some reason the Duke of Filsand, Elizabel, Dianu, and the vassals are all petrified.

“As you have seen, the Legion has been taken care of. Duke?”

“In-, indeed. As, as expected.....”

So says the Duke while jerkily standing up.

In contrast, the surrounding chief vassals, magicians, and knights all prostrate themselves in unison. Elizabel and Dianu too.

“What an in-, incredible sight it was..... to think that you possess that much power.....”

“You..... You sure you're not actually the Demon God?” (Dianu)

(T/N: Dianu was about to use the 'omae' pronoun to address Gio, but then rephrased herself.)

“Ou-, our hero!”

“It was the very scene of a legend!”

“Ahh, umu.....”

This kind of reaction itself, I’ve already gotten kind of used to. However, perhaps due to their reverence for the Duke, so far his subordinates had yet to deprecate themselves toward me so blatantly, which is why I am slightly bewildered.

..... No, thinking about it, this is also my first time using so many high level spells in such a flashy manner. I think I have grown apathetic to it, but clearly this left a much greater impression on them than that show-and-tell of a single dragon.

“..... Ladies and gentlemen, be at ease.”

Originally, it is not my place to speak those words, especially when their master is also present.

But the Duke himself still looks quite out of it, so I have no choice but to purposely speak in a prideful tone.

Everyone looks relieved, and neither the Duke nor Claura says anything in particular, so I think that way of handling the situation was correct.

“Either way, thanks to you the danger has passed. We..... Filsand will never forget this debt.”

Wiping sweat from his forehead, the Duke displays clear relief on his face. Though this reaction can be said to be natural after the city under his control was saved, it seems that even he has human-like emotions after all.

As we exchange a firm handshake, I can indeed feel heat beyond the thick glove on his hand.

Be that as it may.

I still have many tasks before me, beginning with the matter regarding Elizabel and his children, the handling of the Shulz, and of course ‘the second condition’ that I still need to present to him.

..... More like, the current task is still not yet finished.

“The danger is not yet over. The fact that so many Shadow Demons have appeared must mean that somewhere — I highly suspect it to be the Shulz’s

home base — a Shadow Demon nest has appeared. We must go destroy it.”



That night.

After dumping all of the detailed processes and paperwork and whatnot due to the clash with the Legion on the Duke, I am currently in the underground dungeon of Castle of Fortitude together with my allies.

The reason is because Leid and Leiha had returned with a huge ‘accomplishment’ from their separate mission.

That ‘accomplishment’ is currently sitting on a crude chair placed in the middle of of a cell.

Both arms are tightly tied to the back of the chair, and there is a mouth gag tightly in place.

This man with a stiff, ceremonious appearance is the ‘Mystic,’ who Leid and Leiha had kidnapped while infiltrating the Shulz’s home base, Garden of the Gods.

“I said it was fine to only do reconnaissance, but..... was it not dangerous?”

“I, I’m very sorry, my lord.”

“I just did it of my own accord. Since I don’t have a reason to listen to your orders.”

Indeed, I had asked these two to scout out Garden of the Gods, which I suspect had been taken over by Shadow Demons. I did lend them Phantom Horses for transportation, as well as several magic items, but what happened to my request to not risk any danger.....

“W-, well..... I don’t mean to comment on you guys’ on-scene judgment. And the result is..... this is nothing short of distinguished service.”

It’s true that I did not say to not bring back prisoners. In all likelihood, it wasn’t much trouble for Leid and Leiha anyways.

I make a mental note to be more strict with my cautioning the next time even while patting Leiha’s head to soothe her down, as she looks ready to physically

punish herself even now.

“To cast such magnanimous words upon one so lowly and foolish as myself..... th-, thank you so very much, my lord.....”

“..... Umu.”

As I am patting Leiha’s light purple hair while she is still on her knees, ecstasy gradually comes over her face.

Due to her being pretty much the embodiment of sexiness, there have been quite a few times when things have inadvertently gotten a bit dicey. But lately, it’s starting to feel like showing affection to a big dog who’s gotten really attached.

“So, is one of us going to interrogate this man?”

So asks Claura as I get kind of distracted fiddling with Leiha’s hair.

In order to interrogate the Mystic, the only person present aside from Leid and Leiha is Claura.

Originally, the high-profile status of this captive means that we should have also called the Filsand and Shulz sides first. However, considering our interrogation methods and the information that we will most likely draw out, I wanted to confirm everything within our circle first, so I forcefully made it into this lineup.

“Ahh. I’ll do it. With this.”

“..... That again? Not that it’s not a method, but.....”

“Since I don’t have any more cultured way of doing it. And I don’t have the confidence to maintain a proper conversation with him in the first place.”

I take out my ESP Medal from within my clothes, causing Claura to shrug her shoulders.

In actual fact, despite being bound head to toe, he is directing powerful hatred towards us, and his eyes are indeed glowing golden. The moment Leid brought out his Sight Demon, it immediately began glowing.

Whichever way we look at it, this man’s mind has already been corrupted by

Shadow Demon influence.

Previously, I tried to read a Demonist's mind in Lelis using this ESP Medal, but his mind had already collapsed by the time I got to him, so all I got was a very blurry and obscure image.

Thankfully, this Mystic clearly still has his consciousness, so we might perhaps get some actual information about Shadow Demons or Demonists from him.

Even beyond the ethical issues, I find peering into a mind dirtied by Shadow Demons quite repulsive in and of itself. However, doing things that need to be done even when you don't want to, that's part of what it means to be an adult.

"..... I'll ask this just in case, but do you have any intention of honestly answering our questions?"

"N—! Nn—!"

I did try, for the record.

The tanned-skinned man wearing a black robe grunts while looking as if he wants to bite my face off.

"In that case, you leave me no choice. I'm sorry, but I'll be reading your mind directly then. Firstly..... how did you guys know my name?"

"....."

Thrusting the ESP Medal in front of his eyes, I begin the interrogation.

When asked a question, he will naturally think of the answer, regardless of whether he wants to or not. If I read those thoughts, I might be able to learn the reason how these Demonists knew about me, even though I've only just left Senpu Village at the time.

And perhaps I might also learn the reason why the War Tribe's Miko is also declaring me a Focal Point.

Chapter 99: That which lurks within

"Well, no other choice huh?, sorry but I'll be reading your mind. First, why do you all know my name?"

"..."

The Shaman tied on the chair, was silently glaring at me full of hatred.

He was resolute to not leak any kind information, but there's nothing he can do in front my ESP medal.

According to the Patriarch and Diane, it's been a few years since he started working for the Patriarch's wife and Diane's mother, Shaela, at the garden of gods.

After hearing all this, it reminds me of baron Cobal the priest of Lelis city.

From the adventurers investigation, the priest and the baron were supposedly leading a bunch of dark beast cultists. So it was natural to associate this Shaman with them.

Different from baron Cobal, it seems the Shaman still has his consciousness, so it may be possible to get a lot of information from him.

"Oracle... The king of the dark beasts... the oracle... must kill the man called Gio Margis..."

The king of the dark beasts?, this is going out of control. However, his consciousness is barely there. That Dark beast king, is it a proper name? Also, what is that thing he is calling like that?

Once again I pressed into the Shaman's shoulder.

The ability of the ESP medal is telepathy.

Until I've been using it as kind of receptor, in other words, I've only been using it to read one's consciousness.

There's wasn't a rule in D&B regarding how to use such ability... Still, the real thrill in TRPG is to figure out how to use spells and items.

"Hey!! Shaman! come to your senses now!"

I held out the ESP medal, and anxiously sent my own words into his mind...

".....□■□■... ah... garr..."

"If you are still human help us one last time! The other cultists, where are they and what are they doing!?"

I don't know if any of his consciousness still remains.

There was no more words to be said, he was desperately calling to his heart, that was like a well filled with pitch black hatred.

It wasn't words, but an image that was conveyed.

"aaaAAAARRGGG!!!"

"Wonderful! just wonderful! a new focal is now created!"

"Shaela-sama, it seems all the malice from the Ogre figure has been cleared"

I saw it, below Lelis city was an altar made of the remains of dark beasts and humans, in front of it was the image of a beautiful woman and the Shaman speaking to each other.

In a highway unbeknownst to anyone, was the image of a lone Shaman walking.

The image of a young Shaman, looking up to a sparkling white temple.

"aaAAAHH!?"

"Gio!?"

"What happened!?"

It seems that I peeked into a fragment of the Shaman's memories.

I saw an enormous temple, and then a voice suddenly pierce into my consciousness.

It wasn't the Shaman.

It was a "voice", overwhelmingly full of hatred.

Shocked and terrified I screamed as I fell on my back. The ESP medal resounded after colliding with the floor.

Astonished, Claura and Leiha hurried to my side, they held me as I was trembling with fear and sweating cold.

"HAaa..."

The effects of the ESP medal ran out and the link to the Shaman's consciousness was severed.

I can't also hear that "voice" anymore but... that's obviously a being far removed of the norm. Probably that's the king of the dark beasts.

"He's sweating so much... what happened?"

"Hold on my lord! ..."

Claura was composedly wiping my sweat, while Leiha looked worried.

Meanwhile, before I knew it, Rade had readied his great sword, and was looking at the Shaman who was convulsing while still tied to the chair.

"Lade, he's..."

"Step back"

"arg ah arggggg"

If he keeps convulsing so violently, he could break off the ropes tying him...

Violently going back and forth, his head started to swell, like a CG, and then burst open...

"Pum"

It sounded as if a tire just burst open.

At that moment, fragments of the Shaman's head scattered all over the place, a big lump stuck morbidly on the ceiling.

"AHH!"

Claura was petrified in place while still holding me, Leiha drew her dagger and stood in front of us to protect us.

"grr"

Meanwhile Lade, raised his voice even if the thing in front of him seemed like a fly, he simply lifted his sword, and with the tip he stabbed the lump stuck on the ceiling.

"W-what the hell is that?"

"Crick crick"

The lump, stitched to the ceiling with the sword was wriggling.

If one paid attention, that eerie creature (?) more than a pink lump of meat looked like a spider or a jellyfish maybe.

Its size is one third of the size of the head of the Shaman.

"T-that thing... was lurking inside his head? ..."

"Uhm..."

More than anyone else, Leiha was mumbling dumbfounded after observing the creature.

Claura, after enduring for several seconds the sight of the creature, she finally put her face on my shoulder.

In spite of that, she is a brave women who won't budge an inch in front of a dark beast. On the other hand, Leihas's ability to tolerate such grotesque scene is praiseworthy. If possible, I would also like to look away.

"Interrogate the enemy's leaders which are now prisoners" In that situation normally the prisoners got themselves killed or just commit suicide to prevent any leak, or so I expected. Thus I hurried with the interrogation... but this was excessively cruel...

"It's the first time I see something like this, the possessed person was actually used to getting across his point..."

Lade is mumbling bitterly.

Chapter 100: Because I don't know if I can win or not

I mutter as I sit on the bed

In front of me is the Shaman who lost his head, also ready to protect me is Leiha and her glorious posterior.

Claura is still firmly clinging to my left arm

"Crick crick"

Lade continues to impale the thing that came from the Shaman's head - I probably should, provisionally, call it dark beast bug - it was releasing vapor and shrinking and then it disappeared.

"It's alright now..."

"ahhh"

I whispered to Claura as she laid face down and gently caressed (in a non lewd way) her back

She flipped over separating from my hand.

"It's okay now, that thing already disappeared"

"A-ah yes, is that so?"

She was checking her surroundings with a red face, but as soon as she looked at the gruesome body of the Shaman her face turned pale

"Urrrg..."

"Why don't you rest for a bit?"

"Y-yeah..."

Her face turned red once again, she let go of my robe which until a moment ago was firmly holding.

"F-for me to lost my composure... I-I beg your pardon"

What is she on about?, she said that as she straighten the wrinkles on her robe with both hands.

Seeing her like that is kind of lovely, even the terror I felt just a moment ago is starting to fade. I never expected for Claura to have such a healing effect on me.

Certainly the brief moment I hear the "voice" of the "dark beast king" was frighteningly, but after the connection was severed, surprisingly, the impression he left was rather weak. It's as if suddenly waking from a nightmare.

"Mistress"

Leiha started cleaning the blood and chunks of brain off Claura's hair and body, how gallant of her.

Lately it seems that Leiha has given priority to helping Claura on her daily life, more so than me... Well, as someone who was brainwashed into loyalty, waking her own free will is certainly welcome.

"Hey!"

"Ouch!"

And then with nod, the annoyed Lade kicked me with the tip of his military boots on my back. Hey... isn't he putting a little too much force there?

"What's with that carefree attitude of yours? Did that guy tell you anything before dying?"

"T-that's right"

"Dark beast king? There's rumors he exists somewhere..."

"Rumors huh? ..."

I asked the jailer of Fortitude Castle to handle the corpse of the Shaman, meanwhile we gathered in another room.

The words I listened to with the ESP medal, the images that surfaced right at the end, and also the "voice" I heard at the deepest part of his mind.

As I explained all that, Lade was grumbling without saying anything.

"Ah ... the elder council might know more about this"

In a surprisingly dignified manner he made a wry face while crossing his arms.

I got that feeling before, that there's such differences in status between the upper brass of the War Tribe and the ones doing the actual work.

"About this dark beast king, is possible he's the one manipulating from behind the scenes all of the cultists (demonists)."

"We... is he the one manipulating the tribe (High Cross)? making us live under a scheme?"

"I'm afraid that might be the case, And what does he intend by targeting me by name?"

As things were, until recently we only had some vague guesses as to what was going on, but with the information we got now we have a firmly grasp of the situation.

The situation with baron Cobal and the priest and the dark beast king ordering the Schutlz's Shaman to deal with me, it all makes sense.

"Seems like Canberists was right... The priestess prophecy is... "

Said Lade with a bitter expression.

Yes, if the dark beast king is influencing important people all around the world, then it's also possible for the War Tribe's priestess to declare I'm a focal point.

Before I said anything, Lade pointed it out. I'm sorry, but I'm glad he pointed it out.

"In the first place, everything related to the priestess prophecy is unknown. It's possible the dark beast king is meddling her"

"... haa..."

By the time he realized it, he was someone below the priestess or the elder only fighting the dark beasts. It wasn't suppose to be something emotionally difficult but, he was grinding his teeth trying to conceal his emotions. It really is a big deal.

Nevertheless.

"... I don't want to say it but, we are dealing with a formidable enemy"

The dark beast bug is probably a tool used to manipulate the cultists (demonists). Those are the only things I know more or less, his identity, whereabouts and real objectives remains a mystery.

Even worst, he might be implanting those bugs inside people's brains all over the world, making legions of dark beasts appear whenever and wherever he wants.

For Claura it was a difficult enemy. Yes, a frightening enemy, but not an absurd one.

Claura's expressions stiffens, she's gritting her teeth.

Her fingers were pressing hard on her upper arm.

Normally she's like cool beauty, but now she's mentally strained and fearful, but also full of fighting spirit.

She's determined to win the coming battles.

"Really, that's one tough enemy but, there's surely a way to win"

I immediately declared.

Girls that are like daughters are "good women", or so I delude myself. I wonder if I exposed a shameful side of me.

"Come to think of it, You were talking with Las, right?... Does he have a clue as to the identity of dark beasts king?"

"Right, we were talking about how we must defeat this powerful enemy, or something along those lines."

"I-I see."

Of course, whether we can defeat it or not is still unknown.

After my first chaotic struggles, I'm currently unusually calm.

There's isn't a Last Boss you can't defeat, and I'm quite aware is a childish way of thinking.

After all I played "D&B" for more than 10 years.

This world, Cedia, is not something from a game setting, many time I've realized that already. And yet, the dark beast and their king exists, to say the king cannot be defeated it's the opposite of being realistic.

To be honest, it's the first time I'm "fighting without knowing if I can win".

And the first time I have companions in the same position as I am.

And that's why I cannot give the impression of being scared.

That fighting spirit I felt over a soon to fail project that I was made responsible for on one of the power struggles at my company so many years ago.

Or the time I was still a student and spent two new year's eve challenging the last boss on a campaign.

Those feelings are now boiling up inside me.

"Anyway... that aside. There's still something we must do, we need to destroy the "nest" at God's garden."

From the images I saw from the Shaman, Diane's mother probably became a nest.

I wonder if we could help her?

There's still many things to take care of before returning to Jiiteas castle.

Author's note:

Somehow I made it to the 100th release.

Thank you so much for keeping up with me.

The road ahead is still long, but I'm focusing on the goal.

Once again I'm in your care.

Chapter 101: Princess of the Schultz (Part 3)

The next day, we departed to “God’s Garden”, ruined by the dark beast “nest”.

The nest supposedly birthed a 5000 beasts strong legion, but I can only roughly estimate their numbers at the surroundings of the nest.

According to Lade, there’s isn’t a set period of time at which the nest births new dark beasts.

There are nests that barely births new dark beast even if left alone, similar to this occasion, some nests births a large amount of beast in a short time, there are some precedents in past events.

After destroying the nest and a doing throughout search of the “God’s Garden”, we couldn’t find any new information regarding the “dark beast king” nor the cultists. Unfortunately, we found an innumerable amount of bodies from the Schultz tribe.

"Say... that nest, that creepy lump of meat is it really my mother?"

After returning to Fortitude Castle.

Diane, the princess of the Schultz tribe asked me that.

Their current headquarters decided that she will be accompanying us as a representative of the Schultz tribe.

From the images I saw from the Shaman, her mother, Sheala, was being swallowed by darkness. I couldn't think of any other explanation other than she becoming a “nest”.

Actually, at the time we were in front of the nest at God's Garden, I tried "Dispel Magic" and several other spells to make her human again but they all failed. Afterwards I reluctantly destroyed the place with "Meteor"... for Diane this is something utterly incomprehensibly I'm sure.

"I've have no proof but... I don't think there was any other choice... I'm sorry we couldn't help her"

"..."

Even if that lump wasn't Sheala, there wasn't any living human remaining. Even for a short time, dark beasts did occupy the place.

We also identified and buried every remain from the Schultz tribe we could, but Sheala wasn't among them.

I'm sure Diane knows what that means.

"If ya say so... that must be it..."

Naturally, she was sulking.

No matter if she's a warrior of the tribe or someone in command of a battle, she is still a girl around middle school age.

You could see her sadness and sense of loss on her red eyes.

"Ya... She was a person with so much pent up resentment. Even if the cultists took advantage of her... it was pitiable..."

Such a shame... As someone who just meet her can I do anything for her?

"I'm sorry... Like really sorry...."

"N-no it's nothing... you didn't do anything wrong..."

Diane turned her back on me.

Only once I heard her sniffing.

"From now on... I'll consult with my dad... the patriarch and the others. Maybe they all want to to return to God's Garden"

That's how it is.

The Schultz tribe was chased out from Fillsand once already.

And for 20 years they have been desperately rebuilding their lives on the ruins of God's Garden.

I also doubt they want to migrate again.

"It's just that, among the youngsters some want to follow you, would you take care of that bunch?"

"Yeah, of course"

"That's relieving, I'll also obviously be serving under you"

"I see..."

Diane was vigorously turning her face to me.

Just a moment ago she had a face that could cry at any moment, but now she's all smiles.

"I don't really get it but, you are trying to destroy the dark beasts huh? ain't that something amazing you want to do? Let me help you too!"

"Yeah, that's right"

She wasn't an outside of the norm warrior as Lade, but she was plenty strong for this world standards. Besides, her ability to lead the tribe's warrior is

something we are currently lacking.

"From now on I've become your sword, also 30... no make that 50 warriors from the tribe I'll dragging along!"

"uh huh..."

Above all is her motivation to fight against the dark beasts, I think...

I don't feel any anger nor any desire for revenge from her.

Rather, I have the impression she strangely feels admiration for me.

It might not be the best way to say it but, it's not something like determination or willingness to fight, more like she's depending on me.

"How reliable... thanks. But first you need to go calm down your people"

"Ya I know!"

For this 14-15 year old girl, her mother was the cause the dark beasts destroyed her birthplace, it was an abnormal situation.

It's absurd to expect her to keep her sanity.

In the first place, there's no way I'd know how to deal with the mental trauma of PTSD.

It's vexing, but it's up to herself to regain her own peace of mind.

"Well! Wait for a bit!"

She waved her hand and with an empty smile she returned to her tribe

I fought the dark beast legion and destroyed their nest, while also negotiated with Irudo (Ild?) the patriarch and the vassal of Fillsand.

Based on that, the remaining members of the Schultz tribe discussed what to do, and now they have an answer.

First, there's about 1200 people of the tribe gathered at Fillsand, roughly 1000 of those decided to follow the lead of the patriarch, and return to God's Garden. Also, the army of Fillsand was prohibited from attacking the tribe in any form, on the contrary, they've been tasked with maintaining order in the vicinity for the time being.

The remaining 200 people, are being lead by Diane and the former patriarch to Jiiteas Castle.

Among those 200 people, 50 were warriors while the rest were their family members.

As for me, I'm basically planning to have them clear the forest at the western part of Jiiteas Castle, and build a new village. Of course, I'll hire some of the warriors as soldiers for the castle.

In the end, the only thing I probably did was to divide the tribe in two. I know for sure this can become a source of conflict in the future but...

"I can only hope it doesn't become like that"

I'm always lacking confidence, so I need to keep pushing forward.

Chapter 102: The diplomat

The Schultz tribe completed their first step into a new future.

They will also be living safely for the time being.

I would like see how they are doing, but all this chaos wouldn't allow me.

Let's think about that when things are calmer, first I need to make sure things are going well.

"Margils-Sama... Would you spare a few moments?"

As I think some of my burdens were relieved, someone called me.

It was the daughter of the duke of Fillsand, Elisabel.

Thinking about it, the cause for all this uproar was rescuing her from her brother's assassination attempt. Had I visited Fortitude castle as a simple guest, my relationship with the duke and the others would have been so much easier.

"Yeah, I also wanted to talk to you"

I wanted to take some time off, but I think it's better to just hop on into action.

We talked in my room at the castle (I'm not renting it, the duke assigned me one room for my lodging).

"Please come in"

Elisabel graciously prepared some herbal tea, and then sat next to me.

I remembered a scene with hot tea lined with some cakes.

"Is this Ruth's fruit?"

The Schultz tribe eat plenty of this fruit, dried and preserved in sugar. The sweetness is plenty strong, but it matches quite nicely with the bitterness of the herbal tea.

"Yes, I shared it with the others"

This girl is working as a representative for Fillsand, she's the one who carried the negotiations with the Schultz tribe, furthermore, she listens to the complains and requests of the commoners, and also serves as an intermediary between the citizens.

She gained the goodwill from many among those people.

"I see... Wasn't hard being rejected by them?"

"Certainly it was, at first they even threw rocks at me"

Elisabel told me so as if it wasn't a big deal

"Sounds terrible, is everything fine now?"

"Yes, a bit better"

So far, she's been working really hard as diplomat for Fillsand, and yet, her mother, a princess of the Schultz tribe, and her father the tyrant that tormented them.

It was impossible to build any trusting relationship in that setting.

"I see, you really did your best right?"

"I... The only thing I'm good at is talking to people"

She is an outstanding diplomat, but more than that, she could hold a fair dialogue no matter the person, that left a deep impression on me.

I unintentionally patted her blonde head.

I don't think she likes it, but she was shyly smiling.

"Last night... I finally spoke to my father"

You could say our chat until now was a kind of greeting.

I prepared two cups of herbal tea, she was ready to talk about the real issue now.

"I see, how was it?"

"I think it's as you already hear, to my father... I'm nothing more than an useful person who's only good at one thing"

That bastard! Even if those were his real feelings, he should be more considerate to his own daughter.

"But, that was the first time I heard my father being sincere"

Elisabel was still smiling.

However her smile was a bit dark.

It was the same as that night she was told it was a sin for her to be born.

Just like Diane, my wizardly is useless for these girls who can only laugh in this situation.

"What are you going to do from now on?..."

"I already thought about something, and also got permission from my father"

Huh?

That night the light was different, I was motionless and she was gazing at me with red eyes.

"Wouldn't you allow me to help you in your work? You'll eventually need someone working as a diplomat right?... I can also work as a civil servant"

"hmm... Are you saying you are leaving your home to come serve under me?"

"Correct, I still love to work as a diplomat. Besides, in order to fight against the dark beasts you'll need to form new alliances, thus there is no other job better suited for the task right?, In this way there's going to be more than commerce and plotting with my father, by far it would be more enjoyable"

This girl, before she was semi convinced the duke would toss her aside, while also being scared. But now, she on her own accord is planning to cast aside the duke.

Previously, I've told the duke to better his relationship with his children, making it solid.

From Elisabeth words, I really don't think their relationship is "better", well they can at least "cooperate", I think.

Diplomat huh?... All this time I've been leaving all the internal affairs and diplomacy to Irudo.

"Of course, taking me as your wife would make me very happy"

"T-that's... Sorry I'll have to decline"

"Oh my, how disappointing"

Suddenly, she showed me a mischievous yet cute smile.

At first I thought she was planning to use me so she could escape from her father and from Fillsand.

But now...

"I better ask, With your abilities and connections, you could have choose anyone else to work with right? Then why choose me?"

That might have been a bit tactless, nonetheless I asked the real reasons.

It is not reckless to firmly express myself in front of a veteran diplomat. Besides I want to hear what she thinks of me.

"Well"

Unexpectedly, she blinked.

"Aren't you underestimating my own influence? You are trying to make Jiiteas castle into the most important key point on the whole continent, I want that to also become my dream"

Lastly, she said while smiling weirdly

"Besides, I hate the dark beasts"

"I understand..."

She decided on her own how to live her life.

Just like Diane, she is trying to fill the gaps on her heart by working for me...
Well at least that's not the main issue...

So that's her dream huh? That's heavy...

"I welcome you, miss diplomat"

"It's an honor my lord"

She expressed her gratitude making a reverence.

Chapter 103: The "right" thing

Elisabel and Diane joined as my new staff members. The next day I was drinking with Damond, the duke of Fillsand

We were in his own private room.

The liquor was high quality, but that didn't prevent the tension between the two of us.

As far as I'm concerned, I want an answer regarding the alliance with Fillsand. Naturally, I'm not going to let the Duke involve me with his invasion of the Felde kingdom.

On the other hand, the duke wants to win me over and take over the territory of the Felde kingdom together.

On our last reunion, as a prerequisite to form the alliance I imposed him some conditions.

The first was, to quell the disputes between his children in order to consolidate his own power.

There are other conditions, but I'm reserving them for the time being.

"... Elisabeth is going with you, right? Well, please take care of her"

"Now, I'm the one that's grateful, still is it fine to let her go?"

"It's not a problem"

Strictly speaking, this was contrary to the condition of "Having the duke cooperate to mend the relationship of his three children".

But I intend to let it pass.

In the first place, it was a condition for protecting Elisabeth, so he should be aware of that.

"If she's useful to you, she's useful to me, besides having her at hand, would put us on good terms indefinitely"

"I see..."

The duke seemed relieved.

He's not the kind of evil person to take pleasure in hurting others, but having said that, as a father his love for his daughter is appalling.

Elisabeth clearly understands that, so she herself chose to come to Jiiteas.

He's the same age as me, still I said such arrogant things despite not having children of my own. It's depressing but I'll have to make do with it.

"How are Balzade and Agbeil doing?"

The duke poured more wine on my empty cup, he's timing was like we are already used to each other.

"I already proclaimed Balzade as my official successor. He's always been an uninteresting guy, but he'll do fine. For some reason he's quite capable when it comes to the Felde kingdom and the Schultz."

"That's good to hear, I also think he's quite capable"

It's a shame he didn't go into much detail about his two sons.

Still, Balzade manage to win the trust of the Schultz tribe, so I know what kind of man he is. The duke really doesn't seem to think much about his sons.

There's a limit to how generous he can be as a ruler.

"Agbeil also seems to be more relaxed around his brother. I also don't intend to do anything more than deciding the order of succession"

"Is that so, I think he seems promising too"

Contrary to his brother, Agbeil resembles his father, he's calculating and cunning. And can also think from the perspective of the weak.

He has already acknowledge his brother as the ruler, if they cover each other's weaknesses ruling over Fillsand will go smoothly.

Incidentally, he said...

"That reminds me, didn't Agbeil told you something?"

The duke was pouring more wine on my cup while smiling. Be damned this father and son.

Certainly, Agbeil has been secretly reporting to me.

"Ah yes, it was something like: "In the future, if my father wants to betray you, I'll let you know in advance""

"Grrr, that's so like him. It's because he's like that I didn't say anything to him, please don't think I want to betray you"

"Will do, let me say this just in case... don't lay your hands on them"

"These brats have been prowling at my feet, don't worry about it"

Well, for the duke and his children, that much is fine I guess.

More than anything he wanted it to be over, I also couldn't do anything for their mother, the duchess.

It's time now.

"So... For the father that somehow managed to bring his family together, what kind of reward awaits him, lord wizard?"

In a plain manner the duke got down to business. The flame of ambition was burning inside his eyes.

"Ah yes, about the other day's proposal, Fillsand need new lands for expansion, right? In that case I have the perfect region to use"

As I said that, I pointed at a region in the map hanging in the wall.

A vast open piece of land at the northern region of Fillsand, the "Plains of Twilight".

"... That place is infested with undead... you are aware how preposterous is that?"

Are you planning to use your sorceries to deal with it?"

The duke was staring at the map intently.

He interrupted me but didn't denied my proposal, more than keeping his composure he didn't know the extend of the power of my sorceries.

Of I don't know a spell that can eliminate a seemingly endless number of undead from a vast extension on land. However during my stay in Fillsand I visited the library and the sages to gather information about the Plains if Twilight, so I'm not completely aimless.

"The outbreak of undead 120 years ago, came to be known as the "storm of the dead", there's probably a source for the outbreak, and I'm planning on eliminating it"

"That's extremely dangerous... Is that not the case for wizards?"

"Well more or less"

Truth is, there's only incomplete information about the "Storm of the dead". There's something causing it, so I need to eliminate that something, or that's my partial conjecture.

That said, If I could have the dwarves help me mass produce golems, claiming that land by sheer numbers wouldn't be impossible.

If I haven't prepared this amount of bait, I would never have been able to satisfy the duke's lust for conquest.

"What do you think? I'll need to prepare... so in one or two years I promise to restore the "Plains of Twilight" into the former "Plains of Dawn", until then I will like to assist in the restoration of your territory and improve the commerce between Jiiteas"

"hmmm..."

The duke is deep in thought.

Given the situation, I'm glad I'm showed off the power of wizardly when I eliminated the dark beast legion.

If not for that my proposal would have been laughed off.

"Very well, anyway the arable land and villages on the path of the dark beast legion were damaged, it'll take time to repair those and also reinforce the army. I'll wait for 2 years"

"Yes"

"If we reclaim the Plains of Twilight, within 20 years we can construct one or

two prominent districts, with ten years remaining to overthrow Felde."

"I hope so..."

I'm sorry for him, but in 20 years I won't be helping him with the invasion.

In a way, I feel guilty for deceiving him but...

"By the way Margils-dono"

"hmm?"

"When the dark beast legion attacked, at first I thought that would be the end of Fortitude castle. But when you completely destroyed them... I was relieved"

"Somewhere inside me, even if a little I thought about how important are the castle, my subordinates, the town, the population... I wonder if I'm getting old..."

"Maybe..."

The "evil me", the duke of Fillsand who misused his mighty power.

Meeting with him was extremely meaningful for me.

At the very least I haven't made any mistake that could make me resemble the duke.

And while that might be true.

The things I have done, and the things I have to do, no one can guarantee that they would be "right".

Even in modern Japan, finding what's "right" it's next to impossible.

I wonder if the "right" thing exists in this world?

Chapter 104: Illustrations of the main characters (WN Version)

Format: Name [race *gender* age / job]

Gio Margils [Human / 42 yo / Wizard level 36]



Mora [Human / Female 14 yo Common person level 3]



Sedam [Human Male 32 yo / Thief level

9]

Claura Andell [Human / Female 22 yo Magician

level 7]



Gilg [Human 35 yo Warrior level 6]

**Irudo [Human 38 yo Common person level
12]**

**Gillion Gil Calbanera [Human *Male* 23 yo /
Warrior level 8]**

**Lioria Calbanera [Human / Female 19 yo Warrior
level 10]**

**Arnogia Gil Sadish [[Human *Male* 17 yo /
Warrior 3]**

**Helidol Saillam [Human *Male* 36 yo / Magicial
level 9]**

**Tetoh Browse [Human *Male* 53 yo / Common person
level 13]**

**Leihanalca Highcrows [Elf / Female 51 yo Thief level
20]**



米

四十路勇。
建國記

Lade [Human *Male* 28 yo / Warrior level 21]

**Elisabel Lowny Fillsandia [Human / Female 15 yo
Magician level 2]**

Diane [Human *Female* 16 yo / Warrior level 5]

**Damond Feldy Fillsand [Human / 43 yo / Warrior level
15]**