



ever since I was a child.
An anime, manga, or movie? No, whatever's fine.
If I could become a man behind the scene,
I didn't care what type I would be.
Not a hero, not an arch enemy,
but the existence intervenes in a story and shows off his power.
I had admired the one like that, what is more,
and hoped to be.
Like a hero everyone wished to be in childhood.
"The Eminence in Shadow" was the one for me.
That's all about it.

The Eminence
in Shadow

影の天才

天才者
に

逢沢大介 著

東西 01 イラスト

なりたくて！

To Be a Power in the Shadows!

– Kage no Jitsuryokusha ni Naritakute! –

- Volume 1 -

**-Author-
Akasatana**

[Tenshi Translations]

- STORY -

Just like how everyone adored heroes in their childhood, a certain young man adored those powers hidden in shadows. After hiding his strength and living the mediocre life of a mob character by day while undergoing frenzied training by night, he finally reincarnates into a different world and gains ultimate power.

The young man who is only playing at being a power in the shadows, his misunderstanding subordinates, and a giant organization in the shadows that gets trampled...

This is the story of a young boy who had adored powers in shadows possibly eventually reigning over the world of shadows in another world.

"The Eminence in Shadow" was the one for me.
That's all about it.

The Eminence in Shadow

ニュー

_Nu

The E
in Sha
Volun

The Eminence

ベータ

_Beta

The E
in Sha
Volun

The Eminence

シャドウ

_Shadow

The E
in Sha
Volun

The Eminence

デルタ

_Delta

The E
in Sha
Volun

The Eminence

ガンマ

_Gamma

The E
in Sha
Volun

The Eminence

アルファ

_Alpha

The E
in Sha
Volun

The Eminence

「我等は
シャドウ
ガート
テン」

狩る者……
陰に潜み、
陰を



ローズ・オリアナ

_Rose Oriana

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クレア・カゲノー

_Claire Kagenou

The Eminence in Shadow Volume 1

The Eminence

アレクシア・ミドガル

_Alexia Midgar

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The Eminence

「いい剣ね……」

でも、嫌いな剣

「生意気な弟……」

だから、

いじめてやるの」

「あの……
タツキを
焼いてきました」

「あなたに

救われた命……」

ならば私は

心を捧げます」

シェリー・バーネット

_Sherry Barnett

The Eminence in Shadow Volume 1

The Eminence

Chapter 1

Remaining Within the Limits of Being Human Means You Would Be Evaporated By a Taepodong

I don't remember what was the trigger. All I know is that ever since I can remember, I've always yearned after "powers in the shadows."

Was it because of anime? Manga? Or movies? Actually, it doesn't really matter. As long as it was a power in the shadows, it didn't matter what it was, I loved it.

Not the hero. Nor the last boss. I'm talking about those existences that work their interference and flex their true strength only from the shadows.

I adored them, and wanted to be one of them.

What heroes were to everyone else was what powers in shadows were to me. That's all that was.

But unlike those children who adored heroes, mine was not a short-lived passion. It was something much deeper, something that burned from the depths of my heart, and it continuously propelled me forward.

Karate. Boxing. Kendo. Mixed martial arts. And more. To become strong, I threw myself into learning everything I would need, all while hiding my strength. For the sake of the day when I would get to reveal myself.

At school, I was mediocrity itself. Harmless to man and beast, one and all. Mob character A.

But on the flip side of my everyday life was grueling training.

That was my youth, and that was my school life.

But as time passed and I grew older, unease pressed upon me. It became time to face reality.

The reality that all my effort was meaningless.

No matter how many martial arts I master, I would still be far from the overwhelming power possessed by those powers hidden in shadows depicted in stories.

The most I could achieve would be the strength to beat up a few punks. If firearms came into the picture, things would get tough. And if I got surrounded by soldiers wearing full equipment, well then, that'd be game over.

Power in the shadows that gets beaten up by soldiers. How laughable.

Even if I spent several more decades in training, even if I became the world's strongest martial artist, if I got surrounded by soldiers, I'd still get beaten up. Mm, or maybe I would be able to handle it somehow. Perhaps, with enough training, humans might possess the potential to beat up soldiers even if originally surrounded.

However, even if I could beat down every single soldier, if a taepodong fell on my head, I'd get evaporated. That is the limit of being a human.

(T/N: 'Taepodong' is a North Korean ICBM.)

This alone I could say with utmost certainty. The power in shadows that I adored would not get evaporated by a mere taepodong. Which means that I, too, had to become a human who wouldn't be evaporated by a taepodong.

What is it that I needed such that a taepodong wouldn't be able to evaporate me?

Punching power?

A sturdy body?

Endless stamina?

Of course not.

I would need something different, an altogether different kind of strength.

Magic, mana, qi, aura, anything was fine. I would need to acquire a mystical power of some sort.

And that was the answer that I had arrived at, after facing reality.

If there was someone searching for real magic, I'm sure everyone would doubt that person's sanity.

So would I. Of course he's insane.

But, well, how is it really?

In this world, no one has yet been able to proof the existence of magic. But on the flip side, neither has anyone been able to disproof, with utter certainty, that magic does not exist.

Sanity would not grant me the strength that I sought. It for sure is something that lies beyond the realm of insanity.

From that point on, my training became much more difficult.

Magic. Mana. Qi. Aura. No one knew how to learn any of these.

I meditated Buddhist-style, I meditated under waterfalls, I meditated quietly, I fasted, I mastered yoga, I converted, I searched for spirits, I prayed, I even affixed myself to a cross.

There was no correct answer. My only option was to keep going down the path that I believed in, all alone in the darkness.

With the passage of time, I finally approached the last summer of my high school era.

I still had yet to find magic or mana or qi or aura...



After finishing the usual training, I realize that the sky has become completely dark.

I put on the underwear that I'd dropped next to me before threading my arms through my school uniform.

I still had yet to grasp a mystical power. However, I feel like I'm making some progress in my recent training.

Such as right now.

Having just finished a training session, there is a bright light flickering on and off inside my head, and my vision is wobbling unsteadily.

Either magic... or perhaps aura...

I am definitely feeling the effects of either one of those.

I can say that today's training was meaningful indeed.

By taking off all my clothes while in the forest, I was able to feel myself becoming one with nature. By continuously banging my head against a thick tree trunk, I was able to purge my mind of distracting thoughts AND stimulate my brain to encourage it to awaken to mystical powers.

It is a perfectly logical training menu.

Aah, my vision is blurring over.

It's almost as if I'm suffering from a cerebral concussion.

With floating steps – it's as if I'm almost floating through the air! – I come down from the forest.

Abruptly, I see a swaying light.

Two lights actually, swerving through midair.

How mysterious they are! They seem to be guiding me, inviting me.

“C-, could it be... magic?”

I approach with tottering steps.

It must be! It's magic!

Finally! I have finally found a mystical power!

Before I knew it, my steps have turned into a dash. There are tree roots in my way, but

even when I trip I continue rolling towards the lights, simply plunging forward like a wild animal.

“Magic! Magic! Magic! Magicmagicmagicmagicmagic!!!”

I jump out before the two lights, and grab...

“Ah...?”

The headlights dye my world pure white.

The sound of screeching brakes reverberate inside my head.

The shock penetrates my body, and I... my... magic.....



In conclusion, I did find magic.

When I woke up, my surroundings was filled with magic. It's a bit different from those two lights that I saw at the end, but hey, who cares about the insignificant details.

Oh right, and another insignificant detail is that I apparently reincarnated. Perhaps it was because I found magic that the gate of reincarnation opened for me. Or whatever. Again, who cares.

At the moment, I am a baby of several months. It was only recently that I came to be fully aware, and my sense of time is still a bit blurry, so I'm not sure of the exact details.

Above anything else, I don't understand the language. All I do know is that this world has a medieval European-like culture, which, well, I suppose is good enough.

Because what actually does matter is that I have finally gotten my hands on magic. That is the be all and end all. The process and other extra details are of no interest to me.

As soon as I'd come to, I had noticed the magic. The sight of those glittering particles floating around in the air is exactly like what I had felt while running through a field of flowers buck naked as part of my training in my previous life.

That training was by no means pointless. The proof of that is the fact that I'd

immediately been able to sense magic, and that now I've become as proficient with it as with my own hands and legs. This feeling is just like that time when I had affixed myself to a cross while buck naked... no, it is like when I had repeatedly converted religions and danced in prayer while buck naked... I'm sure every bit of my training is now bearing fruit.

I've already confirmed that physical strengthening is indeed possible.

Pouring all the free time that a baby is blessed with into training, this time for sure I will become a power in the shadows... ah, gonna poop.

Speaking of which, I'd learned somewhere that birds are incontinent, but so are human babies. No matter how much my reasoning tells me to resist, my instinct screams at me to let it out. However, with the physical strengthening that I had spent days and nights training up, I constrict my anal sphincter to buy time, during which...

"GYAaaaaaAAAA!"

...I call for help.

Chapter 2

Bandits Are Basically Just Walking Bonus Stages

I think about 10 years has gone by.

Magic is amazing. With it, I can easily make movements far beyond human limits.

Crushing rocks? Easy.

Running twice the speed of a horse? Totally.

Jumping higher than houses? You bet.

But I'm afraid a taepodong is still beyond me. Magic can up my physical resistance, but mighty are Earth's weapons.

The thought that "There is no taepodong in this world, so isn't it fine to drop this?" did cross my mind, but what worth is there in a power in the shadows who attained his position by compromising?

None, absolutely zero.

Thus, I continue to strive towards attaining a body that can win over a taepodong.

To that aim, I have poured my days into research and training. Recently, a certain possibility has surfaced in my mind, and I'm currently experimenting on it.

Oh and by the way, the family that I was born into is apparently a noble house. It's a lineage that has continuously spat out knights that fight while using magic to strengthen themselves – so-called magic swordsmen. And I was brought up as the family's heir with sky high expectations and respect... or not. Nah, they just treated me like any other apprentice swordsman.

Powers in shadows reveal their true strength only to people and in places of their choosing. Up till that moment...

Though I am holding back, the training for apprentice swordsmen is not completely useless to me. I am able to learn how this world fights with magic, and it is also a chance for me to review my own fighting style.

To be blunt, the fighting techniques that I had learned in my previous life are several folds more polished and rational.

This could be easily seen just by watching any modern martial arts match. Useless techniques and unnecessary movements have all been weeded out, and different schools have taken and adopted other schools' very best. That melting pot effect was indeed bringing all those schools towards the path of being perfected.

Of course, modern martial arts have boundaries called 'rules,' but that does not change the fact that their various techniques are being polished against each other and undergoing the process of selection.

But this world, in comparison. Firstly, there is absolutely no way that a technique crosses between countries. Neither would a technique cross schools. There are techniques that apparently only disciples can learn and are forbidden from leaving the school grounds. Even if a technique gets publicized, there is no media to spread it. In other words, there is no melting pot, no selection, no polishing. If I had to sum them up in a single word, it would be "crude."

But this world's fighting is indeed fundamentally different from that of my previous world. Exactly, because of magic.

Due to magic, basic physical stats of this world's people are on a totally different level.

For example, physical strength. People can lift someone else up with a single hand. Just because of that, all grappling techniques become obsolete. Even if I mount someone, they can jump into the sky just by flexing their abdominal muscles. Even if I put someone into the guard position, they can send me flying with just a single leg. So yea, grappling techniques, all out the window.

People fight the way that people fight, and goblins fight the way that goblins fight. That's all there is to that.

Furthermore, the speed and distance of step ins are different, so maai are considered differently. And actually, this is the most important one.

(T/N: 'Maai' refers to the space between two opponents in combat; formally, the "engagement distance". It is a complex concept, incorporating not just the distance between opponents, but also the time it will take to cross the distance, angle and rhythm of attack. It is specifically the exact position from which one opponent can strike the other, after factoring in the above elements. For example, a faster opponent's maai is farther away than a slower opponent. ~Wikipedia)

Martial arts are, in essence, a fight over maai. Distance, angle, positioning, these are all what the fights are all about.

It took me quite some time to determine my own maai in this world. I mean, this world's people's maai are so far away. They start fights standing 5m away from each other. Sure, their step in is long, and their speed is fast, so it's not like I don't understand. At first, I was impressed with it and thought "ohh so this is this world's fighting style"... but nah, turns out that it's only because their defense techniques are undeveloped.

We have this kind of people in our world too – people who suck at defense so they just meaninglessly distance themselves from their opponent as much as possible.

The opponent's attack is scary, isn't it? Being in a place where their attacks can't reach you is safer, isn't it? So that's why fights become just blandless repetitions of opponents dashing in to make an attack before dashing right back out. Hit and run, is it? Sorry, useless and simple back and forth movements don't count as hit and run.

To me, 5m and 100m is equally worthless. After all, proper attacks can't be launched from either distance. 6m, 7m, 10m, it's all the same. There's no point to it, so let's just walk closer together and close the distance, shall we?

But at a certain distance, there is enormous meaning between the difference of 1mm, which is maai. Whether my attacks will hit, whether my opponent can react in time, considering the angle and various other things, gaining or losing advantage by moving half a step sideways or tilting a certain degree. By no means is it just running 5m to make an attack before jumping backwards 6m.

All my preconceptions about another world and magic and all that confused me for quite a while, but recently I was finally able to determine my own maai, so all's good, I suppose.

So yea, that's pretty much how my daily training at home goes. There's only me, my older sister, and my dad – my dad teaches my older sister and me, and my older sister and I spar. My older sister of 2 years above seems to have quite the talent, and will most likely become the heir of the house. In this world where magic can be used, even girls can become crazy strong, so girls becoming the heads of their families is not that uncommon.

And because of that, I get beaten up by my sister pretty much every day. I mean, I can't win, right? After all, to become a power in the shadows, I have to act out my common life as an unremarkable Mob A.

Which is why I spend everyday going “fueee, onee-chan you're so strong~” while getting beaten up.



So, such is my daily life. During the daytime, I also have studies related to being a noble, as well as various other tasks that I need to carry out as Mob A, so I don't have much free time.

Therefore, my personal training naturally ends up having to be carried out at night, after everyone else has gone to sleep. Of course, that means decreasing my sleeping hours, but by combining the effects of meditation and magic's recovery powers, I was able to develop a unique sleeping style that is super short but super effective.

Well then, let's work hard at training today as well. For today, I have a bit of a special menu after the usual running in the forest.

As of late, it seems that some ruffians have taken to occupying a nearby abandoned village. Upon investigation, they turned out to be a bandit gang of quite some size. Yep, they make for perfect tameshikiri targets.

(T/N: A sort of urban legend is that there were swordsmen in the Edo period who would test out new swords by cutting up random pedestrians on the streets, and this act was called tameshikiri.)

I do kill random scattered brigands whenever I come across them, but something the level of a full-fledged bandit gang is like a once in a year event for me, so I'm quite excited. All year long I'm in lack of a proper sparring partner, so I love these kinds of

criminals. Aah, can the local public order go down please?

In the rural areas of this world, criminals can generally be killed without a trial. More like, only the large cities have judges, so those in the rural areas aren't too fussed up about this kind of thing. Which is why I will judge you all, kekeke.

Today is to commemorate a new weapon that I have recently been trying out – the slime bodysuit.

Allow me to explain what the slime bodysuit is.

This world has magic. This world's people fight by using that magic to strengthen themselves and their weapons. However, there is always some degree of loss when they use magic. For example, a normal iron sword would only have 10% efficiency – you pour in 100 points of magic, but the effect is only a boost of 10 points. Which means that 90% of the magic is lost in the process. Even for mithril, a metal lauded for its high conductivity, a sword capable of 50% efficiency would already be considered to be a high grade item. So in short, there is always a huge amount of loss.

Then I came to consider slimes. Slimes are, well, true to their appearances, magical beings. They change form and move around using only magic. When I studied them further, I realized that their magical conductivity is a mind-shattering 99%. Furthermore, as they are in liquid form, they can freely change form. So I hunted slimes, crushed their cores, and experimented on the leftover slime jelly. The number of slime cores that I have crushed are easily in the thousands. It was to the degree where the local area began suffering from a slime deficiency, forcing me to go on expeditions further afield.

The slime jelly was quite easy to process. After strengthening and compounding it, I was eventually able to make a full-body bodysuit out of it. Unlike armor, it does not make any sound, is comfortable, and actually even provides support to any movements I make. And of course, its defensive capabilities are also guaranteed.

At the moment, I'm wearing a completely black bodysuit made from slime jelly mixed with black pigments. There is no unnecessary adornments, the suit fits my body perfectly, and my vision and breathing is unobstructed. I pretty much look exactly like the villains in a certain detective manga.

Perhaps I should also think of a more appropriate design in preparation for the day

when I shall intervene as a power from the shadows.



So with that, I've arrived at the abandoned village. Despite the late hour, they've got torches lit up all over the place. Apparently, they've just successfully assaulted a merchant caravan, so now they're having a feast. Yep, my luck is pretty good. Bandits generally have zero planning skills, so they have a strong tendency to immediately use up whatever they get their hands on. It's only right after an assault that they actually have things worth anything.

What belongs to the bandits, belongs to me. This is how I'm saving up capital for becoming a power in the shadows in the future.

With max tension, I crash into the feast. I don't play the stealth route, because then that wouldn't count as practice.

"Hyaha~! Bring out all your money and valuables!!"

So I yelled standing smack dab in the middle of the camp.

"The fuck is with this little squirt?"

I'm 10 years old, so I guess the 'little squirt' comment is not entirely undue.

"Oraa, I said to bring out all your money!"

After I kick away the rude guy who called me a squirt, the other bandits finally take up their weapons.

"Oi, if you look down on us too much don't think we'll go easy on you just 'cus you're a...!"

"Oraa!"

That guy's lines were just too cliché that I couldn't help but to cut off his head first. Naturally, my weapon is made of slime material; it's an exceptional weapon that I can take out only when needed. Furthermore, this slime sword still has several more handy functions.

Handy Function 1: it stretches.

“Ora ora ora ora oraaaAAA!”

I stretch the slime sword and swing it in a horizontal arc to take out all the nearby bandits.

The elasticity of mochi paired with the sharpness of an actual sword. It’s the first time I’m using it in real combat so I had been slightly apprehensive, but turns out it performs quite well.

“ORA ORA ORA ORAAA... hmm?”

After getting caught up in the moment and cutting every which way indiscriminately, I suddenly realize that the surroundings has become really quiet. Eh, there’s only one guy left?

“Y-, you, who the hell are you...?”

“Sigh, no other choice. I’ll test Handy Function 2 on you then.”

“Wha-, what are you saying...!?”

“It seems that you’re a bit stronger than all those other guys, so you’re probably the boss or something, yea? Unfortunately, there is zero possibility for you to win against me, but if you agree to be my practice partner than you can probably live for 2 more minutes. Try your best, alright?”

“Fuck you, making light of me! I’ll have you know, I’m...!”

“Unnecessary comments are unnecessary, seriously.”

“FUCK YOU!!!!!!”

Boss A charges at me in rage. In the face of that dull slash, I... choose not to evade.

So Boss A’s sword smashes into my chest, the shock causing me to roll onto the ground.

“Haha, this is what happens when you make light of me! I have completely mastered Royal Capital Bushin Style... wha-, WHAT?!”

“Hmm, not even a scratch.”

I stand back up as if nothing had happened.

I am completely satisfied with the suit’s defense capabilities. Seems like it can completely negate at least something on the level of Boss A’s attacks.

“Ooo, Royal Capital Bushin Style? Isn’t it the school that has been pretty popular in the royal capital of late? Hey, show me more!”

“Shit, you asked for it!”

Boss A attacks.

Er, um, yea, easy. He’s giving his very best in trying to cut me, but I don’t even have to hold up my sword. Just with positioning and stepping alone, handling him is easy-peasy.

But this Bushin Style? I think I quite like it.

Uncommonly so for this world, I can see that this style is not one bound by idealism or trite traditions, but takes direct and rational ways to close in to the opponent. I can recognize that even from Boss A’s crappy swings. Instantaneous acceleration, pressing forward by half steps, and the variety of other methods to press towards the opponent resonates with me.

But, well, Boss A is really just too crappy at it.

The moment when Boss A’s attacks let up, I easily step out of his maai.

“My, my sword... why didn’t you get cut!”

“I mean, you’re weaker than my dad. You’re probably stronger than my older sister at the moment, but she’ll probably overtake you in one more year or so I think?”

“YOU GODDAMN BRAT!!!!”

After parrying Boss A’s reckless swings, I lightly kick his shin. Light, but snappy, it was a kick from below the knee.

At which...

“Gu, aa, why...?”

Boss A crumples into a kneel, pressing down on his shin. Red blood gurgles through his fingers and makes a stain on the ground.

What happened was simple; there is an ice pick-like sword extending from my toes. Slime bodysuit Handy Function 2: able to to extend a sword whenever and wherever I want.

The way I thought to use this function is to kick the opponent’s leg with a sword extending from my toes. It is really hard to defend against an attack aimed at the legs. Block the opponent’s sword with my own, seal their movements, then kick their leg. Bland, but effective.

“Guess there’s no point keeping up with this any longer.”

“W-, wait!”

“You didn’t even last the full 2 minutes, man.”

I kick upwards with the sword from my toes, skewering Boss A’s head from under his chin. Death by impalement.

Kicking away Boss A’s convulsing body, I search the camp for loot.

“I don’t know a fence who can handle these works of art... eh, foodstuffs I don’t need either... come on, where are you, cash and jewels and precious metals~”

There were several carts of loot. And also several corpses of merchants.

“I’ve already helped you guys take revenge, and your goods will be used for a good cause, so rest in peace, alright?”

I gathered the passable quality of loot and offered a moment of silence. If I convert all this to cash, I guess it’ll be about 5 million Zeny. Oh, 1 Zeny is about the same value as 1 yen. All of this will become the funding for my activities as a power in the shadows.

If only the entire world could have worse public order such that it would overflow

with bandits. Maybe to the level in games, where you can encounter one just by walking several steps on the road.

“Work harder in your next life and become the bandit king, alright?”

So I say to the silent Boss A... before noticing something further beyond.

“Cage...?”

It’s a pretty big and sturdy-looking one too.

“Slave? I can’t fence that, so pass~”

But maybe, just maybe, there’s something good in there. So just in case, I remove the tarp covering the cage.

“This... I did not expect.”

Inside is, um, how to say... a rotten lump of flesh? I can just barely make out the humanoid shape, but can’t discern the gender nor age nor anything else.

But well, it’s still living. Maybe it still even has consciousness. When I peered into the cage, I noticed the lump of meat twitching.

I’ve heard of this before. It’s called demon possession, and the Church executes these monsters. They were originally born as normal humans, but one day their body suddenly begins to rot away. They would eventually die if left alone, but the Church proactively buys them and executes them in the name of purification. This purification of demons is pretty much just genocide of patients, but the Church gains acclamation from the populace for “protecting” the common populace from the “demons.” What can I say, it’s medieval Europe indeed.

If I sell this lump of meat to the Church, it’ll fetch a price higher than the combined worth of everything I looted today. But again, I can’t actually go sell it, so there’s no meaning to it.

Guess I’ll at least just put it to rest.

I slide the slime sword in between the bars of the cage... but then suddenly realize something.

There is an enormous amount of magic inside this lump of meat. Even though I've been training my magic ever since I was a baby, the amount I have still pales in comparison. What a monstrous amount of magic. And furthermore...

“This wave... is it magic deviation...?”

Is it possibly the case that the reason why this lump of meat became like this is due to magic deviation? Previously, I had also suffered from magic deviation. If I hadn't successfully brought my magic back under control that time, would I have also become like this?

Magic has an undeniable effect on the physical body. A certain day, I thought of a certain possibility. Would it be possible that through magic deviation, I can train my body to become further accustomed to magic, such that it can become easier for me to control magic? But purposely causing magic deviation is too dangerous, so in the end I had shelved the idea.

But if this lump of meat is truly the product of magic deviation, and if I can perform my experiments on this lump of meat... then I can get even closer to the strength of a power in the shadows with zero risk to myself.

“This meat, can be of use...”

I reach out to the lump of meat, and begin to pour magic into it.

Chapter 3

Sudden Emergence of the Order of Diabolos?!

It's been almost a month, I guess.

While thinking of the day I got my hands on that lump of meat, I sigh deeply while standing in that same abandoned village.

How did things become like this.

The experimentation on the lump of meat went well until around halfway through. Since it was not my own body, I had no qualms about pouring in tons and tons of magic. Not this, not that, maybe this way, maybe that way, oh I just had tons of fun with the experiments day after day. Damn it was fun. I got closer to the essence of magic, and felt my own strength growing at a visible rate. Everything was good.

I improved on my magic control, making it denser, finer, and stronger, until the moment came that I was able to completely suppress the magic deviation... then suddenly I found a young blond elf girl in front of my eyes.

I was too absorbed in controlling my magic that I didn't notice the lump of meat turning into a blond elf until that moment. It's pretty amazing, being able to return from being that lump of meat. So I pretty much decided to send her off like "You're free now, so return to your home!" or "May you be happy in the future!" But then she was like "I can no longer go home" and like "I must return this debt of gratitude." I mean, seriously, I wasn't helping you, you're just a coincidental outcome, alright?

It seemed like a pain, and I considered just running away, but in the end I agreed to have her become my very first subordinate as a power in the shadows. Doesn't seem like she'll betray me, and she seems pretty smart, and kind of possesses an unnecessarily capable aura. Even though her age is 10 just like me, but apparently the rumor that elves mature mentally much faster wasn't a lie.

"Which is why, from today onwards, your name will be Alpha."

α, Alpha, either way is fine.



“I understand.”

She nodded. Blond hair, blue eyes, white skin, outstanding beauty, she’s very much the stereotypical elf.

“And as for your duties...”

I stop talking and take a moment to think. This part is important.

Her job is to support me as a power in the shadows, that’s for sure. But then I’d have to clarify exactly what a power in the shadows means, and what my actual aim is. In other words, I have to tell her the fundamentals of my role in this world as a power in the shadows.

The setting of any plot is important. If the reason for fighting is “because I got pissed after losing at pachinko” then that’ll just be dumb.

In that area, I am thoroughly prepared. Before coming to this world, and certainly after coming to this world, I’ve continuously dreamt of my best idea of being a power in the shadows.

Combining together the several thousands, several tens of thousands of patterns that I had thought up previously, I instantaneously arrived at the optimum scenario.

“From the shadows, we shall interfere with, and stop, the resurrection of the demon Diabolos.”

“The demon Diabolos...?”

Alpha tilts her head in puzzlement.

“I’m sure you already know that in distant history, the demon Diabolos had almost completely destroyed the entire world. However, three heroes – one an elf, one a beast person, and one a human – stood up and defeated Diabolos, thus saving the world.”

“I’ve also heard that before, but isn’t that just a fairytale?”

“No, it actually happened. Though the truth was much more complicated than the fairytale...”

So saying, I smile wryly.

For someone of my capabilities, combining this world's various legends into a believable struggle in the shadows scenario is a piece of cake.

“Right before he died, Diabolos casted a curse on the three heroes. That is called the Curse of Diabolos.”

“The Curse of Diabolos? I’ve never heard of such a thing...”

“No, the Curse of Diabolos truly exists. But it is commonly known by another name – ‘demon possession.’ Indeed, it is exactly what you had been suffering from.”

“How could that be...”

Alpha’s eyes open wide in shock.

“The descendents of the heroes who defeated Diabolos will forever suffer from that curse. However, long ago, that Curse of Diabolos was treatable. Just as you were.”

The fact that Alpha’s skin is now white and unblemished – as if she had never been afflicted with demon possession – is the greatest proof of what I’m saying.

It’s all a big, fat lie though.

“Demon possession is the proof of being a descendent of one of the heroes. As the children of those who had saved the world, they were valued, protected, thanked, and extolled. All in past tense though.”

“But now we are not thanked. Rather, we are...”

Alpha’s face scrunches up, unable to continue her sentence.

“Someone had distorted history. Hiding the fact of it being the symbol of the heroes, hiding the method to treat the curse, and furthermore even renaming it as ‘demon possession’ and turning it into a target of scorn.”

“WHO?! Who would do something like that?”

“They are those who are plotting the resurrection of the demon Diabolos. Those

suffering from the Curse of Diabolos are, without exception, those with high magic capabilities due to having heavily inherited the blood of the heroes. In other words, they are our precious military strength, and thus obstacles to Diabolos.”

“Which is why they call it demon possession and execute them? They’re the lowest of the low!”

“Having been branded with the fabricated sin of demon possession, having been chased from your home and family, do you feel hatred?”

“I. Hate. Them. How can I not?”

“The Order of Diabolos. That is our enemy. They would never stand in the public stage. As such, we too must lurk in the shadows. We will lurk in the shadows, and we will hunt the shadows.”

“To possess that much influence even without appearing in the public stage... In other words, it means this Order must have many members in very powerful positions, and that there are many people being manipulated by them without even knowing of their existence.”

I nod gravely.

“It will be a path filled with thorns and thistles. However, this is something that must be done. Will you lend me your strength?”

“If it is your wish, I am resolved to even offer my life. On top of which, this is my own wish as well. We shall succeed without fail.”

Alpha fixes her blue eyes on me and laughs with fearlessly. Her young and beautiful eyes are filled with resolve and determination.

I mentally do a guts pose.

Damn yea, this elf is hella gullible!

Naturally, the Order of Diabolos does not exist, so no matter how hard she searches, there’s no way she’d find anything. Every once in a while, we’ll go take out some random bandit gang on suspicion of being a member of the Order. Or we’ll jump in and interrupt a fight between some some protagonist-like people and say things like “The

destruction of this world is nigh!" or "The resurrection of the demon is nigh!" before making a flashy exit. Or we can flashily show up on a battlefield and say "Oh ye foolish sheep who know not that you are being manipulated..." before taking everyone out. Ohhh, all the things that we can do! The sky's the limit!

Oh right, as for the all-important name of our organization...

"We shall be known as Shadow Garden... We who lurk in the shadows and hunt the shadows..."

"Shadow Garden. What a wonderful name."

Today, at this moment, Shadow Garden came to be. And at the same time, the enemy of this world, the Order of Diabolos was also born. I have taken one more step towards becoming a power in the shadows.

"Well, for now, let's just improve our magic control and swordsmanship. The bulk of the fighting I will take on, but I will assign you to deal with the small fries so you'll also have to become at least strong enough to handle that much."

"I understand. The enemy is powerful, so we have to raise our own strength."

"Yep, yep, exactly."

"And we must also search out the other descendants of the heroes and safeguard them."

"Um, yea, that too. In moderation."

Playing as a power in the shadows with more people would indeed give it more of an organization feel, but we don't really need too many. To be honest, personally speaking I'm fine if it's just the two of us.

"Well, for the near future let's focus on getting stronger first."

So saying, I bring up my wooden sword and parry Alpha's attack. She has made enormous progress after only a month of training.

Her sense is great, and she has more than enough magic. Seems she'll be of quite some use.

So I thought as I continued swinging my wooden sword underneath the moonlight.

Chapter 4

If Only He Had Hair...

It has been about 3 years since the establishment of Shadow Garden. Alpha and I have both become 13 years old, and my older sister Claire is now 15. There is no particular meaning associated with the age 13, but that is not the case with the age 15. When the children of nobles reach 15, they have to attend a school in the royal capital for 3 years. Nee-san is pretty much the rising hope of the Kagenou baron family, so my mom is all pumped up with setting up the farewell party and all that. Yep, rising hope indeed.

(T/N: 'Nee-san' is what the MC calls his older sister.)

All that's fine and all. Really. But problem is, when it came day for her to actually set off for the capital, she up and disappeared. Thus the enormous tumult at the Kagenou house at the moment.

"When I came into the room, it was already like this."

So says my father in a dandy voice. His face isn't too bad either.

"There is no sign of a struggle, but the window was indeed forced open from the outside. The fact that neither I nor Claire was alerted means the kidnapper very skilled indeed."

My dandy dad places one hand on the windowsill and looks off into the distance. All that's missing from this picture is a whiskey glass in his hand.

And hair...

"So?"

A chilling voice is directed at him.

"Very skilled, so there's no helping it? Is that what you're trying to say?"

It's mom.

“No, no of course not. I was merely stating the facts...”

So answers my dad as cold sweat rolls down his face.

“You STUPID BALDYYYYYYYY!!!!!!”

“Hiii, I’m sorry, I’m very sorry!!!”

By the way, I’m air. Nothing is expected of me, and neither do I cause any trouble. That’s the position in this family that I’m striving to maintain.

But well, Nee-san was a pretty good person, so it’s a bit of a pity. The crime happened at night when I was at the abandoned village, so there was nothing that I could have done either.

I quietly listen to my parents’ bickering and, at the first chance I get, return to my own room. I place my palms together in the direction that Nee-san had disappeared, then dive into my bed.

Then.

“You may come out now.”

“Yes, my lord.”

Immediately, my curtains sway slightly, and a young girl wearing a black slime bodysuit steps out.

“Beta, huh.”

“Yes, my lord.”

Same as Alpha, she is also a young elf girl. But where Alpha has blond hair, Beta’s is silver.

She of the cat-like green eyes and a mole under her eye was the third person to join Shadow Garden. Even though I told Alpha “in moderation,” but Alpha brings them in like stray cats or something so their numbers keep growing.

“Where’s about Alpha?”

“Searching for traces of Claire-sama.”

“Fast reaction. You think Nee-san is still alive?”

“Likely so.”

“Can she be saved?”

“Possible, yes... but might require Shadow-sama’s help.”

Ah by the way, they’re calling me ‘Shadow.’ Cus I’m the master of Shadow Garden, fufufu.

“Is that what Alpha said?”

“Yes, my lord. She said that since they have a hostage, it would be best to bring our full force.”

“Heeh~”

To be frank, Alpha has gotten quite strong. The fact that even Alpha is asking for help must mean that someone of very significant power is involved.

“My blood boils...”

I clench my fist while instantaneously releasing magic to create a small explosion.

There’s no particular meaning to it, but I like this kind of theatrics.

I can hear Beta murmuring “As expected...” with surprise.

As of late, I haven’t been in lack of a sparring partner, what with Alpha and Beta and Delta and the crew, but something fresh is good every once in a while. Above all else, I want to play at being a power in the shadows, so this seems like a good opportunity.

“It’s been a while since I last got serious...”

Just like so, I’ve also gotten used to exuding the aura of a power hidden in the shadows.

Also, lately Alpha and Beta have taken to fleshing out our setting even further, so it’s

been a blast.

“The criminal is, as expected, part of the Order of Diabolos. Even more, he is one of their upper echelons.”

“One of their echelons, huh. So why did they kidnap Nee-san?”

“They suspect her of being a Descendent of the Heroes.”

“Hmph, those sharp-eyed bastards...”

So yea, like that.

Furthermore, they’ve also been ‘gathering research’ and saying things like “As expected, your words were entirely correct...” and “About a thousand years ago, Diabolos’ descendents...” and “From this stone monument we can glean clues that point to the existence of the Order of Diabolos...” and other similar such. I mean, I can’t read ancient letters so how would I know? I bet Alpha can’t really read them either, so she just lays out all these ancient-looking materials and whatnot of a similar general feeling in front of me, so that we can feel like we’re making some headway in investigating the Order. I’m sure that must be it.

“Please take a look at these documents. These are the hideouts that we think Claire-sama might be held in, based on our latest intel.”

After saying that, Beta plonks a huge pile of paper on my table. Ok seriously, I have no idea what to do with all this. More than half of it is in an ancient language and the rest is filled with indecipherable mathematical equations or something. Damn, you guys have gotten good at making up this kind of stuff. I’ll admit, you all have gotten even more pro at it than me.

While ignoring Beta’s ‘explanations,’ I take out a throwing knife and throw it at the map on the wall.

Thunk.

With a dull sound, the knife pierces a certain point.

“There.”

“That place? What is there?”

“That’s where Nee-san is.”

“But that place, there’s noth-... no, wait, could it be...!”

Beta hurriedly rummages through the materials as if she’d just realized something.

Um, yeeaa, I just randomly threw that knife, alright?

But wow your acting is good, Beta. I can see where this is going – you’re going to tell me that there is a secret hideout at that location, aren’t you?

“In conclusion, after comparing various sources, it seems that there is indeed a high possibility that there is a secret hideout at the location that Shadow-sama just pointed out.”

Called it.

“But still, to read through this enormous amount of materials in a split second and even deduce the location of a hidden hideout... as expected of Shadow-sama.”

“You still lack training, Beta.”

“I shall double my diligence.”

Seriously, she’s good. Even though I know it’s acting, but I can still feel the emotions that she’s conveying. You’ve got all the important points down pat, Beta.

“I shall inform Alpha-sama at once. Will we move tonight?”

“Mm.”

Beta bows, then takes her leave. Her eyes are glittering and all, such that I can totally feel the respect and whatnot. Cheers to her Academy-level acting.

Chapter 5

Real Member of the Order, and Real Person of the Curse

A man was walking alone through a dark underground tunnel.

Age in the mid-thirties. A well-trained body and sharp eyes. Swept back grey hair.

His footsteps stopped as he reached the end of the tunnel. In front of him was a door protected by 2 soldiers.

“Is the Kagenou girl inside?”

“Yes, Olba-sama.”

The soldier that he addressed saluted, then unlocked the door.

“Sir, please mind yourself in there. Though restrained, she is extremely aggressive.”

“Hmph, who do you think I am?”

“!! I’m very sorry, sir!”

Olba opened the door then walked in.

The room beyond was an underground stone-walled jail. A single girl was affixed to the wall with with magic-sealing chains.

“You must be Claire Kagenou.”

At Olba’s voice, the girl called Claire raised her head.

She was a very beautiful girl. As she had been kidnapped while sleeping, she was still wearing a thin negligee that could not hide her full breasts nor her luscious thighs. With her silk-like black hair cut in a straight line behind her back, the girl glared up at Olba with with strong-willed eyes.

“I’ve seen your face at the royal capital before. If I remember correctly, you are Viscount Olba, are you not?”

“*Hou*, you were with the Imperial Guards previously... Ah, no, it was at the tournament during the Festival of the God of War?”

“Festival of the God of War, heh. Oh yes, that time when Princess Iris cut you up every which way.”

Claire laughed in merriment.

“Hmph, it was within the limits of a match, and thus didn’t mean anything. In a real fight, there’s no way I’d lose to her.”

“Nothing would be different in a real fight, oh Viscount Olba who lost in the first round in the tournament.”

“Fool. You don’t even know how much of an honor it is to simply just stand on the stage of that tournament, you ignorant girl.”

Olba glared back at Claire.

“I will be able to stand on that stage just 1 year later.”

“Too bad for you, you don’t have a year left.”

The chains restricting Claire clinked.

Immediately afterwards, her teeth snapped just barely short of Olba’s neck.

If Olba hadn’t tilted his head that little bit, then his carotid artery might have been torn out right there and then.

“The one who can’t live for one more year – will that truly be me? Or will it be... you? Do you want to bet on it?”

“No need for the bet, Claire Kagenou.”

Olba’s fist slammed into the chin beneath Claire’s dauntless smile.

She crashed onto the stone ground, but her strong eyes never left Olba.

Olba lowered his fist, having felt less resistance on his fist than expected.

“You jumped backwards.”

Claire smiled dauntlessly.

“Was there a fly in the room?”

“Hmph, seems you’re not just led around the nose by your large magic capacity.”

“I was taught that magic is not about amount, but control.”

“What a good father you have.”

“I’ve never learned a thing from that baldy. It was my little brother.”

“Brother...?”

“My impertinent little brother. Every time we fight, I’d win. But I’m always learning from my little brother’s sword. But he never learns anything from my sword. That’s why I pick on him everyday.”

So said Claire in an impish tone.

“What a pitiful younger brother. That would make me an ally of justice who saved him from his tyrannical older sister. Anyways, that’s enough pointless banter.”

Olba cleared his throat and fixed his gaze on Claire.

“Claire Kagenou. As of late, have you felt anything strange with your body? For example, your control over your magic slipping, or your health being unstable, or a sharp pain whenever you try to use magic, or black rot appearing on parts of your body? Do any of those symptoms bring anything to mind?”

“After going to all the trouble of kidnapping me, what you wanted to do was to play doctor?”

The edge of Claire’s glossy lips raised into a sneer.

“I, too, previously had a daughter. I do not wish to employ more violent means. Answering my questions honestly would lead to the best outcome for us both.”

“Ooo, is that a threat? Unfortunately, I have a personality that makes me want to rebel when threatened. Even if my head understands that it would not be logical to do.”

“So you mean to say that you have no intention to cooperate?”

“I wonder~”

Olba and Claire glared at each other.

The one who broke the silence first was Caire.

“Very well. It’s nothing big anyways, so I’ll tell you. You mentioned instability with my body and magic, right? Now I’m perfectly fine, aside from these chains.”

“‘Now’?”

“Yes, ‘now.’ It was about a year ago when I had those symptoms that you listed.”

“You mean to say that you no longer have them? They went away by themselves?”

To Olba’s knowledge, there’s never been a case of ‘that’ being healed.

“Hmm, I didn’t really do anything spe-... oh right, my little brother had me do something he called ‘stretches’? I don’t really know the details, but he asked me to practice it, and before I knew it my body returned to being in top condition.”

“‘Stretches’? Never heard of it... But the fact that you had the symptoms before means that there’s no mistake, you are indeed compatible.”

“Compatible? With what?”

“There’s no need for you to know. You’ll be broken before long anyways. Ahh, I’ll need to investigate your brother too then...”

Something suddenly smashed into Olba’s nose, cutting off his words.

“Guh?”

Olba retreated to the door, glaring at Claire while suppressing his nosebleed.

“Claire Kagenou, you bitch...!”

All four of her limbs were supposedly restricted, but for some reason her left arm is currently hanging free, with blood dripping down from it.

“You scraped off your own flesh and dislocated your finger...?!”

The chains binding her were not normal chains, but magic-sealing chains. In other words, Claire had used pure brute strength to chafe off her own skin, crush her finger bones, and thus free her arm from the chain. That’s how she was able to hit Olba.

Olba was greatly shocked at that truth.

“If something happens to him, I will never forgive you! I will kill you, your loved ones, your family, your friends, and everyone else that means anything to you...!?”

Olba’s full power punch landed on Claire’s stomach. Bound in place by the magic-sealing chains, Claire had no way to evade Olba’s magic-strengthened blow.

“You brat!”

Olba spat on Claire’s crumpled body.

The blood that flowed from Claire’s left hand was pooling together into a dark red stain on the ground.

“No matter. You should now understand...”

So muttering, Olba reached towards that blood. But right at that moment, a soldier breathlessly rushed into the room.

“Olba-sama, it’s terrible! We have intruders!”

“Intruders?! How many?!”

“Unknown! They seem to be few in numbers, but we are being completely run over!”

“*Kuh*, very well, I’ll go out myself! You lot fall back and set up a defensive formation!”

After clicking his tongue once, Olba turned around.

Chapter 6

Your Drug Test Result is 'Positive'

By the time Olba reached the front lines, the entire area was already thoroughly dyed with blood. The soldiers protecting this high value facility were by no means weak. Among them were even those with enough strength to join the Imperial Guards.

But this...

“How did this happen?!”

In the hall of this underground facility, at the only point where light could shine in from the outside, there is an entire mountain of corpses.

All of them bore only a single sword wound.

Completely dominated by an overwhelming difference in strength.

“It was you bastards...!”

The target of Olba's glare is a group of individuals wearing black bodysuits. Judging from the bulges on their bodies, all of them are young girls of small stature.

They number 7 in total. But in this location currently illuminated only by moonlight, their presence is so thin that Olba would lose sight of them if he let his attention wander for even a moment. The girls, through their uncommonly high proficiency with magic, are controlling their own presence.

They possess power enough to match that of his own. Olba has no choice but to acknowledge this fact.

Among them, a young girl drenched head to toe with blood looks Olba up and down under the light of the moon.

“...!”

That moment, alarm bells go off inside Olba's head. There is no particular reason, it is all instinct. Every fiber of his being is screaming at him that she is dangerous.

While the blood of her bodysuit drips onto the ground, drip drop, drip drop, she also begins to slowly approach him.

All while slovenly dragging her blood-soaked sword over the ground, leaving a trail of blood behind.

"Who are you people? What is your aim?!"

So asks Olba while suppressing his fear.

Every single one of them has enough strength to rival his own, but there are seven of them. How out of luck is he?

To do battle would be sheer folly.

Even while lamenting his own unluckiness, Olba continues to search for a way out of this situation.

But the blood-stained girl does not seem to have heard Olba's question.

She only laughs.

Underneath her blood-stained mask, the blood-stained girl only laughs.

I'm going to be killed!

Or so thought Olba, when...

"Fall back, Delta."

The blood-stained girl stops moving.

Then she turns back as if nothing had happened. Olba watches her go with a sigh of relief.

In exchange, a different girl steps forward.

“We are Shadow Garden.”

It is a voice so beautiful that if the situation wasn't was it is, he might have fallen in love with it.

“And I am Alpha.”

And suddenly, he realizes that she had taken off her mask.

Under the moonlight, her skin shines a dazzling white.

The girl takes one step forward.

“...!”

A blond elf.

Beauty enough to steal his breath away.

Then she takes another step forward.

“Our aim... is the destruction of the Order of Diabolos.”

She swings the black blade that had appeared in her hand out of nowhere through the air.

The night was sliced through.

Or so the black blade caused Olba to hallucinate.

The air pressure, the sword pressure, every single part of it intimidated and terrorized Olba.

How on earth did she manage to gain such strength at such a young age?! Olba finds himself shuddering with both jealousy and fear.

But what he finds more shocking than her strength are the words that had come out of her mouth.

“You bastards... where did you hear that name from?!”

The Order of Diabolos. In this facility, there is only a small handful of people who know of this name.

“We know about it all. The demon Diabolos, the Curse of Diabolos, the Descendants of the Heroes, as well as... the truth of demon possession.”

“How, what, that...”

Among what Alpha just said were things that even Olba learned of only recently. Those secrets are protected so carefully that there is no way they had leaked outside.

“Did you think that you people were the only ones chasing the Cursed of Diabolos?”

“*Kuh...!*”

This information leak can never be forgiven.

But to kill these girls to plug the leak?

He does not possess the strength to do so.

In that case, what Olba must do is... to survive. He must survive and warn Headquarters of these girls' existence.

Therefore, Olba charges forward.

“AAAHHHHHHH!!!!”

Olba draws his sword with vigor, and slashes at Alpha.

“*Ara*, how reckless.”

Alpha easily parries his sword.

Her counter slashes Olba's cheek, causing blood to fly through the air.

But Olba does not stop.

Again and again, without regard for how many times his swings miss, Olba continues brandishing his sword, searching for an opportunity to escape.

But she dodges every stroke by a paper's length. Exerting only the minimum amount of movement, she has already fully seen through his swordsmanship and dodges everything perfectly.

In converse, it is Olba who is getting cut. Cuts on his arms. Cuts on his legs. Cuts on his shoulders.

But none of the cuts are fatal.

Determining that her intention is to subdue himself for interrogation's sake instead of to kill, Olba laughs.

He has finally found the path to victory.

After the nth time that his sword slices through empty air, Olba suffers a cut to his chest, and totters back in retreat.

"Seems that continuing this any longer would be a mere waste of time."

Olba does not answer.

Kneeling down while pressing down on his chest wound, Olba smiles... then drinks something.

"What are you d-... what?!"

Abruptly, Olba's body doubles in size. His skin turns jet black, his muscles expand, and his eyes turn red.

And above all else, the amount of magic in his body increases explosively.

"...!"

Without any notice, Olba's blade flashes in a mowing attack. Alpha manages to block in time, but the shock causes her to grimace.

As a snap judgement, she decides to take some distance by riding the shock and jumping backwards.

"What an interesting trick."

Flapping her slightly numbed hands, Alpha tilts her head.

“That wavelength is magic deviation, is it not? Hmm, and you are trying to suppress it with brute strength?”

“Alpha-sama, will you be alright?”

So asks another girl at the back, seeing Alpha retreat for the first time in this fight.

“Not a problem, Beta. It’s merely gotten a bit annoying... hmm?”

When Alpha returns her attention towards Olba, he is no longer there.

Instead, there is now a square hole in the spot that he had been standing, with a staircase extending downwards. Hidden door.

“...He ran away.”

“He got away... shall we give chase?”

But Alpha stops the girl who was preparing to jump into the hole.

“No need. At the other end... ‘he’ is there.”

“He’... Speaking of which, earlier Shadow-sama did say that he’d go ahead and split up from us. Could it be...?”

“Indeed. He went off towards an undetermined direction, so I’d originally thought that he had gotten lost, but...”

Alpha laughs gently.

“To think that he had predicted even this outcome... he never ceases to amaze.”

The eyes of the girls peering into the hole are all glittering with respect.

Chapter 7

A Simple Fighting Lesson, Power in Shadows Style (With Only This Much, You Are Also a Power in the Shadows?!)

“I’m lost.”

So I mutter to myself in an underground facility with nary a soul in sight.

It was fine when we all came together and crashed this hideout. But then I got bored fighting with the small fries, so I thought to go on ahead and find the boss first. But then this is the result. Sighs, and I had even practiced my lines for when I meet the boss.

But still, this facility sure is huge. Guess this time it’s bandits who had occupied an abandoned military facility?

“*Nn?*”

At that moment.

I feel the presence of someone approaching from the other side of the underground passage.

After a short while, the other side also notices me. They stop a certain distance away from me.

“To think that I was forestalled...”

It’s a guy with bulging muscles. And for some reason, his eyes are glowing red. What on earth is that, it’s so cool! Can he shoot beams out of his eyes?

“But it is only a single person. This will be easy.”

The red-eyed guy makes a twisted smile, then disappears. Or so it would probably seem to a normal person, but he’s just moving quickly.

But, well.

I stop Red Eye's sword with a single hand.

Since I know the direction that he'll be coming from, that speed is not really that much of a threat. Plus, power is all about how it's used.

"Wha-!"

Lightly pushing the shoulder of the surprised Red Eye, I take my distance.

He has even more magic than Alpha. But unfortunately, he doesn't know how to control it at all. He's just a moron with a lot of magic.

Incidentally, I am really not fond of the brutish fighting style that simply relies on doping up on magic to raise one's strength and speed. Of course, I am not making light of the importance of physical specs. If I was really forced to choose between power or technique, then I would choose power without hesitation. There is no worth in techniques if there is no power. But the imperfect and warped way of fighting by solely relying on physical specs like simple strength, simple speed, and simple reaction time that completely disregards and gives up on the details – that kind of fighting style is something that I really hate.

Physical specs is genetics, but techniques are effort. That's why I, and the power in the shadows that I am aiming to be, would never lose in the area of technique. I apply techniques to my strength, apply schemes to my use of speed, and search for possibilities with my reaction time. Physical specs are important, sure, but I would never stupidly fight while relying solely on it. You could say that that is my esthetics in regards to battle.

Which is why I am slightly ticked off by this magic-doped retard.

So I'll give him a bit of a lesson.

On the proper way to use magic.

"Lesson 1."

I raise my slime sword, and walk towards him.

One step. Two steps. Then the third step.

The moment I took my third step, Red Eye swings his sword. That is his maai.

At that moment, I accelerate.

I only used a tiny bit of magic – I concentrated only on my foot, compressed the magic, then released it all at once.

That was it.

With only that much, the explosion of the compressed magic propels me forward with great vigor.

Red Eye's sword swings through mere air.

But I've already entered my maai.

I no longer need speed. Don't need strength either. Don't even need magic anymore.

I caress Red Eye's neck with my jet black blade.

Just a tiny slice of skin on his neck.

After leaving a red line on Red Eye's neck, I leave my maai.

At the same time, Red Eye's sword barely grazes my cheek.

“Lesson 2.”

I dash forward again in conjunction with Red Eye drawing back his blade.

This time, I don't use any magic.

Which is why Red Eye is much faster.

But regardless of how high his speed, he cannot attack at the same time.

Which is why he gets closed in on.

It is only a mere half step.

An almost insignificant distance. A distance that is far for me, close for him.

A moment of silence.

Red Eye is conflicted.

I can see it.

In the end, Red Eye chooses to draw back.

I knew it.

I'd already read from the movement of his magic that that would be his choice.

Which is why, even though Red Eye is faster, it is me who moves first.

I close the distance faster than he retreats, and the tip of my blade caresses his leg.

A bit deeper than last time.

"Kuh...!"

Red Eye lets out a grunt of pain, then retreats even more further.

I choose not to chase him.

"Lesson 3."

This tutorial session has only just begun.



Has he ever felt such a disparity in strength? So thinks Olba while his body is cut again and again by that jet black sword.

Even when he was fighting with that elf who called herself Alpha, even when he fought and lost to that princess at the Festival of the War of God, he did not feel such a huge disparity.

If he really had to draw a comparison... it would be from his childhood, when he had barely begun taking up the sword and was facing off against his master. Child versus master. Beginner versus expert. The word 'fight' is not even applicable.

What he is currently feeling is exactly the same as from back then.

His opponent is a young boy who by no means looks strong. At the very least, Olba doesn't feel the sense of pressure from when he fought Alpha. If he really had to sum it up into a single word, it would be 'natural.' His stance, his magic, his swordsmanship, every single thing about his opponent is natural. There is nothing of note in regards to his strength or speed or anything else. No, it's simply that he doesn't need any of it. His sword is purely and perfected completed with skill alone.

Olba's overwhelming advantage in magic capacity is being overturned by skill alone.

Which is why he is feeling that absolute sense of defeat.

The fact that Olba is still standing, that he is still alive, is solely because his opponent has decided so. If he ever changes his mind, Olba's life can be snuffed out in a split second.

Olba in his current state can heal all non-fatal wounds. Of course, there is a limit, and there are also negative side effects.

However, having lost a large amount of blood, having had his flesh sliced open and his bones severed, even he needs time for the recovery.

Despite being in such danger, Olba is still alive.

No, he is being allowed to live on.

So Olba asks.

"Why...?"

Why do you allow me to live on?

Why are you hostile to me?

Why are you so strong?

So, why.

The young boy covered in black merely looks down at Olba.

“Lurking in the shadows, hunting the shadows. That is the only reason why we exist.”

It is a deep voice somehow tinged with sorrow.

From that alone, Olba manages to determine the boy's identity.

“You, you plan to resist... ‘that’?”

In this world, there are those that the law cannot judge. Olba knows this, and thinks of himself as part of them.

Power. Privilege. And hidden faces.

The light of the law cannot reach the edges of the world.

Even while enjoying that benefit, Olba himself is stepped on by those above him, being broken by them.

Thus Olba sought greater power... and fell.

“Even if it is you, and even with all of you... no matter how strong you are, you cannot win. This world's darkness... runs much deeper than you can imagine.”

Which is why Olba said such things.

It was not a warning, but a wish. A wish that this young boy, too, would be broken, would lose everything, would be plunged into despair. But at the same time, he is afraid that his wish would not come to be. Simple jealousy and envy.

“Then I will dive. It matters not how deep.”

There is no fighting spirit in his voice, nor a burning vigor. Only complete confidence in himself, and an unshakeable resolve.

“You say it so easily, you brat.”

Olba cannot accept this.

He absolutely cannot accept this.

Because that is what Olba previously aimed for, but was broken by.

At this moment, Olba decides to cross that last line. He takes out a lozenge from his chest pocket, then swallows it.

Olba has already resigned himself to the fact that he would not be able to leave this place alive. Therefore he will use his own life to teach this brat.

About this world's darkness.

Olba's slashes are absolutely fast, absolutely heavy, and absolutely merciless.

An overwhelming amount of violence.

When a tiger kills a rabbit, it doesn't need to use any tricks. It simply brandishes its strength, and that's enough.

There is no way to resist.

The boy in black is one-sidedly being crushed.

Or so Olba expected.

"!?"

Blood suddenly spurts from Olba's chest. When was this not so shallow cut made?

Olba stops moving for an instant, but then sends the young boy flying again the next moment.

"IT'S USELESS! IT'S COMPLETELY USELESS, YOU BRAT!!!"

Olba's wound is supposed to be deep enough to reach bone. However, the wound bubbles, then regenerates in a split second.

"THIS IS POWER!! THIS IS STRENGTH!!"

Olba accelerates even more.

The scene of him spurting blood while zooming through the air is almost like a red flash.

Black versus red.

The two clash – the black is sent flying, while the red spurts blood.

The exchange of blows cannot be followed by the naked eye.

Only the red afterimages and the sight of the black being sent flying indicate that there is something going on.

But this does not last long.

The disparity between the two is obvious, and it requires no stretch of imagination to predict the black being destroyed eventually.

It is supposed to be a fight that where there's no way for him to lose.

Repeatedly he swings his sword, and repeatedly he demonstrates his dominance over the black.

But, why.

Why... how does the boy in black continue to stand back up again and again, looking none the worse?

"Why... why can't I reach you...?"

There is no visible change on the black. Having used almost no magic, having made almost no movement, simply allowing his body to follow the flow of Olba's attacks. Exactly like a leaf caught in a rapid current.

But he was not only flowing along, but also using Olba's momentum to deliver accurate and precise strikes.

There is nothing unnecessary, nothing extraneous. Just being natural, letting things be the way they are.

"How ugly."

So says the black. Those eyes that seem like they can see through all things are focused on Olba.

"What do you know... WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU KNOW?!?!?!"

So screams Olba.

With that, his sword, his body, his everything is poured into a mowing attack accompanied by a howl.

Even if it costs him his life, he will erase this black.

This strike is well and truly the greatest one that Olba has ever made in his entire life.

But.

“Playtime is over.”

It is easily bisected.

As if swinging through empty air, the black sword completes its trajectory without any resistance.

Olba’s sword, his immense amount of magic, his well-trained body, all of it was cut in half by a single swing.

The jet black sword has no magic, no strength, and no speed. It was perfected with only pure skill. Or so Olba originally thought.

But that wasn’t it.

“What... was that...”

It was indeed a stroke that could cut through anything and everything.

As it sliced through his sword, his magic, his flesh, and his bones, Olba noticed it.

That stroke contained a highly condensed amount of magic, a tremendous amount of strength, and an overwhelming amount of speed. And to top it all... there was skill.

This, this is true perfection.



Apparently the black had possessed everything from the very start.

It was only that he didn't use it.

There is absolutely nothing that that stroke cannot cut.

“To think it was... to this... level...”

Blood spurts into the air.

The upper half of his body falls off, while the lower half crumples.

Even after being split clean in half, Olba's body continues trying to regenerate, but it's already gone past its limits. It begins to rot, dyeing the ground black.

Olba looks up as his opponent looks down.

Having crossed swords, Olba now understands the black.

The black's sword is a honest sword, a commoner's sword, a sword attained from effort filled with blood and sweat.

He had thought him a mere brat who did not know anything. But that is wrong. He already knows everything, but regardless had made a conscious choice to fight, knowing full well the odds.

Powerless.

Olba's life was powerless from start to finish.

What he tried to achieve, what he could not achieve.

“Emi... li... a...”

Olba reaches for a jewel-studded short sword, then closes his eyes.

The last thing that comes up in his fading consciousness is the smile of the beloved daughter that he had lost.



So that's basically how we wiped out that bandit group and saved Nee-san. When we found Nee-san, she was unconscious, so we freed her restraints and then just left her there. The very next day, she showed up back at the house, in high spirits. That person is excessively resilient, so her hand injury had already mainly healed up after just one night. After that was a whole week of recovery or investigation or whatnot before she finally left for the royal capital. And for some reason, during that one week she kept fussing over me, it was quite annoying.

Alpha and the others were apparently busy with investigating the bandit gang and cleaning up the leftovers. Ah right, sorry, they're not bandits, but the Order. Well, bandits by any other name are still bandits in the end.

But damn, that red-eyed ossan sure had talent. It was partly his credit that I was able to use a cool-sounding line like "Then I will dive. It matters not how deep." Too bad he died, otherwise I would have hired him as a supporting actor.

And my power in the shadows play and ad libbing was a must-see! It's a pity that there was no audience, but I only have to bear with it for 2 more years. Two years later, I will also be going to the royal capital. It's the royal capital, that capital! One of few great metropoli of this world, the only city in this country with a population higher than a million. I can bet that there would be both protagonist-like characters and last boss-like characters there. There would be an abundance of incidents, conspiracies, and intricacies that could never occur in a backwater place like here... and thus opportunities for me to make an appearance as a power in the shadows. Aahh, in that light, then the current me who is making do by only taking out mere bandits is but a frog in a well. My story so far was only the prologue.

As I continued to build up my strength in preparation for 2 years later, Alpha and the 6 others requested to meet with me together. Apparently they want to 'report' on their 'investigation into the Order' and the results of their 'research into the Curse.' Lately they've all gotten quite busy, so it's rare to see all 7 gathered together at the same time. There's no actual point to 'investigating' and 'researching,' so you guys should keep it to a moderate level, alright? is what I'm thinking as I listen to their 'reports.'

To sum it all up.

All of the heroes who fought Diabolos were female. That's why the Curse of Diabolos

only manifests in females.

What a novel idea! But unfortunately, the general consensus is that they were all male. Ohhh, because Shadow Garden only has girls (except for me), so they're making that their pretext?

Next, the largest percentage of those who manifest the Curse are elves, then beast people, and finally humans. This is related to the lifespans of the races. For example, humans have the shortest lifespans, so the blood of the heroes flows the thinnest in them, which makes it hard for the Curse to manifest. Elves, in contrast, have the longest lifespans, so it is the opposite for them. Then the beast people are in the middle of the spectrum. Speaking of which, I am the only human in Shadow Garden, and I didn't even have demon possession. As for the 7 of them, 2 are beast people, and the remaining 5 are elves. All of them previously had demon possession. Wow you guys, good job thinking up a setting for even something like this.

Alpha and the girls also 'reported' a few other things to me, but it basically just went in one ear and out the other.

And with that, they moved onto 'reporting' about the Order. Supposedly the Order is an enormous organization that has grown roots all over the entire world. Nice, I like that you girls think large scale.

The Order calls those suffering from demon possession (or the Curse, you can call it what you want) as 'Matches,' and prioritizes the capture and execution of such people. It became that in order to mount a resistance against the Order, members of Shadow Garden also have to scatter across the world, leaving only 1 person to stay with me on a rotation basis. The rest will focus on reaching out to and sheltering those suffering from demon possession and also continue digging into the Order or run interference where opportunities arise.

Hearing that, I got it. They have realized that the Order of Diabolos does not actually exist. Which is why they are trying to say that they can't play along with this farce any longer, that they want to be set free. That's what 'scatter across the world' means, right? But because I really did cure them of demon possession, so to repay that debt they'll take turns to accompany me, and for me to be content with that much. That is the message between the lines that they are hoping for me to read.

I found myself feeling a little sad. Even in my previous life, everybody adored heroes

when they were children. And I adored powers in shadows in the same way. But eventually, everybody grew up, and before I knew it, they'd all forgotten about their heroes and left me all alone. These girls have also grown up, that's all there is to that.

Despite feeling a bit sentimental about it, I quickly agreed to let them go. In the first place, I didn't even plan to gather so many of them. It would be enough with just me and one assistant. I saw off the girls who all teared up at the parting, then swore to myself that I'll definitely become a power in the shadows, even if I become the only person left in the entire world.

Chapter 9

The Frolicking of Those Who Know Nothing of the World of Shadows

I have finally become 15 years old, and have matriculated into the Midgar Magic Swordsman Academy. It is known as one of the top leading magic swordsman academies in the continent, gathering talents from both inside and outside of our country.

In the two months that I've been here, I have purposely maintained my grades somewhere slightly below average, the most optimum position for a mob character. And in the meantime, I have been keeping an eye out for protagonist-like characters.

Among the few that I have my eyes on.

Princess Alexia Midgar. The most promising one is her.

Even a chimpanzee would be able to figure her for a big potato just from hearing the title 'Princess Midgar.'

Incidentally, above her is someone even bigger and more famous called Princess Iris Midgar, but unfortunately she has already graduated from the academy.

And it is this Princess Alexia that I am going to have participate in a super important mob event. To be more specific, it is a penalty game.

Yep, you guessed it. It's that one where the loser has to confess to a girl.

Thus, I am now on the school roof, standing a certain distance away from Princess Alexia and facing off against her.

She has shoulder-length silvery white hair, and her red eyes are enchantingly... arg anyways she has pretty eyes too, and... her brows are, um... screw this, I give up. In short, she is really beautiful in the well-featured cool beauty kind. Unfortunately, thanks to Alpha and the others, I've gotten used to seeing pretty faces. I think it would

be better if you let some of that tension out of your face, you know? Showing a bit more emotion would make you look a bit more human.

Well, let's set that aside for now. Naturally, I am not the first to attempt this foolhardy challenge. After entering the school for 2 months, already more than a hundred retards have approached her and gotten shot down with the same emotionless phrase.

"Not interested."

It's not like I don't understand. She's probably already got a political marriage lined up for after graduation, and she simply isn't interested in this kind of child's play. But the large majority of the nobles that tried to confess to her should also be in the same boat. After graduation, it'll be straight off to arranged marriages for most of them. That's why they are hoping to have a love affair or two while still in the academy.

Well, whatever their motivations, in the end it is all but the mere frolicking of those who know nothing of the world of shadows.

However, as a mob character, I am also fated to take part in this frolicking. Forced through a punishment game to confess to the school idol and get turned down in the harshest and most heart crushing manner – it is truly a mob-like event, is it not? By completing this event in the most mob-like method possible, I would get one step closer to the most ideal image of a mob character inside my head. And that, in turn, would bring me that much further down the path towards becoming a power in the shadows.

For the sake of this moment today, I stayed up all night deep in thought. What can I do... How can I confess to make this into the most mob-like confession ever?

Word choice is of course important, but there is also articulation, pitch change, and vibrato, to list only a few. After the whole night of research, I have attained the ultimate mob-like confession, and am now standing at the decisive battle.

Battle.

Exactly. For a mob character, this is nothing short of a great battle.

Power in shadows have power in shadows battles to fight, while mob characters have mob battles to fight.

And thus I, at this moment, as a mob character, must give it my very best.

With resolve in my chest, forward I face.

Princess Alexia... you might be standing there looking composed and all, but if I really wanted to cut you down, your head would leave your body before you even know what happened. In the end, that is your limit as a person.

Therefore, watch closely.

This is the world's most mob-like confession!

"P, P, P... Priness Alexia..."

I reveal the 'Stutter' attack card, then display my nervousness through the (in)articulation of 'princess,' followed by a pitch change when saying her name.

"...I, I like you...!"

My eyes leap away from Princess Alexia to swim all over the ground, while my whole body trembles at a barely perceptible degree.

"P-, please go out with me...?"

My word choice is kept to the basics, with no fancy additions, while my pronunciation, pitch, and articulation are flying off to god knows where. Then I ended it all with a rising inflection to exhibit my lack of confidence.

It was perfect...!

Now this, this was the perfect mob-ness that I have been aiming for!

Satisfaction. I feel pure satisfaction.

"Very well. Please take care of me."

"Nn?"

Feeling satisfied, I was preparing to go back when I heard an auditory hallucination.

“You, what did you just say?”

“Please take care of me.”

“Ah, ok.”

Something doesn't seem right here.

“F-, for starters, let's go back together after school.”

Still not fully wrapping my head around this development, I meet up with Princess Alexia after school, we walk back to the dorms together, and part smilingly with a promise to see each other again tomorrow. Then I go back to my own room, dive into my bed, bury my face in my pillow, then scream.

“HOW THE FUCK DID I ENTER THE MC ROUTE OF A GODDAMN LOVE COMEDY?!?!?!?”

Chapter 10

Apparently He Discovered Her Secret And Is Blackmailing Her...

“Isn’t it strange?!”

“That’s strange alright.”

“That’s so strange.”

Lunchtime the next day, I am having lunch with my mob friends while going over how yesterday went down. Consequently, all three of us are of the same opinion, that it was strange.

“To be honest, you simply don’t have the specs to go out with Princess Alexia. Even I would be barely at the acceptable level, you know?”

So says Hyoro. He is the second son of the Baron Gali family. His appearance is tall and thin, and it might seem like he is kind of fashionable and puts some effort into his appearance, but he has terrible sense. From afar, he could perhaps somehow pass off as handsome. Or not, scratch that last part, I can’t see it at all.

Of course, this Hyoro Gali does not have the specs to go out with Princess Alexia. Why? Because he is someone that I’ve acknowledged as a mob friend.

“If even Sid-kun could pull it off, then even I could have succeeded. Ah~, I should have done the confession myself.”

And this is Jaga. Second son of the Baron Imo family. His appearance is small and bony, like that extra guy in every baseball club. He is outstandingly talented in that even when looking from afar, no matter the angle, he wouldn’t even have the atmosphere of being a handsome guy.

Naturally, he is also a mere mob character who would never be a good match with Princess Alexia after even a thousand years.

Oh and by the way, my name is Sid. Sid Kagenou. When I go by this name, I am your average, everyday mob character.

“Seriously, this is not as good as it sounds. It freaks me out that there is probably some deeper circumstances here, and in the first place the worlds we live in are too far apart.”

“You got that right. After all, your caliber is even less than mine. I bet the longest this would last would be a week.”

“I say three days max. Take a look around.”

At Jaga’s words, Hyoro and I glance around. Almost everybody in the cafeteria are looking my way and whispering furiously to their respective companions.

“Look, he’s the one...”

“No way! His looks are so average...”

“Is there some misunderstanding here...”

“Damn, then even I could have...”

“Ehhhh!”

Et cetera, et cetera.

“I heard that he discovered a secret of hers and is blackmailing her... from that guy called Hyoro Gali.”

“Are you serious?! I’m gonna kill that bastard...”

“Act like it was an accident...”

“How could we call ourselves men if we don’t stand up here...”

Et cetera, et cetera.

I have good ears, so I can pick up pretty much all of it. But for starters, I glare at Hyoro Gali.

“Nn, what’s the matter?”

“...Nothing.”

Such is the friendship between mob characters.

“But seriously, what am I to do? It would be super suspicious if I turn around and dump her the very next day after confessing.”

In the first place, it is not mob-like to breakup with a princess. But then again, I was forced out of being mob-like the moment she said ‘yes.’

“Why not just go along with it? Who knows, maybe you can even get a good memory or two out of it.”

So says Hyoro with a smirk.

“I agree. Even if it was a mistake, you are currently officially going out with a princess. It would be such a waste to chicken out due to a few minor obstacles.”

“I can’t actually do that, now can I?”

The longer this state of affairs lasts, the farther that rumors about me would spread, and the further I would be from a mediocre mob-like life.

“But now that things have developed to this level, we absolutely cannot let slip that it was just a penalty game.”

So says Jaga.

“Agreed. The moment it becomes leaked, things will descend into absolute chaos. So I’m begging you guys, alright? Especially you, Hyoro.”

“Me? Pfft, no one would be able to make me talk.”

“Of course, I would also never tell.”

“I’m seriously begging you guys, alright?”

I sigh, then reach for my 980 Zeny Daily-Set-Meal-for-dirt-poor-nobles.

Let's eat quickly then leave this extremely uncomfortable cafeteria.

But I was too late.

A 100,000 Zeny Daily-Set-Meal-for-filthy-rich-nobles is set down right across from my seat. By a maid, with oh so graceful skill.

Then.

“This seat, is it free?”

Princess Alexia enters the scene.



Fuck, I knew it. That's why I wanted to eat quickly.

"O-o-o-o-of course!"

"I-i-i-i-i-if it pleases you, please!"

I can almost see Hyoro and Jaga visibly shrinking into themselves.

And these are the people who were bragging mere moments ago that even they could have gone out with her. As expected of the mob friends that my mob character had fully acknowledged as true mobs.

Now I just want to cry, for various reasons.

"Sit if you want."

Alexia was waiting for my answer, so I answered.

"Well then."

And with that, she sits down.

"Nice weather, isn't it?"

For starters, I try to fill the gap by bringing up the weather.

"I suppose."

Thus continued our bland and banal conversation.

With elegant motions, she puts her hands to her extravagant lunch.

As expected of a princess, she has wonderful manners. Low ranking nobles are pretty much just commoners slapped with a title.

"That super expensive meal sure is a lot."

"It is, isn't it? I always end up unable to finish it all."

"What a waste."

“To be honest, I would rather choose a lower rank course, but when I do, then everyone else finds it hard to order this.”

“Ahh, ‘k. If you can’t eat it all, then may I grab some?”

“I don’t mind, but...”

“If you’re worried about the manners and all that, don’t be. This is the lower nobles’ seating area, after all.”

I plunder the meat main dish from the bewildered-looking Alexia and stuff my cheeks with it before she can utter a complaint.

Yep, delish.

“Ah...”

“I’ll help myself to the fish too, then.”

“Wait a...”

Damn, I feel lucky.

Thanks to you, my stomach is now in seventh heaven.

In sharp contrast to yesterday, my attitude towards Alexia is now super meh.

The reason?

It’s because I’m currently in the middle of carrying out the ‘make her dump me’ strategy.

“Sighs... oh well.”

“Thanks for the food. ‘K, seeya.”

“Wait a second!”

I was hoping to just eat whatever I could and then leave like it’s nobody’s business, but no dice. Grudgingly, I sit back down.

“Your practical studies after lunch is Royal Capital Bushin Style, is it not?”

“Yea, sure.”

This school’s curriculum is separated into theoretical studies before lunch and practical studies after lunch.

Theoretical studies are separated by years, but practical years are all elective-based and students from all years are mixed together. The point is to pick the fighting style that fits you best from among all the ones that they offer.

“I also take Royal Capital Bushin Style, so how about let’s go together?”

“Uh, that’s not happening. I mean, you’re in Group 1, and I’m in Group 9.”

Bushin Style is a pretty popular course. With 50 students in a Group, there are a total of 9 Groups, with Group 1 being the most proficient and Group 9 being the worst. Having joined the academy only 2 months ago, I am still in Group 9. My plan is to eventually settle down in Group 5, by the way.

“With my recommendation, a spot was freed up in Group 1, so don’t worry about it.”

“Isn’t that, like, abuse of power or something?”

“Do you want me to come to Group 9, then?”

“Oh god please don’t, you’d destroy my standing.”

“These are the only options available. Choose one.”

“Seriously?”

“It is an order, by my authority as princess.”

“Group 1, here I come!”

And so ended my lunch.

Hyoro and Jaga remained as ornamental decorations to the very end.

Chapter 11

Conflict is Entertaining When You Are Uninvolved

(T/N: The word 'sword' will appear often in this chapter, and it might mean various things. Aside from the physical object, it could also refer to a person's swordsmanship, their approach to sword fighting, or some other nuance.)

"So wide..."

I could not help but to say that out loud the moment I stepped into Royal Capital Bushin Style Group 1's classroom.

Within the area of a gigantic stadium, aside from the changing rooms, there are also baths, a bar, and several other amenities. Even the doors are automatic (maid powered).

Incidentally, the classroom of Group 9 is outdoors, be it rain or shine. No doors, thus no need for maids.

In order to not get tangled with, I change at super speed, then stayed in a corner to wait for Alexia.

After a short while.

"Let's loosen up a bit first, shall we?"

Alexia in a dougi enters the scene.

The one for girls is a long dress with a deep slit, very much like an unadorned China dress. The color of hers is black. Bushin Style uses color to show proficiency – black is for the best, white is for beginners.

Mine is of course white. I am the only white in this whole classroom. I stick out like a sore thumb.

Ignoring the stares composed of 70% hostility and 30% inquisitiveness, I start doing

some light stretches.

“Interesting.”

Says Alexia while copying what I’m doing.

In this world, the idea of loosening up before exercising is well known, but the way to do so has not been established, so everyone kinda just does it their own way.

Those who do sports but underestimate the importance of stretching would definitely destroy their body. In this world, magic can perhaps somehow take care of such such injuries, but there would still be an effect on performance.

On this, Alexia is actually quite conscientious, which is laudable. I, too, am extremely conscientious when it comes to anything related to combat. I have as much confidence as I do in the taste of that drink that I always drank at the East Coast.

After a short while, class begins.

“Today onwards, a new friend will be joining us.”

Was the way that the teacher in charge introduced me.

“My name is Sid Kagenou. I will be in everyone’s care.”

Then came the barrage of stares from people who absolutely are not thinking of me as a friend.

Aah, as expected of Group 1. Just by taking a quick glance around, I see super important people here and there. That ikemen over there is the second son of a Duke’s family, that beauty is the daughter of the current leader of the Magic Swordsman Knight Order, and even the class instructor is our country’s Swordsmanship Instructor. He is even a blond ikemen and merely 28 years of age.

“Everyone, get along well.”

After which then began practice.

Starting from magic control through meditation, all the way to basic training like practice swings.

Good, this is good. The basics are important. In Group 9, we only did a short time of practice swings before everyone started just banging their swords against each other. Guess the truly strong really do understand what's what.

Everyone here seems high level, so this is honestly a really good environment.

Above all else, this Royal Capital Bushin Style is one that makes a lot of sense. It's wonderful that every ounce of effort poured into it would never go to waste.

"Do you like the Royal Capital Bushin Style?"

So asks the blond ikemen while approaching me. If I remember correctly, his name is Zenon Griphi.

"Do I look like I do?"

"Oh yes, you look like you enjoy it very much."

In response to my answer, Zenon-sensei gives a refreshing laugh.

"As you probably already know, Royal Capital Bushin Style is a new branch off of Bushin Style. Traditional Bushin Style was originally already the most popular style in our country, so the reformed Royal Capital Bushin Style had a strong start. Then with the patronage of Princess Iris, it became the second most popular style in this country, behind only the traditional Bushin style."

"I've heard that Sensei is also quite an influential proponent of the style."

"What I've done is insignificant in comparison to what the princess has done. But even so, I feel like I was a part of nurturing Royal Capital Bushin Style to where it is today. That's why when I see someone else liking this style, I get so happy that I can't help myself. Sorry for interrupting your practice."

With that, Zenon-sensei goes off to watch the other students. I, too, fully understand how he feels. I like seeing Alpha and the girls swinging my sword. My sword is something that I had built up myself, so the feeling of being recognized when seeing someone else use it is an exceptional kind of happiness.

"What were you two talking about?"

So asks Alexia.

“About Royal Capital Bushin Style.”

“*Fuun*. Anyways, it’s mass next, so let’s pair up.”

‘Mass’ refers to light practice of actual fighting forms.

The point is to confirm the feeling of using certain techniques and parries, all without actually touching your opponent.

“Isn’t our mastery too far apart?”

“Won’t be a problem.”

So we take a stance across from each other with our wooden swords.

I make a move, which Alexia parries.

Then she makes a move, which I parry.

The attacks don’t land, and our movements are slow.

Neither are we using any magic.

Around us are several pairs fully utilizing magic and whamming each other fiercely, but to my surprise Alexia is matching along with me.

No, rather than matching along with me... This might be what she normally does. Mass is ultimately the confirmation of techniques, so there is absolutely no need for speed nor strength. She has a firm eye on the true intended purpose of this training.

This can be seen just from looking at her sword.

Her older sister, Princess Iris, is praised for her strength to heaven and back by absolutely everyone in this country. Genius, wizard, every single person has a different word to praise her with. At the moment, she is even said to be the strongest in the entire country.

On the other hand, the reputation of Alexia is not so good. She has magic, and her

sword is honest, but she simply pales in comparison to her sister. This is the valuation of Alexia shared by the general populace.

But now that I'm here standing opposite her, I realize that her sword is a pretty good sword in and of itself.

Faithful to the basics, firm foundation, and plain.

Yes, it's plain. But that plainness is the crystallization of her effort. After everything useless is removed, then the rest is just her continuously building upon her foundation, step by step.

Delta, take a good look at this.

I couldn't help but to mentally call out to that beast person girl who swings a sword that I find hard to acknowledge.

"Nice sword."

So says Alexia.

"Thanks."

"But I don't like it."

So she's the type to bring you up before dropping you.

"It's like I'm looking at myself. Let's stop."

So saying, she begins to wrap up. Seems like class is almost over anyways.

Against general expectations, I was able to safely get through the class without anything untoward happening. Let's quickly clean up, get changed, then dash back at full speed...

"Wait a second."

Or not.

Alexia grabs me by the scruff of my neck and drags me somewhere.

“So this is your answer?”

For some reason, we have come to Zenon-sensei.

“Indeed. I’ve decided to go out with him instead.”

“You can’t keep running away like this indefinitely. You know that, right?”

So asks Zenon-sensei with severe eyes.

“Us children don’t understand the circumstances of adults.”

Says Alexia with a ‘hohoho’ laugh.

Based on this conversation, I’ve finally understood most of what’s going on. The reason why I was brought here, and the reason why she decided to go out with me.

While praying earnestly that I won’t be dragged in, I turn myself into air and merely watch these two protagonists having their event.

Chapter 12

Hi, My Name Is Pochi! Nice to Meet You, Everyone!

“In other words, Alexia and Zenon-sensei are engaged, and I’m the stalking horse?”

I’m currently facing off against Alexia behind the school building after school.

“We’re not engaged. He’s just a fiancé candidate.”

So returns Alexia with a composed face.

“Whatever, same thing.”

“No, it’s not the same. It’s not even been confirmed yet, but he’s already trying to forcefully move the talks along. I’m quite troubled by it.”

“Ok, seriously, whatever. Sorry, but I have no intention to be swept up in the circumstances between you two.”

“Oh dear, what a heartless thing for my boyfriend to say to me.”

“Boyfriend? You just wanted a convenient stalking horse, didn’t you?”

“That is true. But the same goes for you, no?”

An unpleasant smile appears on Alexia’s face.

“Same? What are you talking about?”

“Oh, you plan to feign ignorance? Oh Sid Kagenou-kun who lost in a penalty game?”

Her smile deepens even more.

Oook, wait a second. Let’s calm down.

“How cruel, to play with an innocent girl’s emotions like that.”

So says Alexia while crying crocodile tears without even a shred of innocence coming from her.

No problem, I am calm.

“I have no idea what you are talking about though. What, do you have evidence or something?”

Yep, evidence.

Regardless of how much suspicion she might have, as long as those two don't betray me...

“Is his name Jaga-kun? As soon as I talked to him, his face became all red and he began telling me things that I didn't even ask about. You have such a good friend.”

I mentally beat Jaga up and smash him into mashed potato to maintain my own mental health.

“Are you alright? Your face is convulsing like crazy.”

“Not a problem. My character is twisted so my mouth is twisted too.”

“Ahhh, I see.”

“Still better than you, though.”

“Nn, did you just say something?”

“Uh, no. So what is it that you want anyways?”

I admit defeat. The reason for my loss is my choice of friends.

“Let me see...”

Alexia crosses her arms and leans against the school building.

“For now, continue pretending to be my lover. Time duration is until that man gives up.”

“My status is but that of a mere Baron family. To be honest, I don’t even have the strength to be of much use as a stalking horse.”

“I am fully aware. As long as we can buy time, then that’ll be enough. The rest I’ll handle by myself.”

“Furthermore, I don’t want to be put into any danger. The other party is the country’s Swordsmanship Instructor. If anything happens, I wouldn’t be able to deal with it.”

“Blah, blah, blah, you sure are noisy.”

So saying, Alexia takes out gold coins from her chest pocket and scatters them over the ground.

“Pick them up.”

A gold coin is 100,000 Zeny. And there are at least 10 pieces there.

“Heeh~, do I look like a guy who would wag his tail for money?”

So I say while crawling on the ground and carefully picking up the gold coins piece by piece.

“Yes you do.”

“You’ve got a good eye.”

11th piece, 12th piece, 13th piece... ah, there’s one more!

Right as I’m about to reach for that last piece of gold coin, Alexia’s loafer steps onto it.

I look up at Alexia. Alexia’s red eyes look down at me. I can see the inside of her pleated skirt.

“You will move exactly as I tell you to, yes?”

Confirms Alexia with a smile revealing every last bit of her terrible personality.

“Of course, of course.”

Answers I with a full-faced smile.

“Good boy, Pochi.”

Alexia pats my head like I’m a dog or a child, then leaves with a flutter of her short skirt.

I carefully wipe the gold coin that had her shoe print on it before pocketing it.

(T/N: ‘Pochi’ is an extremely common name for dogs in Japan, the way ‘Tama’ is for cats.)



Even after I entered the academy, I had continued cutting into my sleeping hours to continue my own training. But now with the whole fake love thing with Alexia, my time has decreased even further.

“Come with me.”

With just that single utterance, I was forced to come to the Royal Capital Bushin Style Group 1’s classroom early in the morning.

Shafts of the morning sun stream in, lighting up the quiet, spacious room occupied by only the two of us.

Morning practice.

Alexia focuses solely on swinging her sword.

I, too, swing my sword beside her.

Alexia is singularly earnest towards her sword. That point at least is something that I truly appreciate.

We do not talk. We only continue swinging in silence. For me, it is a surprisingly not painful time.

“It really is quite mysterious, your sword.”

It was Alexia who first broke the silence.

“You’ve got the basics down. And that is literally the only thing you are doing. But still...”

Of course, I am suppressing my strength, my speed, my magic, my skill, and everything else while swinging my sword before her.

So naturally, the only thing left is the basics.

“For some reason, I find it hard to tear my eyes away.”

“Thanks, I guess?”

A bird chirps outside the classroom. That lovely voice is actually not singing, but struggling for territory. I can hear the beaks clashing, too.

“But I really don’t like it, your sword.”

After saying that, our conversation cuts off, then we resume swinging our swords in silence.

Chapter 13

Incidentally, I'm In the Zenon Faction

Two weeks after that, I am somehow making do as Alexia's boyfriend. Every once in a while I get harassed by other students, but everything so far is still within tolerable levels.

More than anything else, Zenon-sensei has not come to beat me up or seek to 'solve' things with any direct approaches that involve violence, so at least that's a relief.

As for the man in question, he continues to give Alexia and I appropriate and thoughtful guidance during classes. He no longer comes over for casual talks, but clearly is an adult capable of keeping public and private separate.

In comparison to that.

"That man truly irritates me. Looking like he's all that just because he is a little good at the sword."

When we're before people, of course she's got her act on and all, but when we are alone, her words become like a tornado of vilification.

"Yep, yep, that's right."

I am pretty much just a yes-robot. I learned early on that any and all rebuttal would only be a waste of time.

"Pochi, you also saw that absolutely shady smile of his, did you not?"

"Yep, yep, I did."

It has become our routine to return to the dorms after school via a longer path through the woods that few other students use.

During that time, I simply continue to agree with whatever Alexia says. Not even 10% of it actually enters my brain.

We continue walking slowly down the path as the sun sets above. Whereas walking normally would get us through to the other side in 10 minutes, we easily take longer than 30 minutes. Some days, I can already see the stars by the time we get through, but patience. Some days I feel like yelling at her to just find a random wall to talk to instead, but patience. I can bear it.

Patience, patience, and more patience.

But even I have one thing that I really need to say.

“Ahh, can I ask you something?”

“What, Pochi?”

Alexia sits down on her favorite tree stump and crosses her legs.

Why the hell are you sitting down, get the fuck up and continue walking – is what I really want to say but I know I have no choice but to also sit down next to her.

“In the end, what is it about Zenon-sensei that you dislike so much? Objectively speaking, as a marriage partner he seems like a pretty good catch to me though.”

“You... were you even listening to what I was saying?”

Alexia looks slightly displeased.

“Everything, alright? I dislike his very existence, and everything about it.”

“He is handsome, is the country’s Swordsmanship Instructor, has a high social status, has money, and is able to clearly demarcate between public and private. Everything about him seems good. In actual fact, he is quite popular among the female students, I hear.”

My words are only met with a scornful laugh.

“That’s all just his outward appearance. Appearances can be fabricated and kept up as much as wanted. As a prime example, me.”

“I see, damn that’s a convincing example.”

Speaking of which, Alexia is also highly popular. Since she's putting on so deep an act that it makes me want to puke sometimes when I see it.

"That is why I do not evaluate people based on appearances."

"Then how do you evaluate people?"

"By their flaws."

So says Alexia with a self-satisfied look.

"A truly negative judgment method. Fits you to a tee."

"Why, thank you. Incidentally, the fact that you are only composed of flaws and that you possess absolutely no virtues whatsoever scores you relatively highly in my book."

"Thank you, it's my first time receiving such a compliment that does not make me happy at all!"

Alexia smiles wryly.

"It's good that you are an easily identifiable piece of trash. And that is why I dislike that man."

"Since we're on the topic, tell me some of Zenon-sensei's flaws, then."

"From what I can see, he has none."

"Then isn't he just perfect?"

"There isn't a single human alive who is perfect. If there truly is, then that person is either a big, fat liar, or there are screws loose in their head."

"I see, I see. Thank you for that totally jaded and prejudiced reply. I truly learned something today."

"You are very welcome, oh Pochi of the endless list of flaws. Go fetch~!"

With that, Alexia takes out a single gold coin and throws it. I dash out at full speed to catch it.

Damn straight, just done earned me 100,000 Zeny.

I put the gold coin into my pocket, then return to Alexia, who is clapping her hands in delight.

“Good boy, good boy.”

She is patting my head. Patience.

“You’re hating this, you’re hating this so much~”

While being patted, once more I think to myself that she is a terrible human being.

“It’s showing in your face, you know?”

“I’m letting it show in my face.”

With a *fufu* laugh, Alexia stands back up.

“Well then, about time to get back.”

“Yes, yes.”

“Pochi, tomorrow I’m going to smash that annoying face of his with a wooden sword, so make sure you watch carefully.”

Upon hearing Alexia say so, I couldn’t help but to ask.

“That thing... are you seriously going to do it?”

“What are you implying?”

Alexia turns around and glares at me.

I really shouldn’t have asked that. But it is something that I truly cannot turn a blind eye to.

“Zenon-sensei is indeed stronger than you. But from what I can see, the difference between you two is not so great that you’d be single-sidedly done in.”

I like Alexia's sword. Because it is a sword built up from days and days of accumulation, one step at a time. But when it comes to the real thing, actual combat, there is one unnecessary element mixed in. And I really cannot stand seeing a sword that I had recognized being tainted by that one element.

"Easy for you to say. What do you know, white robe?"

"Sure, it's the nonsense of a white robe. There is no need for you to pay any mind to it."

"Fine, I'll tell you. Things are not as simple as you think."

"Is that so?"

"I have no talent. I was born with a large magic capacity, and I'd like to think that I've also put in a fair share of effort. I think myself relatively strong. But even with all that, I can never win against a real genius."

"You sure?"

"I've always been compared to Iris nee-sama. There were expectations from the people all around, but even more than that, I myself also greatly respected Iris nee-sama and wanted to catch up to her. But I could not do things the way Iris nee-sama could. What each one of us had from the very start was too different. So I decided to find my own way to become stronger. But as a result, do you know what people call my sword?"

When the sisters' swords are raised in comparison, there is a certain phrase that comes up with almost guaranteed certainty.

"The commoner's sword."

(T/N: 'Commoner' here refers to 'a common person'. As opposed to a genius. This is completely unrelated to her status as a princess.)

"Yes, that. Oh and by the way, yours is also the commoner's sword. Too bad, eh?"

Alexia laughs in self-derision.

"I don't think it a bad thing at all. I like your sword, after all."

Upon hearing my words, Alexia's breath stops for a brief moment, then she scowls at me.

"Previously, someone else had also said those words to me. It was Iris nee-sama, on the stage of the Festival of the God of War, after my unsightly defeat at her hands."

" 'I really do like your sword, Alexia.' "

With curled lip, Alexia attempts to imitate Princess Iris's voice.

"I'm sure that person didn't understand even a fraction of my feelings. How wretched I felt at that moment. Even since that day, I've hated my own sword so much."

Then Alexia laughs. I don't know what is contained in that laugh, but at the very least it is not a happy laugh.

I have something that I really must say. If I don't say it, then it would be akin to denying my very self.

"I am an extremely facetious person. If something happens and a million people suddenly die, I wouldn't really care. If you go mad and become a serial killer going around indiscriminately slashing people left and right, I wouldn't really care either."

"If I go mad, the first person I cut would be you. I've just decided."

"But there is one thing that I would never compromise on. Even if it is worth absolutely nothing to other people, to me it is the most important thing in my life. And the way I live my life is to protect only that single thing that is important to me. Which is why, what I will say next, I fully mean with all of my heart."

Just one sentence.

"I like Alexia's sword."

After a short period of silence, Alexia replies.

"What meaning is there in those words?"

"None. But if I really had to say, it's because I got angry hearing something that I like being denied. That's all there is to it."

“Is that so.”

Alexia turns around...

“Today, I will go back alone.”

...And then walks off.

Chapter 14

It Would Take Serious Effort To Make Me Truly Flip Out

“How long has it been since we last had a meal with just the three of us like this?”

So says Jaga the Traitor.

“Since this guy eats with the princess for literally every single meal.”

And that was Hyoro.

“What choice do I have?”

Me.

For the first time in quite a while, we three are eating together in the cafeteria. Alexia is, for a surprising change of pace, not present.

“Sid-kun, can you forgive me already?”

“Hear, hear. Men don’t hold grudges over insignificant things!”

“I even treated you to a 980 Zeny Daily-Set-Meal-for-dirt-poor-nobles, didn’t I?”

“Hear, hear. He already treated you, so just let bygones be bygones!”

“Gah, alright already.”

I heave a huge sigh.

“Thank you, Sid-kun.”

“Yea, yea.”

“So, how far have you actually gone?”

So asks Hyoro in a subdued voice.

“Gone where?”

“Duh, I’m talking about ‘that’ and Princess Alexia. You two have already gone out for 2 weeks so you’ve been getting some of ‘that,’ haven’t you?”

Seriously, stop saying ‘that.’ Oh my god what a retarded conversation this is.

“Nothing has happened, and nothing will happen.”

“*Kah*, what a useless wimp. If it was me, I’d have reached last base already.”

“Agreed. I would have at least gotten to the kissing stage.”

“As I keep saying, we’re not like that.”

I half-heartedly fend them off while continuing to eat my lunch. But then all of a sudden.

“May I sit here?”

The blond-haired ikemen Zenon-sensei enters the scene.

“Yes of course!”

“All yours!”

With that, the two once again turn into ornamental decorations.

“What business do you have with me?”

I am slightly on my guard. Just in case he’s aiming for me now that Alexia is not present.

“I’m sure you’ve already heard, but Princess Alexia has not returned to the dorms since yesterday.”

Naturally, this is my first time hearing such news.

But I’m sure she’s merely gone off on a trip of self-discovery or something. That’s what

teenagers do, right?

“During our search this morning, we found this.”

What he takes out is a single loafer. It’s Alexia’s.

“There were signs of a struggle nearby. The Knight Order is considering it to be a kidnapping case, and investigations are underway.”

“What, how could this be...!”

Is what I shout out loud in a grieving voice, but inside I’m shouting “Hell yea, serves you right!!” while making a guts pose.

“When we were narrowing down the list of suspects, the last person confirmed to have been seen with her came up.”

So saying, Zenon-sensei looks at me.

“The Knight Order would like to ask you a few questions.”

Standing at the entrance of the cafeteria are members of the Knight Order wearing their full equipment and projecting bloodthirst.

“You will cooperate with us, yes?”

Oh, I can see where this is going.

Fuck me.



After that, I was brought to a place like a police cell, where I answered a few questions before being released in the evening. 5 days later, that is.

“Get a move on, you fucker.”

My back is pushed roughly as I am effectively evicted from the building. Then my belongings are thrown out right after me.

As I am now only in my underwear, I pick up my clothes and shoes and put them on right there and then. Because I no longer have fingernails on either hand, it takes a bit longer than usual.

After I finish arranging myself, I heave a sigh then walk off.

The pedestrians going to and fro that I pass all stare at my 'scratches' and bloody appearance.

I heave another sigh.

"Stay calm, me. Stay calm. What's the point of flipping out over a few small potatoes?"

I try my best to not remember the face of the knight who interrogated me while maintaining calm.

"They were merely doing their job."

My wounds are all only superficial, and I can grow my fingernails back whenever I want.

The only reason why I don't is to fully act out my mob character.

"Yes, I am the very definition of calm."

Tranquility.

I take a deep breath. My vision widens back up.

Probing with my senses, I notice some suspicious presences.

"They put two tails on me, huh."

The kidnapper is yet to be found. Naturally, Alexia's safety is still unconfirmed.

My head is not so full of daisies that I think I have been acquitted. They didn't have enough evidence, but my name is definitely still on the list of suspects.

I keep my face down and pretend to be haggard and exhausted while making my way back to my dorm.

Along the way.

“Later...”

A really, really tiny voice reaches my ears.

Accompanied by the faint smell of a familiar perfume.

“Alpha, huh...”

The avenues are extremely crowded in the evenings. Her figure is nowhere to be seen.



Having returned to my dorm room, I turn on the lights.

From the shadows, a young girl reveals herself.

“You wanna eat?”

She is wearing a tight bodysuit that seems to be emphasizing her recently acquired assets.

In her hand is a thick sandwich filled with tuna (*T/N: ‘maguro’ in Japanese*), bought from the famous store Maguronaldo (*T/N: try replacing the ‘r’ with a ‘d’*) in the royal capital.

“Thanks. It’s been a while, hasn’t it, Alpha? What happened to Beta?”

I haven’t had anything proper to eat for 5 days straight, so I attack the sandwich with gusto.

Beta was the one who had been supporting me recently.

“I heard from Beta. Seems things have gotten a bit troublesome, hm?”

She sits on my bed and crosses her legs.

Both her silky blond hair and long-slitted blue eyes seem somehow nostalgic.

In the short time that she's left my sight, she has grown up so much.

"Guess so."

I throw the last scrap of the sandwich into my mouth.

"There's water in that."

Thx~"

I drain the large cup in one breath.

"Whew, back to life."

I throw off my shoes and coat, then dive into my bed.

"At least change your clothes first!"

"Nah, gonna sleep."

"You... do you even understand the situation you are in?"

"The prep I'll leave to you."

Alpha is super capable. By giving her free reign, I am sure she will ready the most wonderful stage for me. But until then, I am going to sleep... I mean, conserve my strength.

Alpha sighs deeply.

"I'm sure you understand this, but the way things are currently developing, this will be pinned on you."

"Probably, yea."

As long as the real culprit is not found, it is almost certain that the one under the most suspicion would be executed.

Especially since this case is the kidnapping of a member of royalty. Someone's head has to fly, or else the case can't be closed.

Yay for the Middle Ages.

“Get up, I have another sandwich.”

“!! I’m up.”

I receive the sandwich from Alpha.

“There is movement to actively frame you as the culprit for this.”

“Heeh~, even though I would become it automatically if left alone?”

“They probably want to resolve things quickly. An average performing son of a poor baron family is the perfect scapegoat.”

“Agreed. I’d do the same too, if I were them.”

“The knights cannot be trusted.”

“The Order has moles inside?”

“Without doubt. It was the Order who kidnapped her. Their aim is probably her thick Blood of the Heroes.”

Alpha and the girls are still sticking to the whole Order of Diabolos setting for me. How considerate of them.

“Do you think she’s still alive?”

“You can’t draw blood from a dead person, right?”

“Good point.”

“Though we can’t seem to understand why you decided to take part in a romance story with a princess.”

So says Alpha while frowning at me with half-closed eyes.

“It is not what it seems.”

“I’m sure you must have a reason, something that you can’t tell us.”

I evade Alpha’s eyes as she tries to peer into mine.

And of course, I remain silent. Because I don’t have any really big reason.

“It’s fine, we understand that you’re shouldering something really big.”

What do I do if I’m not actually shouldering anything as important as she’s making it sound?

“But I just want to say, please trust us a little bit more. Even this time, if you had given us a heads up in advance, things wouldn’t have blown to such proportions. Right?”

“Alright, alright.”

“Anyways, don’t worry about it anymore. It’s our job to follow up after you.”

So saying, Alpha smiles at me.

“When this incident is all resolved, treat me to Maguronaldo. That second sandwich was my share, actually.”

“Sure thing. Sorry for eating your share too.”

“Don’t mind it.”

Alpha stands up, opens the window, and puts a foot through.

Her small hip sways.

“I’m going now. You just keep low for a while.”

“Got it. What’s the plan?”

“I’m going to gather numbers. We currently don’t have enough people in the capital. Also, I’m going to call Delta too.”

“You’re going to call her too?”

“She said she really misses you.”

Delta the Loose Cannon. Or by another name, Delta the Suicide Weapon. To put it simply, she’s basically an idiot specced solely for battle.

Since it’s been a while, guess everyone wants to host a reunion or something like that? I sincerely hope that they’re all living decent, respectable lives.

“The details I’ll tell you after the prep is over. Well then.”

After flashing me one last smile, Alpha covers her face with the bodysuit and then disappears through the window.

Chapter 15

Oh Wow, What a Wonderful Idea (In a Monotone Voice)

“Is that it for your report?”

Asks a beautiful girl with red hair the shade of flames. The red hair that reaches all the way down her back glitters in the candlelight, as her wine-red eyes flash over the investigative report. That imposing, beautiful figure of hers makes the reporting knight’s cheeks dye red.

“Th-, that is all, Iris-sama. We will continue our investigation.”

Iris nods, then gestures for the knight to leave the room.

When the door closes, only Iris and a handsome, blond-haired man are left alone in the room.

“Marquis Zenon, thank you very much for your help this time.”

“The incident occurred with school grounds, so I am also partly responsible. But more than that, I am also worried about Alexia-sama...”

Zenon looks down and bites his lower lip in frustration.

“You also have your duties as the Swordsmanship Instructor. I am sure no one would find fault with you for this. For now, what we should focus on is not who to blame, but to safely rescue Alexia.”

“Indeed...”

“So.”

Iris suddenly closes the report folder.

“How sure are you of the probability of this student Sid Kagenou being the culprit?”

“I am also loathe to consider a student of the academy a culprit, but circumstances show him to be the most suspicious. But when considering his strength, it is highly unlikely for him to win if he faces off against Alexia-sama in a direct fight.”

Zenon chose his words carefully while replying.

“In which case, it would either mean that he has an accomplice, or that he had to have used drugs of some sort. But he didn’t confess to anything even under the interrogation of the knights, right? Are you sure about this?”

“I want to believe in him. I truly do.”

Iris nods, then closes her eyes.

“You have already assigned trustworthy knights to follow him, right? Then there’s nothing else that we can do aside from waiting for their report.”

“I shall pray for Alexia-sama’s safety.”

With a bow, Zenon turns to exit the room.

But at that very moment, a single girl slides into the room through the door that Zenon had just opened.

“Iris-sama! Please listen to me!”

“Clare-kun, what do you think you are doing! Please pardon her rudeness, I’ll bring her back out immediately!”

Zenon seizes the girl who just slid in, Claire Kagenou, and tries to drag her out.

“Marquis Zenon, who is this?”

Iris stops Zenon and asks.

“She...”

“My name is Claire Kagenou! I am Sid Kagenou’s older sister!”



“Claire-kun! S-, she is an exemplary student at the academy, and is currently temporarily with the Knight Order on a sort of experience program.”

“I see... Very well, you may speak.”

“Thank you very much!”

Claire Kagenou proceeds before Iris in supplication.

“My little brother, Sid, would never do something like kidnapping Princess Alexia! I’m sure there must be some big mistake here!”

“The Knight Order is conducting their investigation with the utmost caution so that there would be no mistakes. It is still not yet confirmed that your younger brother is the culprit.”

“But the way things are currently going, if the real culprit is not found, it will be him who gets executed!”

“The Knight Order is being very careful. They will not mistakenly execute the wrong person.”

“But still!”

“Claire-kun!”

Zenon stops Claire as she frantically tries to press closer to Iris.

“Claire-kun, leave it at that. Anymore would be an affront to the Knight Order!”

“*Kuh...!*”

Claire glares first at Zenon, then at Iris.

“If anything happens to that child...!”

“Claire-kun, don’t you dare finish that sentence!”

Covering Claire’s mouth with his hand, Zenon drags Claire out of the room.

BAM.

Staring at the forcefully closed door, Iris sighs deeply.

“So our love for our family is the same, huh...”

She murmurs.

“Alexia, please be safe...”

Long ago, these two sisters were very close.

But when was it that they began to pass by each other?

How many years has it been since they last talked?

Could it be that they would never again be able to talk with each other?

“Alexia...”

As she closes her wine-red eyes, a single tear rolls down her cheek.



When Alexia opened her eyes, she found herself in a dim room.

No window, and only a single lit candle.

The walls are stone, and a sturdy-looking door is right in front.

“This is...”

She has no memory of anything after separating from Pochi after school.

When she tries to move her body, she hears the clinking of metal rubbing against metal.

Looking towards the origin of the sound, she realizes that all four of her limbs are chained to a pedestal.

“Magic-sealing chains...”

She cannot use her magic. Escaping by herself would be difficult in the extreme.

Exactly who was it that took her away, and for what purpose? Kidnapping, coercion, human trafficking... a train of possibilities flit through her mind, but there's no way to confirm.

Alexia is not in the line of succession for the crown. But her status as a princess still has a certain amount of utility value. This she knows.

However, the information she has on hand at the moment is really too little to draw any conclusions with

Alexia stops thinking about it, but then a different thought suddenly comes up in her head.

Is Pochi alright?

The boy with a terrible personality who had recently become her friend. She is quite fond of him, because he always saying things to her straight without any fear.

If he was truly caught up in this, then by now he is probably... let's stop there.

Alexia shakes her head, then looks around.

Stone walls, iron door, candle stand... and a black mound that looks like trash.

That mound is right next to Alexia, and for some reason is chained up.

Upon closer inspection, Alexia notices a slight movement.

It is breathing.

The 'mound' is a living creature wearing tattered rags.

“You there, can you hear my vo-...!”

The creature moves, and looks at Alexia.

The 'creature'... is a monster.

It is an extremely emaciated monster restrained with chains.

Its black, festering face only barely retains what seems to be eyes, a nose, and a mouth. Its entire body is bloated in a non-uniform manner, with its left arm even longer than Alexia's leg. In contrast, its right arm is shorter and thinner than Alexia's own, and seems to be affixed to its chest as if clutching something.

Such a monster is right beside Alexia.

Whereas Alexia has all four limbs chained up, that monster is only chained by its neck. If it reaches out with its long arm, it might actually be able to reach Alexia.

In order to not aggravate the monster, Alexia lowers the sound of her breathing and looks away.

But the monster is looking at her.

Alexia can feel the monster's gaze on her body.

After a period of silence that seems as if time had stopped...

Jyarara, the sound of chains rings in the air.

Peering from the corner of her eye, Alexia sees that the monster has curled up and gone to sleep.

Alexia breathes a sigh of relief.

After another while, the door in front is opened.

"Finally! Finally, I have gotten my hands on it!"

The person who comes in is a skinny man wearing a labcoat.

His cheeks are hollow, his eyes are sunken, and his lips are cracked.

His sparse hair is sticking to his skin and giving off a horrible smell.

Alexia quietly observes the man.

“Blood of the royals, blood of the royals, blood of the royals!”

Blood of the royals.

The man continues to repeat that phrase while taking out a contraption connected to a thin needle.

It seems that he intends to draw her blood. The royal physicians have done it to her a few times before, so she recognizes what that contraption is.

But.

She does not understand why this man wants her blood so badly that he would go to the trouble of kidnapping her.

“May I ask something?”

Alexia’s voice is steady.

“N, nn?”

The man replies Alexia with some weird grunting.

“Why do you want my blood?”

“Y-, y-, your blood is demonic blood. It can revive the demons in this day and age!”

Alexia has no idea what he’s talking about, but at least can gather that he is not right in his mind, and that he is in some sort of a cult.

“But it would be a bit of a problem if you draw too much of my blood. I’m not quite ready to die yet.”

“Hihi, hi, n-, no worries. I want a, a lot so I’ll c-, come everyday to d-, drain a little at a time.”

“Wonderful, let’s go with that then.”

As long as this man needs her blood, then chances are low that she would be killed.

Do not resist, remain cooperative. Alexia determined that her best choice of action at the moment is to wait for rescue.

“It, it wasn’t supposed t-, to be like this. It was all the f-, fault of those i-, idiots!”

“I understand, I hate idiots too.”

‘Because dealing with you is tiring’, whispers Alexia to herself while looking at the man in the labcoat.

“M-, my research, all, all destroyed! They got to that idiot Olba first.”

“That’s right, that idiot Olba was the first.”

“After that, again and again and AGAAAIINNNN! AAAARRRRRRHHHHH!”

“How terrible. It must have been hard on you.”

“YES, YES IT WAS! MY, MY RESEARCH IS SO CLOSE! SO CLOSE, SO CLOSE, BUT IF I DON’T FINISH IT, I’LL, I’LL BE EXCOMMU-, EXCOMMUNICATEEDDD...!”

“What, how could they!”

“SH-, SHIT, SO USELESS, SO USELEESSSS!”

The man in the labcoat rushes towards the chained up monster and kicks it violently.

Again and again, he kicks it and stomps on it.

The monster simply curls up and does not react.

“Weren’t you going to draw my blood?”

“Oh right, oh right, your blood, as long as I have your blood I can finish...!”

“Isn’t that great?”

The man picks up the contraption and sticks the needle into Alexia’s arm.

“With this, with this! I can finish, I won’t be excommunicated!”

“Please do it painlessly, ok?”

‘Otherwise I’d want to punch you,’ adds Alexia inside her mind.

The needle enters Alexia’s arm.

Alexia looks on like it’s someone else’s business as the glass container is gradually filled with red blood.

“Hihi, hihhi...”

When the glass container is fully filled, the man cradles it with utmost care and leaves the room.

Alexia waits for the door to close before heaving a long sigh.



Everything was for the sake of this day.

Two days after my release from the knights, I am in my dorm room, sorting through my power in shadows collection and picking out what I can use.

Cigar... it’ll be a long while yet until when I would be of the appropriate age to use it well.

Vintage wine... this is a rare one from Portau in southwestern France that is worth 900,000 Zeny. Good, this is just right for the moonless night tonight.

Which means I need the ultimate glass to go with this... ah yes, the only glass made by Vuitton. This is also French-made, and costed me 45,000 Zeny.

Then there’s also this antique lamp... and this... this too... oh right, and this legendary painting called ‘The Scream’ that I had coincidentally picked up that time. It goes on the wall like so, and... ahh, perfect.

My heart feels so full.

Bandit hunting and crawling on the ground picking up gold coins was all for the sake of this.

I shed a tear of admiration for this room that I had decorated with the very best items from my collection.

The coup de grace is this invitation that I had received just today. Then all that's left to do is to wait.

I continue waiting, for that moment.

Waiting.

Waiting...

Waiting in suspense!

Until... Finally!

The moment the girl clad in black comes in through the window, I open my mouth.

“The time has come... Tonight shall belong to the world of shadows...”

Verily, everything was for the sake of this very day!

Chapter 16

Currently Writing the Complete Version of 'The War Chronicles of Shadow-sama'

"The time has come... Tonight shall belong to the world of shadows..."

Those were the words that greeted Beta the moment she got to Shadow's place.

Shadow is sitting in a chair with his legs crossed and his back to Beta.

The back looks defenseless, but Beta knows that it is the furthest thing in the world.

In his hand is a wine glass glittering under the light of an antique lamp. And the wine that he is drinking without a care... even Beta, who knows almost nothing about wine, recognizes the label as one of the most precious in the world.

Beta is shocked at seeing the various first grade items decorating the room, until she notices the painting on the wall.

It is Munch's 'The Scream.'

It is known as a phantom treasure that cannot be attained regardless of how much wealth one is willing to offer.

Beta almost wanted to ask how on earth he got his hands on it... but then realized that there would be no meaning in such a question.

Because it is him. That's why.

That single phrase is more than sufficient explanation in and of itself.

The fact that he owns 'The Scream' feels only natural. More like, it could be said that there is no one in the entire world more fitting to own this item.

"The world of shadows. It's true that with the moon hidden, tonight is indeed a world

most fitting for us.”

Says Beta.

Shadow gives Beta a single glance, then only brings the glass to his lips again.

“All the preparation is ready.”

“I see.”

He already knows everything. So sagacious is his voice, that Beta feels herself almost hallucinating so.

Actually, he most definitely already knows everything that Beta will tell him now.

But even so, Beta will say them. For this is her mission.

“Under Alpha-sama’s order, everyone nearby who could move have been gathered in the royal capital. Our total number is 114.”

“114?”

“...!”

Is it too few?

Considering Shadow Garden’s battle strength, this should be sufficient though.

But... no.

Beta realizes that she has misunderstood.

114 random riff raff would, in the end, be but supporting actors. In truth, the ones who truly matter are not even 10% of that number. And tonight, he is the main character. The moment she realizes that the role of the supporting actors is to show up the main character, then 114 is truly, truly too little.

“W-, we’re so so-...!”

“Extras, huh.”

His words cut off Beta's apology. What is an 'extra'? Beta does not understand the meaning of that word.

"No matter. Don't mind it, that was just me talking to myself."

"Yes, my lord."

Beta knows better than to ask any further. Every single thing he says contains meaning so deep that Beta cannot even imagine how far it goes. She has neither the privilege nor the strength to ask.

But, still.

One day, she will stand next to him, and she will be strong enough to support him in everything he does. That goal is what fuels Beta's very being.

One day. For the sake of that day.

Beta continues speaking.

"The strategy is to simultaneously attack all hideouts of the Fenrir branch of the Order of Diabolos that are scattered across the royal capital. While attacking, we will also search for Princess Alexia's magic signature. The moment her position is confirmed, we will immediately change gears towards her protection and extraction."

Shadow only nods, as an indication for her to continue.

"Overall command will be handled by Gamma, but the on-scene command will be taken by Alpha-sama, with me as support. Epsilon will be in charge of logistical support, and Delta will spearhead the attacks and initiate the start signal. The composition of each squad is..."

Before Beta goes into further detail, Shadow raises one hand to stop her.

In his hand is a single piece of paper.

"It's an invitation."

After catching the letter that was thrown her way, she reads it as instructed.

“This is...”

An invitation that was written so badly that it makes Beta both exasperated and furious.

“I’m sorry for Delta, but... I will be the one to play the prelude.”

“Yes, my lord. I will make the arrangements.”

“Come along, Beta.”

So saying, he turns around.

“Tonight, the world shall learn of our existence...”

Beta is shivering with the delight of being allowed to fight by his side.



The place written on the invitation is a spot deep inside the woods, close to where Princess Alexia was abducted. Shadow approaches in his school uniform.

Beta is hidden a slight distance away, keeping her presence suppressed.

After a short while, two new presences draw near.

Then something suddenly flies towards Shadow.

Catching it with one hand, he takes a look at it, then mutters.

“This... is Alexia’s shoe, huh.”

At which point.

The figures of two men step out onto the woodland path.

“Hey there, lady-killer. What are you doing, holding Princess Alexia’s shoe and standing there?”

“A~h, now your magic signature is all over it. You are the culprit, Sid Kagenou.”

The two men are wearing the Knight Order's equipment.

Without mistake, these two are the ones who had interrogated Sid.

"I see, so that's the way you're doing this."

"Yep, this is the way we're doing this."

The knights don't even make an effort to refute Sid's words, only smirking in return.

"If you had only confessed earlier, then we wouldn't have had to go to all this trouble, you know?"

"And you would also have been able to get through everything without having to suffer all that pain."

The two unsheath their swords, then immediately charge towards him without warning.

How foolish... Beta finds herself struck dumb at the foolishness of these two.

"Well then, Sid Kagenou. We need to detain you on suspicion of kidnapping the princess."

"Don't bother resisting, there'd be no point."

One of them is laughing while thrusting his sword towards Sid.

At that moment.

"O?"

Sid stops the sword with two fingers, after which there is a flash of light.

Sid's left leg had just barely touched the man's neck.

But blood spurts out from that neck.

And there is now a jet black blade dripping with blood extending from Sid's left foot.

"Ah... ah..... h...!!"

The man collapses while clasping his neck. It won't be long till he dies.

"YOU FUCKER, WHAT DID YOU DO?!"

The other man slashes at Sid in a fluster.

But his attacks are too simple, too crude.

Sid evades by merely tilting his head, then kicks the man's leg in exchange.

Everything below the man's knee is suddenly gone.

"AAAAAAAHHHHHHH!!!"

The man screams while clutching onto the knee that is fountaining blood.

"My l-, MY LEEGGGG!!!"

Then he begins crawling on the ground, desperately trying to distance himself from Sid.

"You bastard, don't think you can get away with doing something like this to us knights...! If, if we die, you will be the one that everyone suspects first!"

Sid only quietly walks along the path of blood painted by the man crawling on the ground.

"*Hii, hiiii...!* Y-, you're finished...! Finished, I say...!"

The man continues crawling in an unsightly manner, fueled by pure desperation.

"When night lifts... your two bodies will be found."

"Y-, yea, when day comes you'll be finished...!"

The man crawls on the ground, while Sid walks on the trail of blood.

"But there is nothing to fear."

It was a mere moment.

The man suddenly realizes that Sid has already caught up.

“Hi!”

Sid’s left foot flashes.

“When night lifts... *everything* will be finished.”

The man’s head flies through the air.

With the fountain of blood in the background, Sid turns around.

Beta cannot help but to shiver at the sight.

The Sid wearing his school uniform is no longer there.

In his place is Shadow in pure black.

Jet black bodysuit and jet black boots. In his hand is a jet black blade, and his jet black longcoat flutters in the wind.

With the hood of his long coat pulled forward, the top of his face is hidden in shadows, revealing only the bottom half.

And even that face is covered with a magician’s mask, such that the only visible part of his actual face is the red eyes glowing within the darkness.

Beta almost faints at the sight of that imposing and beautiful figure, but gathers herself together and takes out, from between her cleavage, the the memopad of the book that she is writing, *The War Chronicles of Shadow-sama*. With a *shubabababa*, her pencil flies over the paper as a sketch takes form.

Right beside the sketch, she adds today’s Shadow-sama’s analects. All done in merely 5 seconds.

This is a digression, but in Beta’s room, there is a whole wall covered with sketches of Shadow-sama and compilations of his analects. Penning the *War Chronicles of Shadow-sama* before going to sleep is Beta’s irreplaceable enjoyment.

Then, suddenly the sound of an explosion echoes from afar, drawing Beta back to

reality.

“Delta, huh... the nocturne has begun. Beta, let’s go.”

“Yes, my lord! Right away!”

Beta shoves the memopad back into her cleavage, then hurries after him.

Of course, he knows nothing about this magnum opus that she is working on.

Chapter 17

Fragment of Diabolos! Squish!

“Wh-, who are you, what have we ever done to you?!?!”

Sea of blood.

So shouts a man in a place truly fitting of that phrase.

‘That’ had come all too suddenly.

Without prior notice, without any explanation, suddenly busting a hole through the wall and beginning to massacre everyone.

Just now, one more fell to that jet black blade.

Not a single person has anymore intention of fighting ‘That.’ The only thing in their hearts is the thought of escape.

But the sole exit is behind ‘That.’

“What the hell did we ever do to you guys?! Nothing, we did nothing!”

‘That’ turns towards the man... and sneers.

“Hiii...!”

Even though the face of ‘That’ is hidden behind a jet black mask, the man can almost palpitably feel its complete disregard for his life.

“Please s-, save me...!”

The man’s body vertically splits into two.

Bisected from the crown of his head to his crotch, spraying blood everywhere while falling down.

‘That’ stands unmoving, blissfully bathing in the shower of blood.

Its figure is female, but its appearance is truly that of a demon.

‘That’ looks around and, upon noticing that there are only very few prey left, extends its sword.

The jet black sword extended.

Not in the metaphorical sense, but literally. It even stabbed into the opposing wall.

‘That’ gives its sword a big swing.

“No, NO, N-...!”

Everything, even the building itself, was cut through.



“So it has begun.”

Atop a clock tower, a beautiful elf watches on as an entire building is severed like a joke and subsequently collapses.

Her golden blond hair flows in the wind, sparkling in the dark of night.

“Delta... that girl always goes too far.”

She sighs, and shakes her head.

But there’s no helping what’s done.

Alpha looks over the entire royal capital from the clock tower.

At which moment, flurried movement erupts throughout the entire royal capital.

Exactly according to plan, everything has been set in motion.

But most of the attention has been drawn towards the building that Delta had cut apart.

“It is a fact that thanks to Delta, it will be easier for the others to move, but still...”

As long as all the collateral damage is ignored, then it can be said that she has completed her mission with a perfect score.

“It’s about time for me to move out as well.”

So murmuring, Alpha covers her face with her jet black mask.



The outside is very noisy.

Alexia opens her eyes.

The only people who come into this room are the man in a labcoat and the woman who takes care of her needs. In her position of being bound to the pedestal by all four limbs, there’s really nothing else for Alexia to do than to sleep.

As for her monster roommate, the two of them have an unspoken mutual non-interference agreement, so they get along alright.

The tumult outside gradually grows in noise, until it reaches the level where Alexia can tell that there is some fighting going on.

Alexia smiles in expectation of rescue.

“Can they perhaps bust through the wall with a big bang?”

So whispers Alexia with no particular reason. She probably just has quite a bit of stress built up.

She shakes her chains hard to make them ring, even while knowing that such an action would be of no meaning.

At which time.

“Oh, I’m sorry, I must have woken you up.”

The monster next to her raises its head.

“But I think you might want to stay awake for this. I’m sure it’s going to get fun.”

Though Alexia knows that she would get no reply, she still couldn’t help but to speak to it.

Boredom makes people go mad.

After a short while, she hears the door being unlocked. And it is in a hurried, unsettled manner too.

“Shit, shit!!”

Labcoat man opens the door with force and rushes in.

“Good day, isn’t it? How do you do?”

“Just a little more. I WAS SO SO CLOSE!!”

The man ignores Alexia’s clearly sarcastic greeting.

“Th-, they came!! They came for me!! It’s over, everything is over...!”

“I advise you to give up, resistance is useless. If you release me from my chains, I’d help to ask them to spare your life at least.”

‘But only ask,’ adds Alexia silently.

“L-, like they’ll let me go...! D-, dead, everyone is dead! Th-, they are killing everyone!!”

“The Knight Order won’t indiscriminately kill people without reason. If you don’t resist, then they won’t take your life.”

‘Since when have they been so nice?’ Alexia laughs at her own lie inside her mind.

“Knight Order? What do I care about the Knight Order! N-, no, they’re killing everyone! Everyone!!”

“It’s not the Knight Order?”

If that’s true, then who is it? No, there is the possibility that this man is just confused.

“Either way, you’re finished. Just give up.”

“No, th-, this cannot be! No, no, no, No, NO, NO, NONONONONO!! I... as long as I finish this!!”

Tearing at his hair, the man then turns his bloodshot eyes towards the monster.

“P-, prototype, right! W-, with this, even a failure l-, like you can be of use!”

With that, he picks up a contraption with a needle, which he inserts into the monster’s arm.

“I think you probably shouldn’t do that. I’m getting a really bad premonition.”

So says Alexia in a serious tone.

Of course the man ignores her and injects some sort of fluid into the monster’s arm through the needle.

“Be-, behold! This is a F-, Fragment of Diabolos!!”

“Oh, fun.”

Almost immediately, the monster’s body rapidly swells up. Its muscles begin to fill out at a visible rate, and even its bones begin to lengthen. Its originally thick left arm turns even more fiendish, even more sinister, and the claws attached to it grow to the size of a human foot. Its right arm, however, remains unchanged in both size and position, still making it look as if it is cradling something to its chest.

The monster lets loose a high-pitched roar.

“H-, how wonderful! How splendid!!!”

“This... is shocking indeed.”

But of course, the monster’s restraints were unable to withstand the monster’s sudden gain in size. With a clang, the chain ring around the monster’s neck snaps open and flies off.

“And that is precisely why I warned you to stop!”

And then, squish.

The man wearing the labcoat was smashed into a pulp by the monster's left arm.

"Well then."

Alexia and the monster stare at each other.

Alexia is paying full attention to the monster's movements. Having all four limbs restrained, the things that Alexia can do are extremely limited. But the list of options is not entirely empty.

She has no intention of dying from being mere collateral due to someone else's idiocy.

The monster brandishes its left arm.

Immediately, Alexia twists her body as far as she can. As long as she avoids a fatal strike...!

"...!"

The monster's left arm misses Alexia, and instead pulverizes the pedestal under her. The shockwave still hits her though, slamming her against the far wall and leaving her groaning with the pain.

"Guh...!"

But none of her bones are broken, and none of her wounds are serious. She can still move.

After confirming her own physical condition, Alexia quickly stands back up.

But.

The monster is no longer here.

The destroyed pedestal, and busted wall.

"Could it be... that it helped me?"

Even though Alexia could not move, the blow had still missed. But if that's so... no,

there is the possibility that it had just mis-aimed.

“Anyways.”

Alexia searches for the key for her shackles from the squashed pile that used to be the labcoat man, then frees herself. Finally, she can use magic again.

After stretching her body a few times to warm up, she exits through the hole left behind by the monster.

It is a dim hallway.

The soldiers that the monster seem to have killed by running over are lying in heaps on top of each other.

“Guess you won’t be needing this sword anymore.”

Alexia seizes a mithril sword from one of the corpses. It’s a cheap mass produced item, but it would have to do for now.

(T/N: Wow a world where mithril is cheap.)

She continues proceeding down the corridor, until she turns a corner.

“Oh dear, this cannot do. Things would get quite troublesome if you escape.”

“Y-, you, why are you here?!”

Alexia’s eyes open wide in shock.

Chapter 18

Keep Watching from Below the Stage

‘What on earth is happening?’

Iris is dashing through the royal capital at full speed in the dead of night, her red hair fluttering after her.

A building was cut. She doubted her ears when such a report came to her. But while heading towards the scene torn between belief and disbelief, successive reports reached her continuously.

Large scale attacks are occurring simultaneously all over the royal capital.

It did not take long to draw such a conclusion. But problem is, the targets of attack share no point of commonality that they can determine. A trading firm, a warehouse, an eatery, a noble’s private residence... the fact that these attacks were premediated is clear to see, but their aim is unclear.

But it is actual fact that the entire royal capital is currently shaking.

All members of the Knight Order have been dispatched as emergency response, and the evacuation of important people are underway. Many citizens are watching from their windows despite the late hour, and not few of them are even approaching the attack sites in curiosity.

Iris continues rushing towards the biggest scene, all while shouting at any citizens she passes by to return to their homes.

This is definitely no simple incident.

Iris’ intuition is telling her so.

Then abruptly.

A scream reaches Iris’ ears.

“M-, monster! It’s a monster, we need reinfor-...!!”

It is a knight’s voice. He is not far.

Iris changes her direction and heads straight for the origin of that scream.

She turns the corner, takes an alleyway, then comes out onto a main avenue... a monster is there.

A gigantic, ugly monster.

It is swinging around its bloated, bloodstained left claw, reducing the nearby knights into meat patties.

“What is this...?!”

Though surprised, Iris does not stop moving.

“Fall back!”

Unsheathing in a flowing motion, followed by a flash of white in the darkness that runs through the monster’s torso.

All the way through.

The huge monster was cut down, just like that.

“Are you all alright?”

Not even bothering to look at the falling monster behind her, Iris immediately addresses the knights.

“Thank you for saving us, Iris-sama!”

“As expected of Iris-sama! To bring down such a monster with only one swing!”

All of the knights turn out to be largely unscathed. The ones that are still alive, that is.

“We lost 8 men.”

Only one blow per person, that's all it took.

Iris' wine-red eyes are shaking at the sight of their gruesome corpses.

"You all go on ahead and retrieve the remains. I will report to your squad lea-..."

"IRIS-SAMA!"

Abruptly, one of the knights raises a shout.

The others also point behind her with voiceless shouts.

"Wha-...!"

Iris brandishes her sword even while turning.

At which time, her sword clashes with the monster's left arm.

"*Kuh...*!"

Finding herself being pushed back, she immediately releases an enormous amount of magic to reinforce herself, which gives her enough strength to fully receive the blow.

Riding the momentum, she dashes into the monster's chest and severs its legs. Keeping her eye fully affixed on the monster this time, she retreats from its maai.

The very next moment, the monster's left arm mows through her previous position, flying past so closely that the wind pressure severs several strands of her red hair.

"It is regenerating...?"

The bisecting wound that she had inflicted earlier is already nowhere to be seen, and its legs are also already regenerating at a visible rate.

"Impossible... to be cut in half by Iris-sama but still regenerating..."

"You're joking, right...?"

"All of you, fall back."

Iris calls out to the shaken knights while stepping forward to receive the monster's follow up attack.

That attack has speed, has strength, and has weight.

But it is too simplistic.

"A mere monster in the end."

There is no mercy in Iris' counterattack.

Cutting up its arms, severing its legs, and detaching its head

Her attacks rain upon the monster in unceasing fashion, as if to say "if you can regenerate this, then let's see you do it!" in brazen challenge.

No resistance is allowed. The monster can only stand in place and be one-sidedly cut up.

But, even with that.

"You're still regenerating?"

The monster still lives.

Taking advantage of a brief moment between Iris' attacks, it brandishes its left arm, forcing Iris to jump back.

Then.

It lifts its face towards the night sky and lets out a high-pitched roar.

Almost as if in the response, the empty, black sky begins to rain.

It starts off as a drizzle. Then gradually it grows heavier, causing white steam to raise up wherever the rainwater comes into contact with the monster's blood.

"Seems this is going to take a while..."

Iris gives up on a quick conclusion, and readjusts her stance while deciding on how to

fight.

She does not think she will lose. In fact, up till this point, Iris has yet to feel even once the possibility of her losing.

However, this seems like it'll take quite some time.

Bringing her sword up, Iris once again dashes towards the monster.

But at that moment.

With a shrill sound, Iris finds her sword flying out of her hands.

It was because of a blow so heavy that even her hands have gone numb.

After a sideways glance at her beloved sword flying far away behind her, Iris glares at the sudden interloper.

The interloper also gives Iris a look.

Their eyes clash. It is the interloper who first breaks the silence.

“Why can’t you see that she is just in pain? And that all you are doing is torturing her?”

It is a female wearing a jet black bodysuit. Her face is hidden, but her voice sounds young.

“Who are you?”

With her guard up all the way, Iris shifts herself so that she can see both the monster and the interloper at the same time.

“Alpha.”

After that single word, the female turns her back on Iris, as if having lost all interest in her.

“Wait a moment. What do you plan to do? If you are an enemy of the Knight Order, then we will show you no mer-...”

“ ‘Enemy’...?”

Alpha cuts off Iris’ words and laughs without turning around.

It is a laugh full of ridicule.

“ ‘Enemy’... To think that the princess would be capable of such a joke. To mention the word despite not knowing anything... know your presumptuousness.”

“What did you say...!”

Iris’ magic swells up. The almost explosive increase causes a wave that blows away even the rain and raises a wind.

But Alpha does not spare even a glance. She still has her back to Iris.

“The audience should just keep watching from below the stage like the audience they are and not get in our way.”

Leaving behind only these words, she begins walking towards the monster.

There is no hostility in her back profile. It is clear that Iris is not even in her mind anymore.

“ ‘Audience’...”

Clenching her still numb fists, Iris can do nothing aside from silently glaring at that dismissive back.

“You poor thing. It must have hurt a lot, didn’t it?”

Alpha continues walking towards the monster while talking to it.

“You no longer have to suffer. Neither do you have to be sad.”

Her jet black blade extends. To a length greater than’s Alpha’s own height.

“That’s why, don’t cry anymore, ‘k?”

Then with the most natural of movements, she takes one more step forward, and the

monster's body is bisected again.

No one could react.

Not Iris, not even the monster, could do anything before it was cut.

It was all too natural. There was no killing intent. The cut seemed to have simply manifested as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

The large body collapses. The rain comes into contact with its blood, raising a huge plume of white smoke. The body itself shrinks, until it reaches the size of a young girl. Then from its right hand, a short sword falls out.

It is a short sword inset with a red jewel.

'To My Beloved Daughter, Emilia'

That was carved into the handle.

"I pray... that you find peace in your next life."

So saying, Alpha disappears into the white smoke.

Thunder roars in the distance.

Iris simply stands dumbstruck. The falling rain flows along over her hair and her face.

But her body is shivering.

Iris does not know the meaning of this shivering.

"Alexia..."

So whispers Iris. Her little sister is in the middle of this entire incident. Iris' intuition is telling her so.

"Alexia, please be safe..."

Coming back to her senses, Iris picks up her sword, then runs off.

The rain continues to fall heavily.

Chapter 19

Far Off Memory

“Y-, you, why are you here?!”

Upon turning a corner, Alexia finds before her a face that she is quite familiar with.

“There’s no ‘why’ about it. This facility is mine, after all. I made an investment in that man. That’s all there is to it.”

Blond hair, a well-featured face, and that confident smile. It is none other than Zenon-sensei.

“What a relief. I’ve always thought that you must have some screws loose in your head. Feels good to be proven right.”

So says Alexia while slowly backing up, one step at a time.

Behind Zenon is a flight of stairs. Most likely, that is the way out.

“Is that so? I don’t care what you feel though. All I want is your blood.”

“Every single person here keeps going on and on about blood. Are you guys researching vampires in here?”

“For you, it might be something similar.”

“Wasn’t actually hoping for an answer. I have zero interest in the occult.”

“Thought as much.”

“I’m sure you already know, but the Knight Order will arrive very soon. You’re already finished.”

“Finished? Exactly what is it of mine that would be finished?”

Zenon's smile is the same as ever.

"Your social status and prestige will be ripped from you, and of course your life too. I'll drop the guillotine blade for you."

"See, that's not gonna happen. Because you and I will be escaping through an escape tunnel. Together."

"Wow, what a romantic invitation. But unfortunately, I hate your very guts."

"Oh, you will come with me. With your blood and my experiments, the 12th Seat of the Rounds will be mine. The status of such a position is like heaven and earth in comparison to a worthless position like 'Swordsmanship Instructor.' "

" 'Rounds'? Is that what you and your group of crazy friends call yourselves?"

"Twelve knights recognized and chosen by the Order, 'Knights of Rounds.' Status, prestige, and wealth, everything will come to my hands at a rate incomparable to anything before. My strength has already been acknowledged. The only thing that I have left to do is to present a tangible achievement, but that will soon be cleared too, courtesy of your blood and my research."

(T/N: Yep this naming is a reference to the Knights of the Round Table. But the author even used katakana to indicate that he wants them to be called Knights of Rounds, so I'm going to stick with that.)

Zenon spreads his hands theatrically and laughs.

"Really couldn't care less. More like, I'm getting tired of this stupid conversation about blood."

"To be honest, if I could choose, I'd have preferred Princess Iris' blood, but I suppose I'll have to make do with yours."

"I will fucking kill you."

"Oh, pardon, you dislike being compared to your sister, right?"

"...!"

Alexia's flare of killing intent turns into the starting bell of their fight.

Her sword flies straight to Zenon's neck, but...

"Ooooo, so scary."

It is repelled by Zenon at the last possible moment.

Then he also proceeds to handle Alexia's follow up attacks.

The two swords collide violently again and again, filling the air with sparks.

Just by looking at the exchange of blows and the two swords dancing through the air, it can perhaps be said that the two are equal.

However, the facial expression of the two are in sharp contrast.

Alexia's is grim, while Zenon's is a relaxed smile.

Sure enough, the one at a disadvantage is Alexia.

After a soft click of the tongue, Alexia retreats from Zenon's maai.

"In the short time that I haven't seen you, it seems that you've changed to using a rather cheap sword."

What Zenon is looking at is Alexia's sword. Alexia also looks at it, albeit with a bitter expression. Although it hasn't been long since the start of the fight, her blade is already chipped in numerous places.

"Masters don't choose their sword, right?"

Alexia decides to put up a strong front.

"That's true. Actual masters, that is."

Zenon scoffs.

"But you, you are a commoner. That I can guarantee, as the Swordsmanship Instructor."

Alexia's face visibly distorts.

For a split second, she looks close to tears, then the next moment it is all wiped away by a fierce anger.

“Then you keep looking. Whether or not I am a commoner.”

With another flare of killing intent, she dives back into the fray.

Alexia knows. She knows that even if she fights Zenon with normal circumstances, she wouldn't win. And now, her weapon is even a cheap, mass-produced sword. It will not last long.

However, Alexia has not been swinging her sword everyday for nothing. With her sister as a goal, she has been analyzing her own shortcomings, and pouring in effort to overcome them. And she has also seen her sister's sword up close far more than anyone else.

She is already capable of flawlessly tracing a tiny bit of her sister's sword.

Which is why she can easily pull off this move.

“HaaaAAAAHHH!”

That one attack truly resembled that of her sister's.

“...!”

For the first time, the smile is wiped off of Zenon's face.

He is also forced to inject magic into his sword.

The two swords meet in a violent clash, then bounce back from the recoil.

The two were equal... no.

It was Alexia who had come out slightly on top in that exchange.

There is a single red line left on Zenon's face.

With a surprised face, Zenon traces the cut with a finger, then confirms the redness on his finger.

“I’m surprised.”

It is pure and simple praise, with no hidden meanings at all.

“I truly did not expect you to be hiding something like this.”

Zenon continues gazing at his finger in different angles, as if to confirm the color of his blood.

“I will make you regret it if you underestimate me.”

“*Kuku.*”

However, the smile is back on Zenon’s face.

“I am indeed surprised. But I am only surprised. In the end, it is merely a mimicry. This is far too removed from the original.”

Zenon shakes his head.

“You sure know how to talk.”

“Since we’re at it, how about I get a bit serious?”

So saying, he takes a stance with his sword.

“...!”

The very air around them changes.

The magic surrounding Zenon qualitatively becomes sharper and more condensed.

“Allow me to say this beforehand. Up to now, I have never once gotten serious in front of outsiders. What you will now see is my true sword, and is also the strength of someone who will soon become a member of the Rounds.”

Then the air shakes.

“This...”

The very dimension that they are on is too far apart.

This strike contains far more power than Alexia has ever seen Zenon pour into his sword.

Genius and commoner... the gap between the two is too vast. The unbridgeable distance causes Alexia to despair.

She acknowledges that this man’s strength might even be enough to match her sister.

Alexia has no way to defend herself from the blade speeding towards her with overwhelming pressure.

It is only due to her many years of training that at least her body’s muscle memory kicks in.

However, there is no clash.

Sword meets sword... then Alexia’s sword simply shatters into pieces.

Alexia feels herself looking at those glittering fragments flying through the air as if it is somebody else’s business.

As if she is looking on from far away.

The far off memories from her childhood, when she had been swinging her sword because it was so fun, flashes through her mind.

And her sister had always been right beside her.

These are memories from so long ago that she had already forgotten them.

“You cannot be like your sister.”

A single tear falls from the corner of Alexia’s eye.

“You will come with me now.”

From her hand falls what is now a mere handle.

It makes a dry rattle upon hitting the ground.

Then at that moment.

Katsu. Katsu.

A sound of footsteps rings out from behind Zenon.

Katsu. Katsu. Katsu.

Someone is coming down the stairs.

When the sound finally stops...

A man wearing a jet black coat is there.

Chapter 20

“I AM...”

Clad in jet black from head to toe, deep hood pulled forward, face hidden behind a magician’s mask.

The man walks forward composedly, until finally stopping a step away from Zenon’s maai.

“The Black-Cloaked One... So you are the stray dog who has been barings fangs against the Order as of late.”

With a sharp glint in his eyes, Zenon glares at the man.

“My name is Shadow. I lurk in the shadows, and I hunt the shadows...”

It is a voice so deep and so low that it almost seems to be emanating from the bottom of an abyss.

“I see. You might be feeling full of yourself after crushing several of our small hideouts, but I shall enlighten you. In the hideouts that yov’re crushed, there hasn’t been a single person truly important to the Order. In other words, you are merely a coward who only targets the small fries.”

For some reason, the man who called himself Shadow is enemies with Zenon. For Alexia, this is great news. However, she can’t imagine this man being her ally either.

“Who I hunt, and where I hunt, it is all the same.”

“Unfortunately, it is not all the same. A core power of the Order is here. Today, you will be the one to be hunted. Such is your fate.”

Zenon turns his sword towards Shadow.

“I am Zenon Griphi, the person who will soon become the 12th Seat of the Rounds. Taking your life shall become my achievement!”

Then he flies towards Shadow with the force of a hurricane.

However.

Shadow's figure disappears, causing Zenon's thrust to pierce through empty air.

"Wha-...?!"

Immediately afterwards, Shadow is standing behind Zenon.

In a mere moment, his back had already been compromised.

He cannot move.

As if forgetting about the flow of time, Zenon holds his sword still, and even stops breathing, concentrating every last drop of his concentration towards his back.

No one moves.

Indeed, Shadow is only standing back to back with Zenon. With his arms crossed, no less.

Then comes a single question.

"So, this core power or whatever... where is he?"

Zenon's face distorts with the burning humiliation. Immediately, he turns round with a sharp mowing attack.

But there is no longer anyone there.

"How cou-...?!"

The rustle of a coat flutter turns his head.

He realizes that Shadow is now standing in his original position, looking as if nothing had happened.

Even as someone looking from the outside, Alexia could not catch what had happened. If there was no trickery or contrivance involved, then that would mean this man is

someone of quite some skill... no, one could even call him an aberrance.

Zenon pushes down his shaken heart, and slowly turns around.

“It seems that I had underestimated you a bit. Though they were small, it seems that you do indeed possess the strength to destroy several of our hideouts.”

This time, he has his guard up, and boosts himself with magic before facing Shadow again.

The magic gathered around him is making the air vibrate. And at a scale much larger than that attack that he had used to shatter Alexia’s sword.

Shadow is certainly powerful.

However, Zenon is no pushover either. Growing up amidst the furor of being called a wonder child, having taken the championship of several tournaments, until finally climbing to the position of Swordsmanship Instructor. In this country, there is no swordsman who doesn’t know the name of Zenon Griphi.

“I shall show you. This is the strength of someone a mere step away from becoming a member of the Rounds.”

So fast...!

Alexia’s eyes could only barely catch up with Zenon’s sword.

The white blade cleaves the air, flying straight towards Shadow’s neck.

However.

“What a dull sword...”

With a jet black blade that he seem to have drawn out of nowhere, he easily receives Zenon’s attack.

“*Kuh...!*”

Zenon tries to lock their swords together into a pushing contest.

But Shadow instead lets all the strength out of his sword and uses Zenon's momentum to fling him away.

"Fuh...!"

The last possible moment before smashing into the wall, Zenon performs an ukemi, then he recovers his stance.

But the disturbance in his heart is now clear on his face.

Neither of them move.

For Shadow, he is simply choosing not to move.

For Zenon, he cannot move.

Because he is under the illusion that every single one of his moves has been sealed.

"Not coming, Rounds-wannabe?"

"...!"

Zenon's face is dyed with rage. Anger towards his opponent, but even more than that, anger towards himself.

"DON'T YOU DARE TO BELITTLE ME!!!!!"

Along with his roar, he swings his sword.

Thrusts with the speed of a hurricane.

Continuous slashes with the fierceness of a raging fire.

But.

Not a single attack lands.

"AAAAaaaaaaaAAAAHHHHHHH!!!"

His battlecry echoes around the room empty.

It is almost like a practice session between an adult and a child.

Alexia watches this fight with enormous shock.

Has Zenon ever cut such a sorry figure before? With both his composed smile and his mask of being a person of character ripped off, but still he cannot reach. The strongest existence that Alexia knows is her sister. But even her sister would not be able to deal with Zenon so handily.

Kan. Kan. Kan.

The sword sounds ringing out are so light as to be out of place here.

It is unmistakably the sound of a practice session.

The jet black and white swords draw their arcs through the air.

Before she knew it, Alexia found herself mesmerized by the fight.

She is drawn deeper and deeper into the jet black blade, unable to tear her eyes away.

Why? Because it is...

“The commoner’s sword...”

It is the appearance of what lies beyond Alexia’s own sword.

It is the perfected state of the ideal sword that Alexia had been spending all her time thinking up. This is the sword for those without talent, without strength, without speed – a sword that can be reached solely by the accumulation of pure effort.

But her sword was compared to her sister’s and branded ‘the commoner’s sword,’ causing Alexia to lose her way.

Despite that, she couldn’t bring herself to give up on it.

That ‘commoner’s sword’ is now completely repressing the genius Zenon Griphi.

“Amazing...”

Alexia likes this sword.

By looking at someone's sword, you can see that path that they had trodden.

This sword is earnest and straightforward, a sword built up bit by bit.

Is it possible that her sister had been thinking the same thing?

"Nee-sama..."

Now, she feels like she finally understands her sister's words from that day.

"Gah... sh-, shit...!"

Zenon's body flies through the air, then crashes down. It is already the nth time.

Zenon glares at Shadow while breathing heavily.

His rage-filled eyes show that he still cannot accept this reality.

"Y-, you bastard, who are you...! Why do you hide yourself when you already possess such strength!"

With Shadow's strength, wealth and fame is but a fingertip away. And his strength would be known and feared across the world.

But no one has ever heard of Shadow's sword. Even if he hides his face, those who've seen his sword only once would never be able to forget it. But today is the first day that both Zenon and Alexia learned of the existence of someone with such strength in the sword.

"We are Shadow Garden. We lurk in the shadows, and hunt the shadows. That is all we live for..."

"Are you in your right mind?!"

Zenon's and Shadow's gazes clash.

Alexia is completely a mere bystander by this point.

Why are these two fighting? She doesn't know either one's reason nor aim.

Blood. Demon. And Order.

There are several keywords that she's already heard.

But she is not able to connect the dots into a complete picture. Perhaps it's only the ravings of deluded lunatics.

But, what if.

What if it is not mere ravings.

What if, in the shadows of this world, there is something of great enormity happening beyond Alexia's knowledge.

"V-, very well. Since you are serious about this, then I shall answer in turn."

So saying, Zenon takes out a red lozenge from his chest pocket.

"This lozenge can turn people into people who've crossed the limits of being human. We call them the Awakened. However, normal people are unable to properly control such power, and thus would self-destruct and die. But the Rounds are different. Only those capable of fully controlling that overwhelming power can be admitted into the Rounds."

Zenon swallows the lozenge in a breath.

And then.

"Awakened, 3rd."

Magic rips around as a roaring squall.

All of Zenon's injuries heal in a split second.

His muscles tighten, his pupils turn bloodshot, and his capillaries bulge out.

The weight of the power is so overwhelming that it seems it would crush anything in its way.

“I will show you the power of the world’s strongest.”

Says Zenon with the composed smile back on his face.

Without doubt, the current Zenon is far stronger than even Princess Iris.

In the face of such power, Alexia would have curled up and despaired. That is, if she hadn’t come to learn of Shadow’s sword.

For the current Alexia, Zenon’s current appearance is far from the title of ‘the strongest.’

Rather...

“So terrible...”

“How terrible...”

Alexia’s and Shadow’s voice overlapped.

The sword sought by the two of them are the same. Therefore, their sentiment is the same.

“Terrible, you say...?”

So asks Zenon, the smile gone from his face.

“Don’t pretend to be the strongest with that mere level of strength. It is an affront to the truly strong.”

“You fucker!”

“There is no path towards that title that involves reliance on borrowed power.”

For the first time today, Shadow’s magic gathers. Up to now, he has used only almost insignificant amounts of it.

Shadow’s magic condenses. It becomes so condensed that it can almost no longer be sensed.

But, just, what is this.

That rising magic is taking on the appearance of violet lines.

Numerous extremely, extremely thin strands. Like lightning, like blood vessels, it surrounds Shadow, painting an exquisite design.

“So pretty...”

Alexia is enchanted by the sight. Enchanted not by the beauty of the light, but by the beauty of the density of the refined magic. Enchanted to the point of yearning.

“What, is this...”

Zenon is shocked once again. He has never seen anyone use magic in this form.

“What true strength really is... burn it into your eyes.”

Magic gathers into the jet black blade and carves out a pattern.

It is a spiral that sucks in even more magic.

It is almost as if everything in the world is being sucked towards that spiral.

A terrifying amount of power now rests within that blade.

“This is my strongest.”

Shadow raises his sword into a stance.

It is the stance of a thrust.

It is a stance solely for the sake of a thrust.

“D-, don’t...”

What is shaking with that rattling sound?

Is it the earth?

Is it the air?

Is it Zenon?

No... it is all of them.

Everything is shaking.

Alexia realizes that she, too, is shaking.

But she is not afraid. Rather, she is ecstatic.

For this is her final destination.

This... is the sword of the strongest.

“Behold...”

The jet black sword clad in light is drawn back...

“Secret Technique: I AM TAEPODONG.”



...and then released.

Sound disappeared.

The torrent of light swallows Zenon, then rushes past Alexia.

It pierces through the wall, the earth, everything. It pierces, swallows, then soars into the sky.

And then... it explodes.

A pattern of light is seared into the night sky, casting a violet shade over the entire royal capital.

From far, far away... a violent wind reaches the capital belatedly. It instantaneously disperses all the rain clouds, shakes every house, shakes the earth, and then passes by.

The only thing left in its wake is a bright starry sky and the full moon.

Zenon was evaporated, with not even an atom left.

The hole bored through the wall continues all the way to aboveground.

And then... With a flip of his coat, Shadow fades back into the shadows.



Previously, there was a man who challenged the taepodong.

The man trained his body, his mentality, and his techniques.

But the taepodong was simply too far away, too high up.

But he did not give up.

At the end of his training of madness, he arrived at the answer.

Question: How can I not be evaporated by a taepodong?

Answer: I simply have to BE a taepodong.

Thus from the simple chain of inspiration was born the ultimate Secret Technique: 'I AM TAEPODONG.'



How long has she been standing in place, shell-shocked.

All of a sudden, Alexia realizes that someone is calling out her name.

"Alexia...! Alexia...!"

From far away, there is a breathless voice calling out to her.

Alexia recognizes that voice.

"Nee-sama... Iris nee-sama!!"

After shouting, she begins to run.

Passing through the large tunnel, all the way to the other side.

"Alexia, Alexia!"

Iris rushes over.

"Nee-sama, I...!"

Before Alexia can say anything else, she is wrapped into a hug.

Iris's body is drenched and cold, yet so warm at the same time.

"I'm so glad you're alright. Just... so glad."

More and more powerful is being poured into the hug.

Alexia hesitantly wraps her own arms around to Iris' back.

"I'm sorry, I must feel so cold."

Alexia shakes her head, buried in Iris' chest as it is.

For some reason, her tears just wouldn't stop.

Chapter 21

[Urgent Question]

The Way to Dispose of a Dead Body on Campus

[Anon]

Early summer finds two students standing together on a rooftop.

One of them is a beautiful teenage girl with silver-white hair.

The other is a common-looking teenage boy with black hair.

“In the shadows, it seems like the incident is still causing various waves, but for all appearances’ sake everything has been resolved. However, Nee-sama is setting up a specialist investigative squad, and I plan to help with that. So it can probably be said that for me, it was only the start of everything.”

So says the girl.

“Just keep it at a moderation, hm?”

So replies the boy.

“And thus, all suspicion against you have been cleared. Sorry for all the trouble.”

“That’s great and all, but...”

The wind blows between the two of them. The girl’s skirt flutters, revealing her white legs.

“...It’s fricking hot, so can we go inside already?”

The weather is great today. In other words, the summer sun is shining away at full blast. Deep shadows stretch from both their legs, and the sound of summer insects can be heard from far away.

“Wait. There are two things that I need to say.”

“Here?”

Here.”

The girl narrows her eyes and looks up at the blue sky.

“Firstly, I want to at least give you a word of thanks. That time, you told me that you like my sword. It’s a bit late, but thanks.”

“It’s fine, don’t worry about it.”

“I’ve finally come to like my own sword. None of the credit is yours, though.”

“I think you said a sentence too much there.”

“It’s the truth though.”

The two’s eyes clash. The one who looks away first is the boy.

“Well anyways, you came to like it, so good on you.”

“Yep, good on me.”

The girl smiles.

“So what’s the second thing?”

“We were pretending to go out up to now, but Zenon went and died.”

“Ah, so my role is finished? I’m fired?”

“The second thing is sort of a suggestion, actually.”

The girl stops talking for a while, as if she is searching for the words to say something hard to say.

“If it’s fine with you...”

Her red eyes are darting every which way.

“...What say you we continue this relationship for just a little while longer?”

The girl was finally able to say it all, albeit in a slightly quieter voice.

The boy flashes her a bright smile.

“I refuse.”

So he replies while sticking up a middle finger.

Immediately, the *schiiing* of a sword being unsheathed rings out.



Later in the day, another student came up to this rooftop, and discovered a huge bloodstain on the ground.

However, despite the large amount of blood, there was no corpse nearby. The students and school faculty investigated extensively, but there were zero reports of anyone being severely wounded or missing. Thus it became a cold case.

Aterwards, this became known as the ‘Corpseless Murder Incident,’ and entered the ranks of the school’s Seven Mysteries.

Cid Kagemou



(年齢) 15

(性別) 男

(名前) シド・カゲノ

モブにはモブの 戦いがある

「陰の実力者」になるために過酷な修行を重ねた末、悲劇的な事故により異世界に転生した少年。前世で果たせなかった夢を異世界で実現すべく奮闘中。陰の組織「シャドウガーデン」の創設者・シャドウの正体……であるが、ただ作っただけで君臨すれども統治せず。シャドウに変身して「陰の実力者」をしたいだけ。

ALPHA



(名前) アルファ

(性別) 女

(年齢) 15

あなたが望むならば、
この命を
捧げましょう……

シドの治療(実験)により腐った肉塊から蘇ったエルフの少女。
救われたことに深く感謝し、シドに心酔するように。
『シャドウガーデン』の記念すべき一人目のメンバーであり、
『七陰』の第一席。シドが何もしないため実質的な統治者でもある。
『シャドウガーデン』が急激に成長したのは、
彼女が無駄に有能すぎたせい。

Alexia Midgar



= Alexia Midgar

いい子ね、ポチ。
ほーら、
とこ〜とこ〜！

(名前) アレクシア・ミドガル

(性別) 女

(年齢) 15

ミドガル王国の王女で、シドとはミドガル魔剣士学園の同級生。表向きの顔は心優しい王女だが、本性はシドをペットにして遊ぶドS王女。幼い頃から優秀な姉と比べられて育ち、強いコンプレックスがある。シドのことは憎からず思っているが、なかなか素直になれない。



PDF by: traitorAZEN