

# **To Be a Power in the Shadows!**

**- Volume 3 -**

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**[ Tenshi Translations ]**

# Chapter 42

## Proposing the Leech-style Mob Life

What started it all was a single letter from Alpha. There was only one sentence on the letter.

“If you’re free, then come to the Holy Land.”

That was it.

Due to half the academy being burned down, summer holidays began early, so I am indeed quite free. And speaking from experience, Alpha’s invitations do lead to fun events the majority of the time, so I set off for the Holy Land the very next day after I saw the letter.

Lindwurm, the Holy Land.

Actually, I’ve been there once before. It is one of the holy sites of the most widespread religion of this world, The Word. It is a monotheistic religion that believes in Beatrix, the goddess who had granted powers to heroes in the legends.

Getting from the academy to the Holy Land takes four days by carriage. It’s within the country, and actually not that far away.

I was torn between dashing there at my full speed or taking the slow carriage as a mob, but in the end decided to diligently be a mob. Everyday decisions are important for character building, is what I told myself while putting on airs in an affected manner.

Now I really want to punch that past me.

I should have just ran. If I did it seriously during the night, it would have taken no time at all.

The result of not having done so is that I am now inside the carriage belonging to the Student Council President, Rose Oriana.

Inside the extravagant and spacious and comfortable carriage is just Rose and me. After taking a cheap carriage to an inn town, I had coincidentally bumped into Rose, who then enthusiastically invited me to ride her carriage. I had refused. I did refuse, but ended up losing to the power of royalty and thus ended up having to go to the Holy Land together with her.

According to her, there's some event called Trial of the Goddess that's going to be held there, and that she had been invited as a VIP to said event. While thinking that that's probably what Alpha's invitation is referring to, I continue listening to Rose.

But it's just that about halfway through, she loses me completely.

"Someone who possesses a heart as gallant as Sid-kun's truly must not die in an incident like that."

So says Rose with a gentle smile. *Un*, I'm just a mob, so I'm not gallant or anything, and since when have we been on a first name basis? But no matter, at least I can still understand her up to here.

"The day I heard that you had survived, I felt that it was fate. The fact that the day has come where we can talk with each other again like this surely must be proof that the world has given us its blessing."

This is the part around where I start to get lost. I don't even believe in fate in the first place, and what the heck does she mean by 'the world's blessing.' I belong to the faction that sticks up our middle fingers to the world.

"Our path will surely be one filled with thorns. With no one to bless us, and no one to acknowledge us."

Didn't you *just* say that the world is blessing us?

"But the great hero in the legends who received his strength from the goddess is said to have been a commoner who built up enough wealth and fame to finally marry the princess of a great country. The path might be full of thorns, but there surely is a blissful future on the far side of it. This I truly believe."

Is this some religious doctrine? The part where an extreme example, the hero in this case, is raised in order to bewilder the average person is really religion-like.

“Overcoming this time’s Trial of the Goddess would be sure progress down that road of thorns. I, too, would be able to tell my father the story of a gallant boy.”

Guess whoever overcomes that trial would be a lucky fellow indeed.

“That path of thorns must be traversed, one step at a time, but as two people together. And thus each step would engender deeper and stronger love that is tied all the tighter.”

So, like a three-legged race? That mentality of helping each other really does sound like a religious doctrine.

“I haven’t told anyone else yet, but let’s work hard, for a happy future.”

“Sounds good.”

Rose offers me her hand, so I shake it. I really don’t know about all that religious mindset or teachings, but I do agree with the part about the happy future. Happiness is important, yep. For me, I mean. What do I care about other people’s happiness?

While feeling Rose’s fiery gaze and slightly sweaty palm, I silently consider taking a distance from this girl. I don’t mean to reject religion, but it’s just that the difference in temperature is a bit hard to bear. I think everyone would be happiest if people on fire stick to hanging out with others similarly on fire.

“Today’s weather is pretty good, isn’t it?”

So I say while looking out the carriage windows at the clear blue sky and rolling green grassland. When you want to steer the conversation away from a troublesome topic, the weather is often a safe bet.

“It sure is. Though the sun is so strong that it must be quite hot outside.”

Rose is now also looking outside.

It is shady inside the carriage, but even so we are perspiring a bit. There is a shining sheen of sweat on Rose’s porcelain white neck. Her elegantly curled honey-colored hair sways gently in the wind, and her dazzling, pale-colored eyes narrow in enjoyment.

For a while, we continue talking about the weather and the school and whatnot, until we gradually lapse into silence, both searching for a next topic.

The thing about silence is that there are many different kinds of it. But they can generally be split between comfortable silences and uncomfortable silences.

The silence where both parties are searching for a topic might be uncomfortable for most people, but that's not really the case for me. Just knowing that we're both searching for a topic gives me a somewhat heartwarming feeling.

In the first place, if two people are alone together in a carriage for an extended period of time, then it's only natural for topics to eventually run out. The fruitless struggle to resist that eventuality is what is most heartwarming of all.

After falling into silence several more times in that manner, Rose finally brings up *that* topic.

The afternoon sun has already fallen quite a bit, and the light is already beginning to take on a madder red tinge.

"That incident, there's probably something deeper about it."

"Nn?"

Rose's eyes reflect the faraway setting sun.

"The men in black who claimed to be Shadow Garden, and the man who named himself as Shadow, those two are most likely from different organizations."

"Why do you think so?"

"The difference in their swords are just too stark. The swords of the men in black were all of the common variety. In contrast, the swords of Shadow and the women that followed him was a brand new school, one that has never been seen before."

"Is that so."

"I had told this to the Knight Order of Midgar Kingdom, that the men in black and Shadow were fighting each other. But the public announcement issued by the Knight Order considered the men in black to be of the same organization as Shadow. They did

not provide any convincing argument for that conclusion. As such, I am sure that there is something much deeper about that incident.”

“Aren’t you just overthinking it?”

“If so, then that’s fine. But, what if I’m not. What if Midgar Kingdom has pitted itself against the wrong enemy... then it might lead to an unthinkable catastrophe. I’m having Oriana Kingdom look into it too, but Sid-kun, you be careful.”

I nod.

Rose smiles gently, then nods back.

“We’ll be reaching the next inn town soon. I’ll get you a room next to mine, alright?”

“Nah, I’m good. I’ll just find a cheap place.”

“You must not! It is very dangerous in those kinds of places! Don’t worry about the fee, I’ll pay for everything.”

“No no no, how can I trouble you so? I’ll be fine, really.”

“There’s no such thing as ‘troubling’ between the two of us.”

In the end, I lost and ended up staying in the 30,000 Zeny per night top class inn. We then had dinner at a top class restaurant, after which I was dragged along to do window shopping and had a fashionable outfit coordinated for me. Lastly, we played for a short while at the casino, before finally returning to the inn. Of course, it was the royal treatment everywhere we went. The bed is soft and fluffy and there’s even a shower in my room.

Through it all, my total expenditure was 0 Zeny. Could it be that the leech-style mob life is actually really great?! If I can just keep one eye closed in regards to her slightly fanatic religious side, this might actually be worth considering.

# Chapter 43

## That Thing That's As Enigmatic as Wooden Swords At Tourist Spots

It is in the afternoon two days later that we finally reach Holy Land Lindwurm.

A magnificent church stands in terrain that looks like a hollowed mountain, and under it spreads a townscape heavily based on the color white. The main street that runs through the town leads straight to the staircase that continues to the church, and there is a huge number of people going to and fro.

We eat lunch at a top class restaurant as per usual, then stroll down the main street while browsing through the stalls.

I find some souvenirs that look like those small accessories of a dragon wrapped around a sword that can be commonly found in tourist sites in Japan, and wryly thinking about the fact that they have these even in a different world. But it's just that for some reason, the ones here are of a sinister-looking right arm wrapped around a sword. Slightly interested, I pick one up.

"Caught your eye?"

"*Nn*, a bit, I guess. So, why the right hand?"

Rose peers at my hands. It's just hot if you stick so close to me that our shoulders are touching. The altitude here is high so it's a bit better, but you haven't forgotten that it's summer right now, have you?

"Ah, that's the sword of the hero Olivie and the right arm of the demon Diabolos. It is said that long ago, Olivie had severed and sealed Diabolos' right arm in this land. Over there, that's the place."

Where Rose is pointing to is a spot even farther behind the church perched above the long staircase.

“On that steep mountain surface is an ancient ruin called the Holy Ground, and that’s where Diabolos’ right arm is sealed. Or so goes the myth, at least.”

Rose smiles before continuing.

“I believe that souvenir is quite popular among guys.”

“Yea, I can imagine. Excuse me, I want one of these!”

This will be Hyoro’s souvenir. It costs quite a bit at 3,000 Zeny, but this I really can’t let Rose pay.

Jaga had given me an entire shopping list of what he wants. It’s a pain so I haven’t looked at it yet.

I put the souvenir into my pocket, then we continue walking. The stream of tourists flowing by and the liveliness around all the stalls somehow feels nostalgic.

Then suddenly, Rose pulls my hand.

“Over there is a an autograph session by Natsume-sensei! I’m a huge fan of hers!”

The place we are heading towards is an enormous crowd. It’s in front of what seems to be a bookstore, but I can’t even see the shop’s signboard.

“Umm, may I go line up for this? It might take quite a while though...”

So asks Rose with upturned eyes.

“I’ll wait for you, so go on ahead.”

“Thank you! How about you also come and meet Natsume-sensei?”

“Nah, I’m good.”

Rose buys one of the books on display shelves that are for sale, then joins the line.

Having nothing to do, I also take up a book and flip through it.

“I am a dragon. As yet I have no name.”

Hell, isn't this a complete rip-off?

*(T/N: Natsume Soseki was a super famous Japanese writer (his picture is on the ¥1,000 bill). I Am a Cat is a very well known satirical novel of his, and it starts off as "I am a cat. As yet I have no name.")*

No wait, I'm sure that it's just that, by some freak stroke of coincidence, a literary master was born in this world who shares similar sentiments. I collect myself and pick up another book.

*Romeo and Julietta.*

Yep, complete rip-off. There are more.

*Cinderella.*

*Red Riding Hood.*

Oh wow, novelizations of Hollywood movies and manga and anime even. By this point, I finally get the message.

Apparently, there are reincarnators here aside from me.

I buy one book and get in line to meet 'Natsume-sensei.'

For starters, I'll take a look at this person's face. I'll think about my next step after that.

While engrossed in such thoughts, I have apparently reached close enough to the front of the line to lay eyes on 'Natsume-sensei.' It's a bit hard to see due to that large hood, but that figure is definitely female.

Beautiful silver hair cropped close to the shoulders, cat-like eyes, and a mole under an eye. The opened top of her blouse is revealing a very deep cleavage.

"Seriously?"

How can I not recognize her? That person right there is someone I know very well indeed. I pinch the bridge of my nose and turn to quietly leave the line.

"That person over there, where are you going?"

I got stopped. It seems that the other side noticed me before I could leave.

I am escorted straight to the front of the line, face to face with this beautiful silver-haired elf. Yep, she is an elf that I am extremely familiar with.

It's none other than Beta.

"Pass me your book."

Beta smiles at me, but I just hand her the book and try my best to act like I don't know her.

But while watching her sign my book with a practiced hand, I can't hold myself back from asking.

"How's business?"

In a super tiny voice.

"So-so. I'm steadily spreading my name."

Et tu, Beta.

Here is another person making a profit by using my knowledge from my previous life.

I did previously tell Beta stories from my previous life. She seemed to like literature, so I told her the ones I remember in a cool way, just for the heck of it. To think that she'd rip everything off almost verbatim and make a killing off it.

Beta-kun, you have disappointed me.

I look down at Bera with cold eyes while receiving my now signed book.

"I've been invited as a VIP. I can leak information from the inside to some degree. I've written the full details of the plan in your book."

The instant before I turn away, Beta says all that by moving her mouth a tiny bit. We part just like that, without looking at each other anymore. I love it, it's like we are in a spy movie.

Beta-kun, you have redeemed yourself.

After I exit the store, for some reason a really happy Rose is waiting for me.

“I knew it, you’re also a fan of Natsume-sensei, aren’t you!”

“No, I’m not rea-...”

“Don’t worry, I understand. You saw all the female fans, so it became hard to admit it, right? But though it’s true that it’s mostly female fans who come to these kinds of events, she actually also has a lot of male fans.”

“I... see...”

“The greatest thing about Natsume-sensei is that absolutely amazing imagination of hers, isn’t it? All her works are completely original, have startlingly novel worldviews, and are filled with characters possessing such unique values.”

Oh yea, it’s all original and novel and unique, sure.

“Romance, mystery, action, children’s tales, and even pure literature. There is no genre that she has not mastered. Every single work is as different from the one prior, almost as if it was written by an entirely different person. That great diversity is what has enabled her to have an iron grip on so many people’s hearts.”

That’s probably because they *were* written by entirely different people.

“Look at this, this is my signature. Then I asked Natsume-sensei to sign her name right next to mine!”

So saying, Rose spreads her book open, showing me her signature and Natsume-I’m-a-Rip-Off-sensei’s signature.

Speaking of which, she had said that she wrote the details of some plan in my book. I also open my book to take a look.

“This... is it the ancient language?”

Comments Rose as she peers over my shoulder.

I can't read a single word.

"Can you read it?"

"No, the study of the ancient language is extremely difficult, so I only know a tiny bit. The lettering is indeed from the ancient language, but it seems to have been scrambled quite a bit also, so it wouldn't make any sense to read it as it is."

*"Heeh~"*

But that makes it seem like a secret code, which is awesomely cool. As someone who had given up trying to learn the ancient language, I have a sort of admiration towards it.

"But whyever did she write in the ancient language?"

"Because it's cool."

"It's cool?"

*"Un."*

"Guys sure seem to love this kind of thing."

We then go on to check into a top class hotel, after which we have to part because Rose has to go around making her greetings to important people.

She tells me that she can't introduce me to them because we are still just school friends. What does she mean by 'still just.' Does she actually have plans to convert me?

I'm sorry, but I've already decided to not go deeply into any religion.

# Chapter 44

## Holy Sword Excalibur

I'm the type of person who doesn't have a lot of likes nor dislikes. And most of those things I classify as 'whatever things.'

Even though they're just 'whatever,' I still do have my preferences. They're not particularly important to me nor even necessary, but what I like is what I like, and what I dislike is what I dislike. No matter how hard I may try to make rational distinctions, it's not possible to rationalize even feelings.

I call them my 'whatever likes' and my 'whatever dislikes.'

Among my 'whatever likes' are hot springs.

In my previous life, there was a period of time when I did not bathe at all. At that time, I had thought bathing to be an absolute waste of time. But with that said, I did still have to keep up with my mob life, so I showered for exactly 3 minutes everyday. It's the time for soaking in a bath that I dealt away with, opting instead to dedicate that time to further training.

It was around that time that I had felt myself hitting the limits of being human, so even mentally speaking I had no room for baths. I was seriously considering how to punch back a taepodong with a right straight.

After many things happened, I eventually realized that my head was in an unnatural state, so I did recover the habit of taking baths. What triggered it was hot springs. The act of soaking in hot water gives the heart composure. Composure is directly linked to the quality of training, and induces the flexibility necessary to sense magic and aura and all that.

And so, I am now in a hot spring.

Lindwurm is apparently famous as a hot springs town too, so I'm enjoying it in secret.

The time now is early morning, because I like entering hot springs in the early

morning. Of course, it's not that I don't go in at all during nighttime, I just prefer early morning more. The reason is because almost no one else does this, so I get to feel like I'd reserved the whole place.

Today I had also come in hopes of the full reservation, but it seems that there is a prior customer here who had the exact same thought as me. As my bad luck would have it, it turns out to be Alexia.

With her silvery white hair tied up, she widens her red eyes for a second upon seeing me, but then immediately turns to look off at nowhere in particular.

After that, we both pretend to not see each other, maintaining a mutual non-intervention policy. This spring is a place only for super high class people to use, and in the early morning when there are very few users, the partition is removed and the entire place becomes a mixed bath. As I soak in both the spring and the rising sun, I think to myself how great it would feel if I really did have this place all to myself, what with this wide a spring, the sea of clouds under my eyes, and the beautiful sunrise.

Alexia and I are occupying opposites ends of the outdoors spring with the best view, watching the sun climb up amidst a rather uncomfortable silence.

In the corner of my eyes, I see Alexia's white skin shake and cause waves on the water surface.

It's a bit of a waste, but let's get out a bit early. Or so I am thinking, when Alexia suddenly breaks the silence.

"Is your wound all healed?"

So she asks in a voice relatively soft for her.

"All healed."

Wound? Which wound is she talking about? So I think to myself while answering.

"I got a bit emotional and reflexively cut you for real, but well, I'm glad that you're alright."

"Thanks, I guess?"

Oh, so she's talking about that wound.

Having been together with her for as long as I have, I understand that this is her way of an apology. I had thought that she didn't know what an apology is because no one had taught her, but apparently this is an Alexia-style apology.

"I guess I'll also apologize then, for thinking that you'd turned into an indiscriminate slasher."

After a small splash, several drops of water hit my face.

"Like hell I would."

"That's what they all say. So anyways, why are you in Lindwurm?"

"VIP for the Trial of the Goddess. You?"

"I got invited here by a friend who told me there'd be a fun event. I'm starting to think it's probably the Trial, but do you know what they actually do there?"

Alexia sighs audibly.

"So you came here without knowing even that? The Trial of the Goddess is a fight that takes place once per year, on the day when the door to the Holy Ground opens. Memories of ancient warriors are summoned from the Holy Ground, and challengers fight against those memories. Any magic swordsman can participate by submitting an application beforehand, but the ancient warriors might not necessarily respond. Every year, several hundreds of magic swordsmen challenge it, but only about 10 people get to actually fight."

Sounds interesting. Maybe Alpha is planning to join this?

"By what standards are they selected?"

"Apparently it's based on whether or not there is a matching ancient warrior or not. In most cases, the ancient warrior that shows up is slightly stronger than the challenger, which is why the name became Trial of the Goddess. Around 10 years ago, there was a wandering swordsman called Venom who managed to summon the hero Olivie, which became a hot topic for a very long time."

“Heeh~ Did he win?”

“I heard that he lost. But it’s not like I was there in person, so I can’t confirm nor deny it. Same for whether or not it was actually the hero Olivie that he summoned.”

“Fu~un.”

Would Alpha be able to call out the hero? Wouldn’t it be fun if she does?

“So you’re not participating? I heard that you got a lot stronger lately though.”

“As if I would. This year I’m busy with something. Actually, there’s a lot of dark rumors about the archbishop here. So I’m here to investigate.”

“Dark rumors?”

“I’m not going to tell you. If you really want to know, come join the Crimson Order.”

“Then I’m good, thanks.”

“Come join after you graduate.”

“I’m good, thanks.”

“I’ll fill out the application for you.”

“Don’t you dare.”

“You’re so stubborn.”

Then the conversation hits a lull.

We are again wrapped in silence. Now it doesn’t feel so bad.

“I had expected a stare like being licked all over, but it seems I’d guessed wrong.”

She did not specify a stare of *what*.

“That’s quite some confidence.”

“Being as perfectly beautiful as I am, the lust-filled gazes just never stop, so it’s a bit troubling.”

So troubled that you don’t bother covering up?

“When in a hot spring, I try not to look at other people. So that everyone can properly enjoy it.”

“That’s a good attitude.”

“Which is why you should stop sneaking peeks at my Excalibur.”

“Pft!”

Alexia laughs. She is laughing at me from the bottom of her heart.

“You call that Excalibur? You sure you didn’t mean Earthworm?”

“If you think that it’s an earthworm, then that is fine. I’m fine with both whatever you want to call it. But just, a warning for you.”

I stand up with a splash, causing waves to spread.

“Never judge a book by its cover. What you thought to be an earthworm might be actually only still sheathed.”

Then I turn to leave the spring without covering myself up at all.

“Wha-, what’s that supposed to mean...”

So mutters Alexia with crimson cheeks.

“The Holy Sword, once drawn from its sheath, with naked blade released, would surely become the guide to the Garden of Chaos...”

So I say profoundly, before slapping my butt, *pechin*, with my towel passed underneath my crotch.

I like doing this thing that ossans do when they get out of hot springs. There’s no meaning to it. But if I don’t do this when I get out, it doesn’t feel like I was in a hot

spring. I do it two more times, *pechin, pechin*, before finally going to the dressing room.

Around when I finish getting clothed, I hear two *pechin's* from the direction of the spring.

# Chapter 45

## Plan A Has Failed, Shift to Plan B

The solemn cathedral is illuminated by the warm glow given off by lamps, which causes the scene to seem fantastical, even.

The only person standing here in this cathedral is a stunningly beautiful elf. Her blue eyes are directed at the statue of the hero Olivie, and she is wearing a jet black dress.

The name of that elf who looks like brilliantly shining moonlight within the darkness of night is Alpha.

“All we wish for is the truth.”

It is as if Alpha is talking to the statue.

“Hero Olivie. What is it that you actually did in the Holy Ground? Now truth and lie is mixed together so thoroughly, it is like reading the darkness of history.”

Then she begins walking, the sound of her high heels reverberating crisply throughout the cathedral. Gradually she approaches something red on the marble ground.

“Archbishop Drake. What was it that you had been hiding? If only your mouth was still functional, then I could have had you answer me.”

The red thing on the marble ground is a large piece of meat covered with blood. What used to be a corpulent man is completely cut up, with not a breath left in him.

The high heels stop right on top of the puddle of blood. The knee length skirt reveals her white, shapely legs.

“Who were you killed by? Who is it that could cut down someone in a position as high as yours?”

The eyes of the archbishop’s corpse speaks of the sublimity of the line on the boundary of death. The dark rumors of the archbishop had reached even the royal capital. Yet

when someone is being sent over to investigate, he is erased.

“We will await the opening of the door to the Holy Ground tomorrow.”

Alpha gives the statue of the hero Olivie one last glance before turning away. From beyond the doors to the cathedral float voices looking for the archbishop.

Paying them no mind, Alpha opens the doors and strides out. As the sound of high heels gradually fade into the distance, knights surge in as if in exchange.

Though they immediately see the corpse of the archbishop, not a single one of them speak of the golden-haired elf. In fact, not a single one of them had even registered having passed by her.

The only proof that she had been here is the trail of red heel marks stretching off into the depths of a white marble corridor.



On the night of the eve festival, I am looking down on Lindwurm from the top of a clock tower.

The eve festival hosted the day before the Trial is currently under full swing. Both sides of the city’s main street are packed tightly with a huge variety of stalls, and the light of the lamps looks like a river winding into the distance.

Rose apparently has a party with the church. Naturally, she did not invite me. If she did, I would have definitely declined though.

With the wind ruffling my hair, I smile.

I love scenes like this where a character looks down at the city and the people and all that from a high place like this. All the more so when the stage is night and there’s something actually happening down under my eyes.

“So it’s started...”

So I mutter on the spur of the moment.

“So this... is the choice of that side...”

Then this is the part where I abruptly narrow my eyes.

“In that case, we shall resist.”

I change into the figure of Shadow in an instant.

“For we cannot condone this...”

Then I jump into the night. My jet black longcoat flutters, and I clinch the landing.

Here is an alleyway removed from all the ruckus of the eve festival. In front of me is a man who has his face hidden behind a mask.

I have been following this guy with my eyes ever since he had left the church in a really suspicious manner. I bet he's a thief.

Actually no, there is a faint scent of blood coming from him. Did he end up having to hurt someone while inside? If he did, then that would make him a mugger instead.

“Did you think you can get away...?”

The masked man backs up a step.

“In the night, all is obscured. And there the world that belongs to us...”

Mask Man draws his sword.

“...A world from which no one can ever escape.”

Mask Man brings up his sword and faces me.

I myself do not even touch my sword, merely standing in place, waiting for *that*.

Then the moment right before he swings his sword, his head just flies off.

I watch on wordlessly, waiting until a female walks up from behind the corpse.

“It has been a long while, my lord.”

So saying, she kneels before me. She is none other than Epsilon, the 5th member of

the Seven Shadows.

She draws back the part of the bodysuit covering her face and looks up at me. She is an elf with hair the color of a clear lake and eyes of a slightly darker color.

When it comes to beauties, there are various types. And she, she is the glamorous type. Her finely chiseled face is glamorous, and her body style is glamorous. Everything shakes when she walks. She steals everyone's gazes, male and female alike, even if the person is not actually interested. However, I actually know her secret.

"Decapitation with a slice? Nicely done."

"I am honored."

Epsilon smiles with slightly red cheeks. Her dignified-sounding voice might come across as overbearing to some people. But for me, it somehow makes me think of the sound of a piano, so I don't particularly dislike it.

Among the Seven Shadows, she is the one with the highest precision in magic control. Normally, after magic leaves one's body, it becomes very hard to control. She, however, is able to not only control it without effort, but her best technique is to even send it flying as a slicing attack.

Thus her second name is 'The Precise.'

Though she is quite prideful and has a rather prickly personality, she is always all sweet when it comes to me. She gets misunderstood quite often, but she's actually a very good girl who even poured me tea everyday in the past. She also obediently listens to Alpha, and is someone who really respects hierarchy relationships.

It's been a long time since I last saw her and so there's a ton that I want to catch up with her on, but I realize from her atmosphere that she is in Shadow Garden mode.

Very well. Then I shall also respond in kind.

"What happened to 'that' plan?"

Epsilon grimaces. She's probably desperately thinking up a story.

"The target was eliminated by the Church's 'Executioner.' We took care of the pawns,

but the Executioner slipped through our fingers.”

“*Hou...*”

So she’s going with an ‘Executioner.’ Nice, I love it.

“So we will shift to the second plan.”

Ooo, the pattern of shifting to Plan B when Plan A fails.

“Proceed. But you know what that means, right?”

“Our resolve is firm. Even should it turn the Church into our enemy, even should our name reverberate with infamy...”

“We will simply do what we do. Do not fail.”

“Yes, sir.”

Seeing Epsilon bow her head with a backward glance, I then exit the scene by erasing my presence and disappearing into the night with high speed movement.

## Chapter 46

# A Woman Who Seems Shady and A Woman Who Seems Cheap and A Woman Who Seems Blissful

How irritating, thinks Alexia inside her heart.

She is currently watching the opening ceremony of the Trial of the Goddess from the VIP section. The first row of this section is occupied by, in order, Natsume, Alexia, and Rose. There are many more VIPs seated behind them, but the organizer is very blatantly putting the three of them in an obvious place so as to gather more participants. But she's fine with that.

There are two things that is actually responsible for her current mood.

Firstly, she finds Acting Archbishop Nelson, who is currently self-importantly giving his greetings on stage, thoroughly irritating. She had talked with him in regards to the death of the archbishop yesterday, but he had refused to grant her permission to investigate the incident.

He had given her some bullshit logic like 'The person you came to investigate is dead, so there's nothing left for you to investigate.' She tried to say 'my investigative target died so of course I now have to investigate all the more you retard' in a more indirect way, but after that Nelson only continued insisting that she apply again for permission to investigate.

Even if she returns back to the royal capital in a hurry, it would still take 3 days. Then it would require about a week for her own higher ups to give permission for the investigation. Then 3 more days to get back to Lindwurm. Then she would have to wait for Nelson to process the request, which can take as long as he wants it to. Based on her judgment of his character, he would probably get around to it after a week. But with that much time loss, naturally all evidence and witnesses and of course the culprit would be long gone.

But with that said, as a representative of the country, she cannot push too forcefully. The Church spans the entire continent, so if Alexia antagonizes the Church, the

surrounding countries would definitely come to pressure Midgar Kingdom. Above all, she, and the royal family by extension, would lose the citizens' support. Religion is extremely convenient as an ally, but makes for an extremely troublesome opponent.

While glaring at Nelson, who is enthusiastically given his speech, Alexia mentally berates him for being a baldy who is not mourning as he should be. Even though the archbishop's death has yet to be publicized. By the way, yes Nelson is actually bald.

*(T/N: When Alexia calls him a 'baldy' the first time she meant it as an insult (for some reason, calling someone a baldy in Japanese is an insult). Thus the follow up clarification.)*

Alexia sighs, then takes a sidelong look at Natsume-sensei at her right.

Natsume is Alexia's second point of irritation. Natsume is sitting with perfect manners, smiling in response to the crowd's cheers. She has silvery white hair, blue cat-like eyes, and a well-featured face that includes a mole under an eye that increases her attractiveness.

With perfect actions, Natsume is both smiling and waving her hand in thanks, gathering the love of the crowd with her beautiful looks.

Alexia is only thinking 'she is shady as heck' while watching on.

She is being called a genius novelist with talent that appears only once in a thousand years or something, but Alexia has never even heard of her name until today. It is true that Alexia doesn't have even a speck of interest in the arts, but as a princess she at least knows of anyone famous for anything in her kingdom. Which would mean that Natsume is a newbie who had only debuted recently.

This much presence and bearing and popularity despite being a newbie? Every single detail just screams shadiness.

This is not jealousy. If she really had to put a name to it, she would call it 'hatred for someone similar to herself.' Alexia also acts perfectly in front of the masses. She represses her inner self to put on a performance as the perfect princess, that is how she lives. Those who stand above others all do this to some degree or other, but very few take it as far as she does. And it is a given that those who repress themselves that much further are actually that much blacker inside.

“Thank you for all your support, everyone!”

So says Natsume to the crowds. The sight causes Alexia to silently click her tongue.

That voice that sounds like a cat’s purr is revolting. That excessively deep neckline is guileful. Don’t lean forward and press up your boobs, you fox. Stop acting all cute and shit.

In that manner, Alexia continues to spout venom inside her heart even while smiling and waving to the masses herself.

But the reaction of the crowd is markedly less heated than it was with Natsume. The smile on Alexia’s face stiffens for a brief instant, then she crosses her arms. By crossing her arms, she ‘inadvertently’ pushes her breasts up, then she leans forward a little bit.

The volume of the crowd’s cheering increases a little. Just a little.

W-, well, she’s not wearing clothes that expose her cleavage after all, is how Alexia comforts herself while settling back in her chair.

A brief glance to her left shows her Rose with a blissful smile on her face. She’s been like this ever since this morning.

Then Alexia peeks at her right, just in case.

That instant, Alexia sees it.

Natsume has one corner of her lip raised in a smirk. She is fucking smirking.

Alexia thinks she hears the sound of something snapping inside her heart.



How irritating, thinks Beta inside her heart while maintaining the act of Natsume the novelist.

There is only one thing that is responsible for her current mood: Alexia Midgar, who is currently sitting at her left. This woman is a harmful insect who is abusing her identity as a princess and as a classmate to get closer to her beloved master.

She cajols the crowd with her revolting voice that sounds like a cat's purr, she waves her hand while smiling the shadiest smile ever, and even her 'perfect princess' act is shady as heck. Though Beta doesn't think in the slightest that her master would fall for such a cheap-looking woman, but there's always that one in a billion chance.

Even without all that, this woman is a mere interloper who isn't worthy of being in Beta's 'The War Chronicles of Shadow-sama.'

The time when Beta heard that Shadow-sama had saved this woman in that princess abduction incident, Beta was absolutely livid. That role was supposed to be hers... well, no, but... yes, she was furious that such a cheap-looking woman had troubled Shadow-sama to move personally. This is not jealousy.

In order to quell her anger, Beta described the rescued princess as a cute elf with silvery white hair and blue eyes and a mole under her eye, then kept on reading that part over and over again, deep into the night.

If this woman continues appearing in The War Chronicles of Shadow-sama, then that would be a grave problem indeed. Even though Beta herself is more powerful and more beautiful and loves Shadow-sama so much more, why does this cheap-looking woman keep on butting in. Why can't you just f-, fuck off.

In that manner, Beta continues to spout venom inside her heart even while semi-automatically responding to the crowd's cheers.

When she takes a sidelong glance at her side, that cheap-looking princess is, of all things, emphasizing her cheap-looking boobs and trying to curry favor with the crowd.

Ahh, how sickening.

And the volume is hers is even markedly less than Beta's own. Alexia's is only normal sized.

So I win in even this area, thinks Beta as she looks down at her prided deep cleavage and smirks.

Oh oops, did she catch that?

Beta opts to feign ignorance, but that instant, a sharp pain runs through her left foot.

“Ou-...!?”

Suppressing her voice, Beta looks over, and sees Alexia’s high heel stepping on her left foot.

Beta thinks she hears the sound of something snapping inside her heart, but she presses it down, and calmly speaks up.

“Alexia-sama, can you please move your foot...”

Alexia pretends to only just notice it and gives Beta a nonchalant look before finally removing her foot. Then without even apologizing, she, of all things, smirks.

THIS FUCKING BITCHHHH!!!!!!

But on the edge of completely flipping out, Beta recalls her loyalty to her beloved master Shadow-sama and to Shadow Garden, and barely manages to hold herself back.

The operative word being ‘barely.’ Like, right-on-the-literal-edge level of barely.

Blood drips down from the corner of Beta’s lip.

The entire time, Rose is just smiling blissfully.

## Chapter 47

# The Theory That When a Bomb Goes Off It Can Erase Everything Else That Had Happened

I am currently absentmindedly gazing at the proceedings of the Trial of the Goddess from the audience seats.

It is still daytime, and the event has only just started. Then there are greetings and VIP introductions and parades and all that jazz. The actual Trial will begin only after the sun sets, apparently.

At the moment, I am merely a mob character in the audience seats. I look at the three VIPs in the front row of that section getting along together well and sigh.

I want to do something.

I want to do something 'power from the shadows'-like. I'm here at such a huge event! How can I forgive myself if I just go through it all as a mere mob without doing anything?!

The most common pattern would be to hide my identity and participate in the Trial.

Like, I could display my overwhelming strength and make everyone think "who on earth is this person?!"

But unlike a tournament, each person only gets to fight once, and from my prior research, it seems that it'd be difficult to participate while hiding my identity. I did also consider the sudden intrusion pattern, but I kind of want to save that for a more important fight in the future.

While bringing up and shooting down plans in my head, the event proceeds on.

Haah, never mind. I couldn't think of anything yesterday even with the whole day, so how can I so conveniently suddenly think of something right on the spot? I decide to continue enjoying the event as a mob, having half given up. In this world, events like

this are quite rare, so it's unexpectedly turning out to be actually quite fun. I also dabble a bit at the gambling corner and manage to earn a little bit.

Then finally the sun sets, and the long-awaited Trial of the Goddess finally begins. Gorgeous lights illuminate the entire venue as letters from the ancient language begin floating up from the ground of the fighting field.

The letters shine with a white light while deploying into a dome, which causes the volume of the cheers to go up several notches.

The way this works is that the challenger would walk into the dome, which would cause the ancient warrior suitable to them to show up. Then they fight, and all interference from outside is blocked until either one of them is rendered incapable of further combat. Apparently there are even challengers who've died.

Having to fight to that point means that I can't participate as a mob, because the risk of me exposing my true strength would be quite high.

After all this and that is over, finally, the first challenger is introduced and then steps into the dome. Apparently he is some valorous guy from the Knight Order.

But there is no response.

He swears, then steps out and leaves.

That was the 200,000 Zeny participation fee disappearing into thin air. And there is even more than 150 challengers this time.

Well, successfully clearing the Trial of the Goddess is apparently an enormous honor. You would get a commemorative medal, and pretty much everywhere you go would be like "oh, you cleared the Trial of the Goddess? Alright, you're hired!" At least, that's what I heard.

I keep watching on as challenger after challenger keep going up, eagerly waiting for Alpha's name to be called.

It is the 14th person who finally gets an ancient warrior to appear.

The moment Annerose, a traveller from Vegalta, the country of swords, steps into the dome, the ancient letters shine in response. Their light gathers into a humanoid shape,

finally coalescing into a half-transparent warrior. According to the commentary, that warrior's name is Bolg.

The two fight normally, then Annerose wins normally. I had held some expectations for these ancient warriors, but they turn out to be rather normal. I look forward to seeing stronger warriors get summoned next.

After that, the event continues, and I get a better bearing. It seems that Annelose was actually kind of strong. Eight people in total had summoned ancient warriors, but so far she was the only one who actually won. Which would mean that Bolg-kun was actually relatively strong.

The night grows deep. There aren't many challengers left.

As the event gradually begins to feel like it's ending, the name of a certain challenger is called out.

"Next is a challenger from the Midgar Magic Swordsman Academy! His name is... Sid Kagenou!!"

Who is Sid Kagen-... what the fuck, that's my name!

There can't possibly be another Sid Kagenou from Midgar Magic Swordsman Academy. But wait, I have absolutely no memory of applying for this!

"Let us greet our brave challenger with applause!"

No, wait, don't do that!

Huge applause rises up. The cheers and whistling livens up the venue.

This is a very bad atmosphere. My face is frozen stiff as my brain whirls at full speed.

In this situation, there are really only three options.

Option 1: Give up and go fight. If all goes well, then I can finish it all as a mere mob. But if a strong ancient warrior really gets summoned, then there's a risk of my strength getting exposed.

Option 2: Run away. All I am in the end is but a mob student. No one knows my face,

so it'd be easy to slip away. However, that might cause the Church to become mad at me. They could put in a complaint with the school and get me expelled.

Option 3: Muddy the waters. Yep, this is really the only reasonable one.

I erase my presence and hide myself through high speed movement. Then in an empty place, I change into Shadow, and fly up into the air.

I am currently advocating the theory that 'regardless of how bad a battlefield is, when an explosive explodes it can erase everything else that had happened.'

And so.

Operation Burst onto the Scene as a Mysterious Power and Muddy the Fuck out of Everything starts... now.

I descend into the dome area, and flutter my longcoat.

"My name is Shadow... I am he who lurks into the shadows and hunts the shadows..."

The entire venue falls into turmoil.

The ancient letters react, and begin forming a shape.

"Tonight shall be thy release..."

I draw my jet black blade and thrust it towards the night sky.

Beta's slack-jawed face from the VIP seats is what leaves the deepest impression on me.

## Chapter 48

# Please Believe That There Really Are Times When Those Who Have No Intention of Looking Still End up Seeing

“Shadow!!”

“Shadow?!”

“Shadow-s...?!”

Beta barely catches herself in time before adding -sama.

Fortunately, everyone in even the VIP seats have their full attention on Shadow, so there was no one who heard Beta’s slip up. Alexia, Rose, and even Acting Archbishop Nelson cannot hide their agitation from Shadow’s sudden intrusion.

Beta closes her immodestly opened mouth while thinking about how this was not in the plan.

But at the same time, she also thinks about how her beloved master would not take such a forceful measure with no meaning. There must be a deep reason why this was the only way. Understanding that and supporting him to the best of her ability is her job.

In an instant, Beta regains her calm.

What to do?

What is she supposed to do?

“I see, so that is Shadow.”

So mutters Nelson.

“I don’t know what he’s intending, but the venus is filled with the Church’s Holy Knights. He’s but a fool with overconfidence in his own strength. He will not leave here alive tonight.”

Nelson gives the order for the Holy Knights to gather.

Holy Knight. They are knights selected and baptized by the Church, tasked to protect the Church. Their strength is incomparable to any average knight. When she was still young, Beta once had to fight with the Church’s Holy Knights in order to save a Match, and she remembers how tough a fight it had been. But then again, with her strength now, she will not show such a disgraceful sight anymore.

“Shadow, why have you come...”

So murmurs Alexia.

“Is he fine? I really hope he didn’t get caught up...”

Rose is restlessly scanning the audience seats while keep an eye on Shadow.

That instant, the entire place is dyed white.

The ancient letters shine radiantly, then form the figure of a warrior.

Beta reads the letters speeding by, piecing them together to draw out their meaning.

“The Witch of Calamity, Aurora...”

“Don’t tell me, it’s Aurora...?”

Beta’s and Nelson’s voices overlapped.

After the light fully subsides, there stands a single woman. She has long, black hair and brilliant violet eyes. Her black robe is thin, under which is a deep purple dress that makes a sharp contrast with her glowing white skin. She is stunningly beautiful in an artistic way that makes her seem like a sculpture from an art museum come to life.

“Who’s Aurora?”

Alexia completely ignores Beta and asks Nelson directly.

“Aurora the Witch of Calamity. She is a woman who had long ago thrown the entire world into chaos and destruction.”

“Aurora the Witch of Calamity... I don't believe I've ever heard that name before.”

“Me neither. But it seems that Natsume-sensei knows something?”

Beta replies to Rose's question.

“Her name is about the only thing I know.”

That is not a lie.

Aurora the Witch of Calamity. That name had come up in ancient texts. However, nowhere is there any further description of her, such that it is not clear what chaos she brought about and what was it exactly that she destroyed. For Shadow Garden, this is ranked second only to the mystery of Diabolos in importance, and studies and research into ancient texts in regards to this is still ongoing at this point in time.

Today is the day when finally the appearance of Aurora is confirmed. This is a great step. Beta takes out her memo pad from within her cleavage, then sketches Aurora's appearance in an instant. Then she also sketches Shadow facing off against Aurora. More like, this is the more important one.

“Material for a novel?”

That was Rose.

“Umm, something like that...”

Shadow-sama is looking gallantly dashing today too, thinks Beta as she puts her memo pad away.

“Please tell us more about Aurora.”

So says Beta in a fawning voice, to which Nelson responds with gusto.

“The two of you cannot be blamed for not knowing. More like, it's a surprise that Natsume-sensei even knows. The name of Aurora is something that only a very tiny handful in the Church knows.”

So says Nelson while smirking. His eyes are fully directed at the cleavage peeking from Beta's blouse.

"But with this, it seems that there'll be no need for the Holy Knights. Guess Shadow is quite an unlucky person. To think that he would summon Aurora, of all people..."

"Is Aurora that strong?"

So asks Rose.

"That monster is the strongest woman in all history. One hand would probably be enough for her to wipe the floor with the likes of Shadow. Unfortunately, this is all that I can share."

Here Nelson closes his mouth, as if in indication for them to see everything else with their own eyes.

Beta pouts slightly, as she doesn't think even slightly that her master would lose. But that does not mean that she's not worried.

Aurora the Witch of Calamity. She is someone who was powerful enough to leave her name in history. If her master gets tired in the fight against Aurora, and the Holy Knights take advantage of that...

There's always a one in a billion chance.

But by this point, Beta is beginning to roughly understand Shadow's intent. He had mentioned 'releasing the ancient memories sleeping in the Holy Ground.' He had showed up to summon Aurora. It is because he had determined this to be of value.

He has determined Aurora to be the key. And so, Beta can only follow.

Beta touches the mole on her face. That alone must have alerted Epsilon, who should also be hidden somewhere in this venue. That is the signal that the plan has been changed. Even without conveying the full details, Beta has full faith that Epsilon will follow up in the most appropriate way.

"They're starting."

Turning her eyes towards the fighting field as prompted by Nelson, Beta sees Shadow

with his sword drawn, and Aurora standing there with arms crossed and smiling gracefully. That smile is so vibrantly beautiful that it is very difficult to believe that it is a mere memory.

“I can’t imagine Shadow losing that easily though...”

It was Alexia who muttered that. She is putting her full attention on Shadow, with a serious look on her face.

At least you have a pretty good eye, thinks Beta while slightly improving her impression of Alexia.

The venue’s air is stretched taut.

An oppressive silence reigns.

Shadow and Aurora. The two of them are looking at each other.

This time might be a precious time in which they feel something from each other.

And then.

The fight begins, with a somewhat regretful feeling.

# Chapter 49

## Those That Don't Understand Are Boring

How long has it been since I've been able to enjoy this feeling.

I face off against this woman with violet eyes, and smile underneath my mask.

She is also smiling. Most likely, she is also feeling what I'm feeling right now.

I like to think of fighting as a conversation.

The quiver of a sword tip, the direction of the eyes, the positioning of the feet; every tiny detail has meaning, and to read that meaning and respond appropriately is what fighting is all about.

The power to read meaning from the smallest of actions, and the power to provide the better response. It would not be an exaggeration to say that these two are the biggest strengths when it comes to fighting.

And that's why fighting is a conversation.

The higher both sides' conversational strength is, the further they can read and respond, and then read the other's response and respond to *that*, continuing the conversation in that manner ad infinitum.

But if their conversational strength is low, or if there is a large difference in their conversational strengths, then the conversation won't even take place.

One side, or perhaps both sides, would just do what they want to do, and then that would be that.

There would be no conversation in there, no process, and only the result. I actually think that people who don't intend to converse in the first place would be better off just competing with rock-paper-scissors. Delta, I'm talking about you.

She would probably just keep on thrusting out 'rock' to send 'scissors' and 'paper'

flying her entire life. It's a ridiculous rock-paper-scissors that she plays.

But I'm not exactly in a position to say this of others. It's been so long since I've had a real, proper conversation.

The only way I'm different from Delta is that I do make the offer to initiate conversation. But it's just that it always ends up being 'rock.'

And this is why I am now so happy to meet this violet-eyed lady. She is actually looking at me. At my sword, at my eyes, at my feet. Though she looks like she's just casually smiling, she is properly paying attention to all my movements.

Let's just call her Violet-san. My dear Violet-san.

For a while, we converse while simply looking at each other. In that way, we gradually get to know the other. She is the type to fight from a distance, and I'm the type who changes fighting style according to my opponent. I am definitely not the type to only go with 'rock' every time.

And so.

Go on ahead.

I offer her the first move.

The next instant, I jerk my foot back.

Immediately afterwards, something that looks like a red spear pierces up from where my foot had just been.

How logical to aim for the foot.

I retreat half a step in the same motion. To think that her first move would come from under the ground.

The red spear splits into two, then chases me from the left and right in an effort to trap me.

My first move is wait-and-see.

I carefully observe the red spears' speed, power, and mobility.

To that end, I dodge the right spear and use my sword to deflect the left one. The feedback on my hand is quite heavy. This is strong enough to kill me with one hit.

The evaded spear explodes with branches. The red, glinting needle-like lines may number even a thousand.

Then all of them rush towards me from all directions.

I clad my sword in magic and sever all the red spears with one swing.

“No matter the size of a scourge of mosquitoes, they cannot kill a lion.”

Violet-san smiles gracefully. We look at each other again for a brief while.

Higher conversational strength means evaluating the opponent's strength in that short a time. And it also means understanding the opponent's situation to some degree.

That is true for me, and most likely for Violet-san too. We both already know how this fight is going to end.

Then.

Spears the width of logs sprout from the ground all at once, pulverizing the silence.

Their total number is 9.

I can evade the thick spears, but they are deforming into tentacles that are chasing after me.

Stabbing like a spear, entangling like string, snapping like a jaw.

This is her fighting style. These tentacles that she can manipulate freely would only one-sidedly torment her prey.

But I'm still in wait-and-see. I look at the tentacles, and optimise my actions.

I gradually decrease the amount that I have to move to evade. One step becomes half

a step. Two moves become one.

I can't win by only evading. Evading is merely the preparation for counterattack.

And the tighter the evasion, the quicker it can chain into a counterattack.

Evade, then counterattack in the same instant.

With a single step, I am standing right before her.

Since who knows when, she is holding a huge scythe in her hands. She swings it in a mowing attack.

I deflect that single strike with my sword. At the same time, I kick her leg.

The slime sword protruding from the tip of my toes stabs her foot. Lately, this sword has been reduced to a mere prop for performances, but it is originally a surprise weapon that can enable me to break the equilibrium when fighting against a strong opponent.

Her movements stop for the briefest of moments, but that's more than enough for me.

Violet-san smiles in acceptance of the outcome.

"I would have loved to fight you at your full strength."

So I say in a voice that only Violet-san can hear, amidst the scattering blood.



"As I had said, it seems that Shadow is already on the ropes."

So says Nelson triumphantly, which Alexia ignores.

In this fight between Shadow and Aurora, it had been Aurora's incessant onslaught from the very first move. Alexia watches on with shock at the red lines dancing at terrific speeds.

No matter how she looks at it, there's no way that that is a forged weapon. It is clear to see that its shape is freely changeable, and Aurora is controlling it as if it's a part of

her body. Most likely, it is capable of spreading in a much larger range to pierce a large number of targets all at once.

Someone restricted to a single sword is no opponent.

This is a fighting technique of old. Alexia is well aware that this is definitely not something that she can even dream of standing against.

“He’s clinging on longer than expected. But the difference in strength is all too obvious.”

That’s not it.

Alexia refutes Nelson’s assessment in her heart.

It may look like Shadow is being pressed by Aurora’s fierce attacks, but that’s only because he hasn’t initiated a single attack yet. He is still only observing this fighting technique that he is seeing for the first time.

Aurora is indeed strong. Since she can fight with Shadow in the truest meaning of the word.

However, it’s just that the red spears have yet to graze Shadow even once.

“No matter the size of a scourge of mosquitoes, they cannot kill a lion.”

So says Shadow as he blows away those spears that number more than a thousand with a single swing.

Then the red spears become as thick as logs, assaulting him from all directions.

They raise high-pitched screams as if to assert that they possess enough strength to kill lions, at times splitting, at times snapping like jaws, chasing and chasing and chasing Shadow.

But none of them land.

Instead, after every single pass, Shadow’s evasion becomes more refined.

What seems to be the smallest possible movement is eclipsed the next moment by one

even smaller.

What Alexia thinks the ultimate exchange of offense and defense is overwritten again and again.

“Amazing...”

“As expected...”

Alexia’s and Natsume’s murmurs overlap.

The truly strong can drive the opponent to the ropes through defense alone. That is something that her swordsmanship teacher had previously told her.

The very illustration of that is being played out before her eyes.

“What is that damned witch doing. Just finish him off already!”

Irritation can be heard in Nelson’s voice.

But, no longer.

No longer can Aurora stop Shadow.

The decisive moment is but a flash.

All Alexia can see is a fraction of the exchange.

Shadow steps in, Aurora swings her huge scythe, then there’s already blood fountaining into the air.

Blood from Aurora, that is.

That seemingly effortless and instantaneous ending is exactly like a lion wringing the neck of a lamb.

What did Shadow do exactly? What had happened in the exchange? No one knows.

That’s why there was no suspense.

It is as if the furious fight spread out before them mere moments ago was but a dream. The entire venue is as still as death.

“She... lost? That’s impossible! It was Aurora who was on the offense the whole time!”

So shouts Nelson.

Most likely, in his eyes, Aurora had been winning to the very end.

His head is not capable of processing what he perceives to be an abrupt upset. But Nelson is not the only one. Almost everyone in the audience had probably been mistaking the winner and loser while watching.

“Exactly what had happened... there’s no way Aurora can lose! That woman is...!”

Shadow flutters his jet black longcoat and soars into the night sky.

“W-, wait! Give chase! Don’t let him get away!”

So shouts Nelson immediately after regaining his senses.

The Holy Knights all spring into motion, chasing after Shadow in a fluster.

Alexia releases the breath that she had been holding in since who knows when, then ruminates over Shadow’s sword in her head so that she won’t forget it.

“What a terrific sword as always...”

So sighs Rose.

Right when Alexia is about to voice her agreement, the venue is once again filled with dazzling white light.

# Chapter 50

## The Heroine Who Directed and Acted in Her Own Production

Rose narrows her eyes, patiently waiting for the light to subside.

When it does, there is a large, white door.

“That is...?”

So Rose murmurs.

“It’s opening...?”

While giving off a faint glow, the door is indeed slowly opening.

The sight is quite strange.

“Don’t tell me, the Holy Ground responded...?”

So mutters Nelson in shock.

“What does that mean...?”

“As you probably already know, today is the one day in the year that the door to the Holy Ground opens.”

“I heard that the door is in the church proper though?”

“Yes, it is indeed. But there isn’t only one door. The door can be altered to specially welcome someone, depending on who is knocking. Other names for the door include The Unbidden Door, The Door of Convening, and finally, The Door of Welcome... And there’s no way of telling what lies beyond that door aside from actually going in.”

Nelson answers Rose’s question absentmindedly while still looking at the door.

“Now that it’s come to this, it is impossible to resume the Trial of the Goddess. Have all the audience leave.”

After receiving Nelson’s instruction, his subordinate goes off to arrange the guiding of the audience. Those in the VIP seats also get up in turn.

In that interval of time, the door has opened even farther.

“Do not allow anyone to get close to that door!”

So instructs Nelson.

Then when the door has opened up enough for a single person to slip through, he turns to the three girls.

“Kindly also make your way outside the venue.”

So says Nelson.

But in that instant, Rose draws her sword. At the same time, Alexia also draws her sword. Then the two of them stand back to back while holding up their swords.

“What are y-...!?”

Flustered, Nelson looks around, and notices that the entire venue has been completely surrounded by a group in black. Even Rose and Alexia had failed to sense their presences until when it was too late.

“We apologize for the slight inconvenience, but we need all of you to stay put until the door closes.”

So declares a beautiful voice that sounds like the ringing of a bell.

Then a single woman in a markedly different get-up appears before them.

“You people... are you perhaps Shadow Garden?!”

Among the group wearing black bodysuits, she is the only one wearing a dress-like robe. With elegant steps, she approaches the door.

Along the way, she shoots a glance towards Rose and Alexia.

The two's shoulders jump. Then they are frozen entirely stiff, with their shoulders still pressed tightly together.

So strong...!

There was enormous pressure in that gaze. She possesses an overwhelming presence, almost as if she is a monarch over the night.

The two of them acknowledge Shadow as 'the strongest.' But this woman is someone who perhaps reaches his feet. That is what they felt.

"Epsilon, the rest I'll leave to you. As for those ladies over there, be good girls, alright?"

"Understood, Alpha-sama."

"Wait, don't you dare go into the Holy Ground!!"

Ignoring Nelson's shout, the woman called Alpha disappears into the door of light.

"So that was Alpha..."

So murmurs Alexia.

Rose nearly blurts out 'eh, you know her?!' but manages to swallow the words down.

"So then, what is your aim in doing all this?"

So Alexia asks the one called Epsilon.

"All we need is for you guys to stay put until the door closes. But Acting Archbishop, you will have to come with us."

So says the voluptuous woman. After being called by name, Nelson becomes even more flustered.

"What do you plan to do in the Holy Ground?"

"It is not what we are going to do, but what is already there. Anyways, no harm will

befall you if you don't act up."

Then she silences Rose and the others with her eyes. Her beautiful, clear eyes that look like lakes simply continue to focus on them vigilantly.

This woman is also very strong. Not to Alpha's level, but she does have that vibe particular to the truly strong.

But, if push comes to shove...

"If you move, even I don't know what I might do to her."

So says Epsilon, as if she had read Rose's and Alexia's hostility.

At the end of her gaze is Natsume-sensei, who has been captured by several women in black.

"I, I'm so sorry..."

Natsume-sensei has her eyes cast down apologetically.

"Natsume-sensei...!"

Rose's chest constricts at the sight of Natsume-sensei trying to hold back her tears.

All her intention to resist leaves her... but.

"Abandoning her is also an option."

So says Alexia in a voice that only Rose can hear.

"What, no!"

Rose vehemently refuses.

"We'll be better off abandoning her, she's too shady."

"I said no, so no!"

While the two of them are having that exchange, the door opens all the way, then

begins to close.

Slowly, ever so slowly.

The group in black also enter the door one by one, with the captured Natsume-sensei and Acting Archbishop Nelson also being dragged along.

Rose and Alexia can only watch on, powerless to do anything about it.

Their enemy has no openings.

Everyone in the group in black is strong individually, and also follows a clear chain of command. They are also in teams of three to follow up after each other. Even when someone has an opening, they are immediately covered by their team members. Their teamwork is extremely polished.

The door is still steadily closing.

“No, it hurts, you’re hurting me!”

Natsume-sensei screams in resistance as she is forcefully strong-armed towards the door.

“Natsume-sensei!!”

“I, I’ll be fine, don’t worry about me!”

So Natsume-sensei shouts gallantly in a quivering voice, before she too disappears into the door.

Rose is on the verge of tears while seeing her off.

“Am I the only one who found that shady?”

So someone may have muttered but Rose pretends to not have heard it.

The only other people left is Epsilon and the bound Nelson.

After Epsilon takes one last look around to confirm that there’s nothing out of place, she turns around to push Nelson into the door.

Nelson resists, which causes Epsilon's attention to stray.

At that moment.

A black figure suddenly swoops down and slashes Epsilon.

“Well done, Venom the Executioner!!”

Nelson's loud laughter echoes out.

# Chapter 51

## The Birth of 'Precise'

Epsilon watches the blade slice into her own body.

Despite having been caught completely off guard, the fact that she is able to shift her upper torso a bit is already worthy of merit. But all that does is lead to a tragedy.



Epsilon's past flashes by within her brain, like a revolving lantern.

She remembers how she had been born the daughter of an elven noble. And how she had manifested demon possession, and thus become discarded by her family and pursued by her country.

And also that day when she had gained a brand new life.

That day when she had been saved by Shadow, everything that she had believed in previously all fell away, and she had found a new reason to live.

Epsilon had been a forceful person ever since long ago. She never doubted the fact that she was privileged, and it was her personality to flaunt that privilege wherever and whenever she could.

In actual fact, her lineage was impeccable, she was beautiful, she was very smart, and she also had great martial talent.

She was very prideful, but did possess ability befitting of that pride.

Which was probably why, perhaps.

The day she discovered she had demon possession, the moment when everything had crumbled away, she was probably the one who took it the hardest, beyond anyone else.

She lost her reason for living, but did not have the courage to die.

On a certain day, Shadow suddenly appeared before her, as she was dragging her rotting body up a mountain trail.

“Do you wish for power?”

So he had said in a voice that seemed to reverberate from the depths of the earth.

Epsilon, in her foggy consciousness, had thought that it was a demon that had showed up.

But she was indeed thirsty for power.

If she had power, she could take revenge on those who had abandoned her.

She could torture every single one of them to death, and make them regret.

“Then I shall grant it to you...”

Then she was enveloped in a sweet, violet magic.

That light and that warmth, Epsilon remembers vividly even to this day.

That somehow nostalgic, warm, healing light had caused her to break down into tears before she knew it.

On that day, Epsilon had been weak, brittle, and unsightly. And it was Shadow who had saved her, when she was at her lowest.

“Falling into madness within a world of lies is fine too. But if you wish to know the truth of this world... then follow me.”

Epsilon had chased after him without a moment of hesitation.

The word ‘unsightly’ was the perfect and comprehensive adjective for the her who had lost everything. And when such an unsightly her was saved, it felt like her real self had been acknowledged and accepted.

She had no need for lineage.

The same went for beauty. And what point is there in bragging of strength?

What is truly important lies elsewhere.

Then she came to learn of the truth of this world, met four senpai, then had to revoke her previous words.

Lineage, she really had no need of. But strength, that's indispensable.

The martial arts that she had been so good at was ranked only two from the bottom.

Among her senpai was someone who she will probably never win against, and a perfect superhuman.

Her prided intelligence was also ranked only second from the bottom.

The intellect specialist and perfect superhuman had crushed her self-confidence to dust.

In terms of general utility, there was again that perfect superhuman, and an all-rounder who handled everything flawlessly.

Epsilon had nowhere to stand.

And above all else, beauty was also necessary.

Her appearance became very important to her. Because her beloved master is male.

Upon objectively observing and analyzing her own charm, she concluded that it'd be a rather tight comparison.

If the criteria was only appearance, then she had nothing to worry about. But she did have one future concern. To be blunt, the females in her lineage were, without exception, all flat.

Just as guys lament over their bloodline's hairline, Epsilon lamented over her bloodline's body shape. If she did nothing, she would only becoming increasingly disadvantaged with the passage of time.

That was why the moment Epsilon met *that*, she felt as if she had been struck by lightning.

The slime bodysuit.

With but a single look, she saw its potential, and had her heart stolen.

Whereas she would normally listen to Shadow's words without letting a single syllable slip, at that moment she had ceased to register his words, as her full attention had been commanded by the slime bodysuit.

This was what was running through Epsilon's mind: This can make me bigger!

After that, it took Epsilon only three days to get to the point where she could manipulate the slime bodysuit exactly how she wanted.

Under the pretext of training her magic control, she started wearing her slime bodysuit all the time from that day on. Then day by day, she gradually increased her own bust size.

In almost imperceptible increments, to avoid suspicion. But at times a bit bolder, because puberty.

But after she reached a certain size, she realized something.

The feel is different.

Slime is still slime in the end. Both the feel and the way it jiggles is different. That day onwards, Epsilon kept on staring at Beta as if at a lifelong enemy. After several days, she was able to perfectly control her slime bodysuit to reproduce the feel and movement.

By this point, Epsilon's magic control had risen to a level that merited even Alpha's praise.

Thus she came to be called Epsilon the Precise and was acknowledged by everyone, but she was already beyond caring about that.

Rather than that, Epsilon continued observing Beta everyday, and couldn't help but to shiver.

This woman, she can grow even bigger?!

By this point, it has already turned into a full out battle. A battle between the natural against the artificial.

In conclusion, Epsilon just kept on adding more and more, until she won. Humans have always faced threats from Nature and overcome them.

But the price was great.

The day she lost a tiny bit of that pride of hers, she looked into a mirror and thought this.

The balance is terrible.

Unfortunately, she has a slender and small-statured body.

But after deeply pondering on the matter, Epsilon was able to come up with a solution.

Why don't I make my butt bigger too, to balance it out?

In conclusion, she did not stop with just her butt. She used slime to increase the size of her butt in a shapely way, then used slime to tighten her stomach, then used secret heels to increase her height and the length of her legs and attained the perfect hourglass figure, then... there'd be no end if all the smaller details were to be listed out in full.

In short, through the slime bodysuit, she had managed to attain the ultimate perfect body.

It was only possible due to an incalculable amount of effort, constant high vigilance to not let anyone find out, and the existence of a worthy rival.

But above all else, it was due to her love for her beloved master.

Epsilon's 'precise' magic control was but a byproduct. Her true strength lies in the unnaturally high physical defense due to the thick slime padding all around her body.

Then the revolving lantern stops.



The swooping figure brandishes his sword.

Epsilon watches as the crystallization of her efforts is sliced.

The two softest lumps of her slime bodysuit fly into the air.

That instant, Epsilon... awakes.

In this kind of place...

After coming this far...!

HELL IF I LET MYSELF BE EXPOSED!!!!

Epsilon controls the magic remaining in the two lumps in midair to retain their shape.

That ability to perfectly control magic that has already left her body requires such skillfulness as to make any observer faint in shock.

At the same time, she draws in the magic, instantaneously reattaching the lumps to their previous position.

That precision that would not allow even a millimeter of error, and the speed that accomplished all that in the blink of an eye. The feat was indeed worthy of being called divine.

Then she ends the process with the reproduction of the jiggling motion.

This is Epsilon the Precise.

“Well done, Venom the Executioner... eh?”

Nelson takes a second look at Epsilon.

She is supposed to have been cut, but is still standing there unharmed.

Or rather.

“Did you see...?”

“Eh...?”

What is with that overwhelming pressure?!

Nelson’s knees are clattering audibly.

“Did. You. See. Anything!”

“*Hiii*... n-, no, I saw nothing...!”

“You two over there?”

Epsilon turns towards Rose and Alexia. Both of them vigorously shake their heads.

“Then it’s fine. Come.”

Epsilon grabs Nelson by the back of his neck and drags him along.

“*Hii!* What are you doing, Venom the Executioner! Help me!!”

“The Executioner? He’s...”

Epsilon whispers into Nelson’s ear.

“...already dead.”

Then the Executioner’s head slides off.

“*Hiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!!!!!!*”

Epsilon then disappears into the door, with Nelson in tow.

The door continues to close.

At the last possible moment, *she* jumps up.

“Alexia-san?!”

Ignoring Rose's cry, Alexia dashes into the door gap.

"Aaaah, *mou!*"

Rose also chases after and dives in, immediately after which the door closes entirely.

Then the door disappears, leaving behind only a faint glow in the air.

# Chapter 52

## The Truth Within Memories

*“Kyah?!”*

Rose falls on top of something soft.

Shaking her head while getting up, Rose realizes that there are two girls pinned under her.

*“Ah, so sorry!”*

*“Rose-senpai, can you please get off?”*

*“Alexia-sama, kindly refrain from touching anywhere weird.”*

Alexia and Natsume are glaring at each other even while pinned down under Rose.

When Rose gets up, the two immediately spring up and turn their backs against each other.

Rose feels slightly saddened at seeing the two of them not getting along.

*“You two, fighting is not good... ah!”*

Halfway through her words, Rose realizes all the gazes gathered on her.

This place is a dim, large space. Surrounding them are all the women in black. Among them are even Alpha, Epsilon, and the captured Nelson.

*“Umm, we’re...”*

Understanding that there’s no way out of this situation, Rose raises both hands as a start.

Then she forces a smile onto her face, trying to appeal to the enemy her lack of

hostility.

Next to her, Natsume-sensei is pitifully trembling in fear. The moment Rose thinks to herself that she must do something, Alexia smoothly steps forward.

“Apologies, we stumbled and fell. The door happened to be right in front of us, there was nothing we could have done.”

Today Rose learns that persuasion is all about having a confident attitude.

Even if it is a bald-faced lie, by saying it with the confidence of a demon king, it becomes extremely troublesome to refute.

‘Er, sure, let’s go with that then’ is the attitude with which everyone is looking at Alexia.

“Very well, you all may come along. But stay quiet, do not touch anything, and do not stray off. Perhaps this is something that you all should know about as well.”

So says Alpha after giving Alexia a glance. Then she immediately begins firing off instructions, after which the women in black scatter.

Alexia clinches a slight guts pose and murmurs “Did it!”

Now the only ones left are Alpha, Nelson, Rose, Alexia, Natsume, and a as-yet unidentified woman in black who is not Epsilon.

“What are your intentions in doing all this?”

Nelson glares at Alpha while still restrained by the woman in black.

For some reason, everyone is sure that Alpha is smiling underneath her mask.

“It is said that long ago, the hero Olivie had cut off the demon Diabolos’ right arm and sealed it on this land.”

“What about it? Did you come in search of the arm?”

Nelson scoffs.

“That sounds interesting too, but... that is not what we wish to know. We are here in

search of information about the Order of Diabolos.”

Alexia reacts to the mention of the Order of Diabolos. Rose notices at the corner of her eyes Alexia’s gaze turning grim.

“Whatever that means...”

“We know that you can’t answer us. That’s why we’re here, in person. In search of the truth that had been buried within the darkness of history.”

Alpha turns around, and walks towards a large statue. The clacking of her heels reverberates in the spacious area.

“So, a statue of the hero Olivie.”

Alpha’s words cause Rose to tilt her head in puzzlement.

“Hero Olivie...? But Olivie was a man, was he not?”

The statue that Alpha had identified as that of the hero is the figure of a woman brandishing a sword. A beautiful, gallant, almost divine even, figure of a woman warrior.

“We already have a general understanding of everything. All we were lacking was solid proof. The truth of the past, the true aim of the Order, and...”

Alpha reaches out to the statue, and gently strokes its cheek.

“...Why I have the exact same face as the hero Olivie’s.”

At which, she turns around, the mask on her face gone.

“Elf...?”

No one knows whose murmur that was.

However, every single person had their breath stolen by her beauty, all while coming to the same realization. Her face is indeed an exact copy of the statue’s face.

“Don’t tell me, you are the elves’... but you were supposed to have manifested demon

possession and died...”

“So you do know something after all.”

“...!”

Nelson hurriedly clamps his mouth shut.

“We already know the truth of ‘demon possession.’ For the Order that wishes to control the world order, our existence must be quite the thorn in your side, no?”

Nelson keeps his eyes down, remaining silent.

Rose has no idea what they’re talking about. But she sees that Alexia seems to have at least some understanding, and Alpha does not look like she’s just spouting absolute nonsense.

An organization with such power would not be dabbling in archeology just as a mere hobby. There must be some enormous reason. The reason for Shadow Garden. And perhaps also, the reason for the Order of Diabolos.

The recent academy attack incident surfaces in Rose’s mind. There is no way that that was unrelated.

Two gigantic organizations are embroiled in an epic struggle hidden from the sight of the common people. Rose finds herself shivering at this realization.

If there comes a time when their struggle grows in intensity, how can countries ignorant of their existence deal with the fallout?

“We also know that the aim of the Order is not merely the revival of the demon. However, we had no proof. And so, everyone, let’s all go together and see for ourselves.”

After saying that, Alpha pours magic into the statue. The rising density of magic causes the very air to quiver.

“This much magic... you really do have demon possession. Did you Awake by yourself...?”

That absolutely outrageous amount of magic causes shivers to run down Rose's spine. If this woman turns her spearhead against a country, how much would that country have to lose in order to stop her?

"Long, long ago, there was a great battle that happened on this land. The hero sealed the demon, and innumerable lives were lost. The magic of both hero and demon mixed and gathered into a whirlpool, which also sucked in and sealed the memories that had nowhere else to go. In short, this place is a grave where ancient memories and the grudges of the demon lies."

The status begins to shine in response to the magic. Then letters of the ancient language float up, cladding the statue in a rainbow of colors.

"Hero Olivie. I thought that you would answer me."

There appears the hero Olivie, looking like a mirror image of Alpha.

"What on... how can this be..."

Nelson's legs are shaking.

Olivie turns her back on Rose and the others, and begins walking. The direction that she is heading towards is gradually dyed with a light that begins spreading everywhere.

"Come, let us take a trip into the world of fairytales."

Alpha's voice is the last thing left as the world disappears amidst a blinding light.

# Chapter 53

## The Escape Plan of a Fragile, Dainty Girl

After defeating Violet-san, I dash at my full speed to throw off any pursuers. Just in case, I even leave Lindwurm altogether, stopping on a mountain outside the city.

I wait for a while, but it seems that I had successfully gotten away. Heaving a sigh of relief, I return to my usual appearance.

I hope this was enough to gloss over the issue. At the moment, the venue must be bustling with talk of the 'mysterious intruder,' and no one should even remember about the mob character from the Magic Swordsman Academy.

I worked extra hard today, so let's go into a hot spring, then straight to bed. Or so I had thought while getting up, but then suddenly a strange door appears before me.

This dirty and shabby-looking door is floating in midair, here in the middle of nowhere. There's a dark stain on it that clearly is dried blood no matter how I look at it.

"What is this."

This is not even on the level of being 'suspicious.' Even I would opt out of touching this thing.

So I turn my heel.

"Oi."

Then I turn around again.

"You gotta be kidding me."

I jump backwards.

"Seriously?!"

The door is following my movements with everything it has.

I try to take a distance, I turn to a different direction, I somersault backwards with a hundred spins, but the door appears in front of me after every single thing I do.

Then what other choice do I have?

“Le’s cut it then.”

Immediately, I draw my sword and slash the door.

But.

The place that I had cut returns to normal.

I sheath my sword and take a moment to think.

It’s out of the question to return back to town with this dirty door in tow. It’s going to make me stand out so badly.

In the first place, what even *is* this door? There is no human presence anywhere in my current vicinity, so it’s unlikely to be a prank. There’s nothing behind the door either.

“Otherworld version of an Anywhere Door?”

I somehow feel a desperation in the way it keeps on following me, so perhaps everything would be resolved if I enter it. But today, I really feel like going to a hot spring and then straight to bed.

After thinking seriously for 30 seconds, I come to a conclusion.

Screw it, let’s quickly get this over and done with.

Opening the door reveals a deep darkness that seems to be sucking me in. Please don’t let this be the pattern where going in means instant death. With that, I dive into the darkness.



When I come to, I find myself in a stone-walled room.

It is a dreary room, with a single door, and a woman bound to a wall by all four limbs. Oh, it's Violet-san.

"Hey there."

I call out to her. She looks at me, then her eyes open wide in surprise.

Then she copies my "Hey there."

"Haven't seen you since the last few minutes."

"Pretty much. So, was it you who called me here?"

"Called...? No, I had no such intention. But it was fun, wasn't it?"

"Yea, that was really fun."

"My memory is incomplete, but from the parts that I do remember, you are the strongest by far. How great it would have been if you had been there during my time..."

"Well, that's an honor."

"So then, why are you here?"

She looks at me in puzzlement.

"A door appeared, so I went in, and this is where I ended up."

"Not sure I follow."

"I'm quite confused about it too. You wouldn't happen to know a way out of here, would you?"

"I wonder? I don't remember ever having gotten out."

"You were fighting with me just now, though?"

“I was just suddenly there. That was the first time that had happened. From what I remember, at least.”

“I see. That sucks.”

I wrack my brain for what to do.

There is a door, so I guess I might as well open it and see where it goes. But the moment I decide so, Violet-san calls out to me while pouting.

“Before your eyes is a pretty girl bound by all four limbs.”

So she says, so I look the crosswise-bound girl, and nod.

“There is indeed.”

“Why not try freeing her first?”

I tilt my head slightly, then realize that I had been under a misunderstanding.

“Aah, sorry. I thought you were in the middle of training.”

“What, why?”

“I did that training myself a long time ago.”

I destroy Violet-san’s bindings with my Academy-issued sword. Apparently I can’t use my slime sword here.

She stretches in satisfaction, then flashes me a smile that seems nostalgic to me somehow.

“Thank you. It’s my first freedom after around a thousand years.”

“Good for you.”

“Just a rough number. Because I don’t remember. But at least a thousand.”

She straightens her thin robe, then tucks her glossy black hair behind her left ear. That’s her style, apparently.

“Well then, our interests seem to coincide.”

So she says with a nonchalant tone.

“Un?”

“I wish for release, and you wish for escape. Am I right?”

“Aah, yep.”

“Let’s cooperate, then.”

“I don’t mind, but do you know the way out?”

“Not really. But I know the method for release. The Holy Ground is a jail of memories. In the center of the Holy Ground is a Magic Core. If that gets destroyed, I can be free.”

“Just you?”

She shoots me a sidelong glance, then smiles impishly.

“Everything and everyone. So, you too.”

“Would the Holy Ground collapse?”

“Who cares about that? It’s not like it’d bother you, right?”

I ruminate over Violet-san’s question in my head.

“Now that I think about it, you’re right, I don’t care. Alright, let’s go with that then.”

“So we’re agreed. And I believe you’ve already noticed it, but magic can’t be used here. This place is close to the center of the Holy Ground, so any magic you weave gets immediately sucked up by the Core.”

“So it seems.”

It’s a much more powerful version of what the terrorists had that time. The moment I weave any magic, it immediately disappears. I’m trying various things at the moment, but it seems like it’d take quite a while.

“No problem, I’m good at destroying things.”

“How reassuring. So, I’m a fragile, dainty girl who can’t use magic. I’ve always dreamed of being protected by a knight-sama.”

She smiles impishly again. That composure does not belong on a fragile, dainty girl.

She proceeds forward as if to guide the way, and opens the door without hesitation.

“Hey, so after you are released, what do you plan to do?”

So I ask Violet-san’s back.

“I’ll vanish and disappear. I’m only a memory, after all.”

She does not turn around.

# Chapter 54

## Gratz for Taking First Place in the 'Humans Who Can't Use Magic' Tournament

The other side of the door is a forest in early morning. The light of the rising sun shines through the cracks between the branches and leaves, and morning dew glitters on the grass.

It is a place that I have no recollection of. I look all around.

"We're inside a memory."

So says Violet-san.

"Your memory?"

"I do seem to remember it."

So saying, she proceeds forward. I follow her so as to not be left behind.

After quietly walking through the forest for a period of time, our vision suddenly opens up. There is an open plaza brightly illuminated by the morning sun. And in the middle of the plaza is a small girl sitting on the ground, clutching her knees.

The little girl's hair is black.

"She's crying, isn't she?"

"So it would seem."

The two of us approach the little girl.

I squat down to peer into her face, and notice tears flowing from her violet-colored eyes.

“She looks exactly like you.”

“She only looks like me.”

“Why do you think she’s crying?”

“Did she perhaps wet herself?”

So says Violet-san. I’m pretty sure that’s not it.

The girl is crying without letting her voice spill out. The bruises all over her body are plain to see.

“So anyways, what are we supposed to do?”

“If we want to proceed, we have to end this memory.”

“In other words?”

Violet-san lifts up the face of the crying girl.

“Crying won’t solve anything.”

Then she slaps the little girl’s face with a loud sound.

“Horrible.”

“It’s fine, it’s myself.”

“So you do acknowledge it.”

Then the world cracks. Just like a mirror shattering, the morning forest breaks into a thousand pieces, then disappears into a deep darkness.

Then we are in an empty darkness.

But I can still faintly make out Violet-san’s figure.

“Let’s keep going.”

“Sure thing.”

Inside the empty darkness, we continue towards the direction that our magic is begin sucked towards.

There is no other feeling in this place.

Even while walking, the feeling of my feet on the ground is vague, and I have almost no sense of up and down. As a test, I try to walk upside down, like when doing a handstand.

Oh, it works.

Violet-san looks at me walking upside-down with half-open eyes.

“Don’t peek into my skirt, alright?”

“I can’t see, so no worries.”

After walking for a while longer, we are enveloped in a madder red light.

“Uwah.”

I almost hit the ground head-first, but manage an ukemi in time.

“That’s what you get for fooling around.”

Violet-san looks at me rolling on the ground, and stretches out a hand.

“Thanks.”

I grasp that cold hand and stand back up.

This place is a battlefield lit by a setting sun. The blood-colored sun is shining right above the horizon.

“Uwah, they’re all dead.”

Fallen soldiers cover the land dyed black with blood. This continues to the horizon.

“Let’s get going.”

Violet-san starts walking, as if she already knows where her destination is.

Literal mountains of corpses.

While stepping on corpse after corpse, we make our way through the twilight battlefield.

I, too, want to rampage in a battlefield like this one day.

After a while, we find a blood-covered little girl crying in the middle of the battlefield. We stop before her.

The girl is crying while clutching her knees, sitting on top of a corpse.

Even without looking at her face, I can tell that she’s Violet-san.

“You’re crying again.”

“I was a crybaby. Lend me your sword.”

“Here you go.”

Violet-san raises the sword, and stands before the little girl. Her face is devoid of emotion, as if the emotions had been locked away somewhere else.

Violet-san swings down the sword.

That instant, I jump into motion.

Grabbing her waist, I fly backwards.

“The corpses!”

It seems she has noticed it too.

The soldier corpses are beginning to move, and one of them had almost cut her. If I hadn’t saved her, she would have been slashed.

“The Holy Ground is rejecting us... how troublesome.”

“Like an anti-virus program reacting to a virus?”

So I ask while kicking away several zombies.

“Not sure I understand that comparison.”

“Sorry, I don’t know it well either. By the way, what happens if you die?”

“Probably back to the jail at the start.”

“Eh, that sounds like a pain. You know how to use the sword?”

“To some degree, I guess?”

“Then it seems better for me to use it.”

I take my sword back from Violet-san, then start slashing at the nearby soldiers.

I can bisect them in one swing, but then the next one stands up, until we are surrounded. I quickly give up trying to wipe them out, and instead shift to trying to break through.

Violet-san stomps on the zombies on the ground with her heels.

“You really do seem meh without your magic.”

“I told you, I’m just a fragile, dainty girl. On the other hand, you seem to be moving quite well even without magic.”

“I told you, ‘no problem.’”

I make a mowing attack with my sword, cutting down the zombies pressing in.

“I was able to weave magic even since young, so I had remodeled my body along with my growth. I optimized my body for fighting. My muscles, nerves, bones, and everything else, I processed and stimulated with magic.”

After cutting down 3 with a swing, I then send one more flying with a kick.

The zombies individually are slow. They've only got numbers, so I feel like an absolute juggernaut at the moment.

"How overwhelming. You're like an adult kicking children around."

"Couldn't you have come up with a cooler comparison?"

"If there is a tournament for humans who can't use magic, you'd take first place."

"Thanks for the upgrade in status."

But with that said, even I would reach my limits if I only continue fighting endlessly. Without magic, I cannot kill all of the zombies in this crowd that reaches all the way to the horizon.

How great it would have been if I could use magic and go on a rampage.

I force my way through, and stab the little girl who is still crying.

"Sorry."

Blood spills from the little girl's mouth, then we are swallowed into a whirlpool together with all the zombies, and the world cracks again.

After the world splinters into a million pieces, we are standing in darkness again.

"You alright?"

"Thanks to you."

So Violet-san answers me as I put away my sword. Then we resume walking in the darkness, until we are once again enveloped in light.

We have reached the center of the Holy Ground.

# Chapter 55

## Just Look at What You Want to Look At Then

Alexia finds herself in a white hallway. The hallway continues into the far distance, with the end nowhere in sight. On the left and right of the hallway are rooms lined with iron bars, looking very much like jail cells.

There is no identifiable light source, but the place is well-lit. Feeling somewhat like reality, yet somewhat like a dream, this is an airy kind of place.

Olivie is walking in front of their group, with Alpha following close behind. Alexia also hurries after them in order to not be left behind.

The adult body of the beautiful elf Olivie is growing younger with every step she takes, until she is reduced to a small child.

Small Olivie walks through the bars right into a cell, and crouches on the ground.

“Long ago, young children who had nowhere to go were gathered.”

Alpha’s voice reverberates down that endless white hallway.

Then Alpha walks on.

The cells on the left and right are now suddenly filled with small children. Boys, girls, humans, elves, beast people. Aside from their youth, there are no other common points between them.

“Here, those children were turned into subjects of a particular experiment.”

Alpha stops before a cell.

There is a little girl inside this cell. She is rampaging inside her cell, seemingly having lost her sanity. From the way that she is banging her head, scratching the walls, and rolling on the ground, anyone can tell that she is trying to escape some unbearable pain.

Alpha walks on.

Inside the next cell is a bloodstained girl. But that blood is not from self-harm. Due to a strange alteration to her body, blood is dripping out from cracks on her skin.

That blackened and rotting appearance, Alexia recognizes.

“Demon possession...”

So whispers someone.

“The majority of the children did not react positively to *that*, and died.”

Alpha walks on.

There is no one in the next cell. However, the ground and walls are stained with blood, and there is a hand print that seems to be crying for help.

Then Alpha walks on, without stopping.

Cell after cell after cell, the same scene is seen repeating itself. Children suffering, and children dying.

“How terrible...”

So laments Rose with a hand over her mouth. Alexia also mentally agrees.

All of the dying children share one commonality. The girls die with symptoms of demon possession, but the boys die without such symptoms.

“It was only a small handful of girls who were fully compatible.”

Then Alpha stops.

Inside this cell is a slightly grown-up version of Olivie. She is not wounded nor suffering. Clutching her knees, all she is doing is staring at the cell across from her own.

The cell across is filled with blood. Then the next instant, the place flickers, and it is clean. Then a little girl appears in it. Then she suffers, and dies. Then another girl

appears inside.

Young Olivie watches it all.

“Why would they... something so horrible...”

So asks Rose in a quivering voice.

“Why indeed, Acting Archbishop Nelson?”

Alpha turns to Nelson.

Nelson turns away and hems and haws for a while, before finally answering in a mutter.

“Power was needed to resist the demon Diabolos...”

“That’s the Order’s stance. Regardless of the actual reason, it is fact that Olivie did manage to chop off Diabolo’s right arm. Olivie was but one among a handful of children compatible with *‘that’*.”

With that, Alpha continues walking on.

“You have mentioned *‘that’* several times already, but what is it exactly?”

Alexia’s question causes Alpha to stop for a brief moment.

“Diabolos cells. That’s what we’re calling it. In order to resist the demon Diabolos, they chose to take in Diabolos’ strength.”

“Diabolos’ strength...? Was Diabolos not a mere fairytale?”

“It’s not like we’ve seen it with our own eyes. All we know is from historic texts. If you believe it to be a mere fairytale, that is your prerogative.”

So saying, Alpha resumes walking.

“We’re not here to debate on the truth of what happened in the far past. Even this memory, we do not know how much to believe. Memories fade over time, and can change due to hopes and desires.”

The cells go by without end.

But the cells gradually become empty, until there is only Olivie left. She is now a beautiful teenage girl. Her face indeed looks extremely similar to Alpha's.

"After having grown up and acquired the power of Diabolos, Olivie was tasked with a certain mission."

"To kill Diabolos...?"

Alpha shakes her head at Rose's question.

"That's what it says in history, but we have determined that to be a fabrication. Most likely, the mission she was tasked with was to gather more Diabolos cells."

"That's complete bullshit!"

So shouts Nelson. With a reddened face, he glares at Alpha. The woman in black tightens her grip on the back of Nelson's neck, causing him to croak like a frog.

"Even after she acquired that power, Olivie remained obedient to the Order. The reason is not clear, but we speculate that it was because she truly believed, from the bottom of her heart, that defeating Diabolos would bring about peace. That is why she cooperated."

Olivie walks out from her cell.

Armor envelopes her body, a sword appears on her hip, and she sets off. Seeing the expression on her face, Alexia agrees with Alpha's speculation.

Olivie was surely hoping for the world's peace from her heart. What was on her face was resolve and hope.

As she walks down the endlessly continuing hallway, the direction that she is heading towards begins being dyed with a bright light.

"But the aim of the Order lay elsewhere."

Then the light fills the world.

“The aim of the Order... was the acquisition of that power itself..”

The light-filled world cracks like a mirror, until it splinters into nothing.

Then an entirely different world spreads out before them.

# Chapter 56

## Genes, Age, or Stress?

The place is a battlefield. But there are no warriors here.

In that battlefield filled with corpses colored madder red by a setting sun, there stand several men in labcoats around a black *thing*.

Olivie is nowhere to be seen.

Alexia and the others follow Alpha, who is already making her way towards that black *thing*.

“What is this...”

So asks Rose in a murmur.

The black *thing* is revealed to be a gigantic arm. A very black, very thick, and horribly enlarged arm of a monster. The sharp claws extending from it are plastered all over with bits of flesh.

“That’s Diabolos’ right arm. Even though it was cut off, it is still alive, to this very day.”

Just as Alpha says, the arm is indeed still alive.

One of the men in labcoats carelessly gets too near, and is instantly impaled by one of the claws. Though the arm is restrained with chains and stakes, a massive amount of magic is still leaking out from it.

“The Order was able to seal Diabolos’ right arm by using powerful artifacts. However, the sealing was imperfect, such that a distortion was generated, which eventually became the so-called ‘Holy Ground.’ But that’s a topic for another day. What is important here is that the Order is after the astonishing vitality of Diabolos cells.”

The men in labcoats are drawing blood and slicing off pieces from the sealed arm.

The drawn blood and cut off parts regenerate after a short while.

“Through their research of Diabolos’ right arm, the Order is developing a medicine that can strengthen humans. At the current stage, that medicine still causes side effects, but it can be used by men.”

Alpha takes out a lozenge from her chest pocket, and flicks it into the air.

After drawing an arc in the air, the lozenge rolls on the ground, until it bumps into Nelson’s shoe and stops. Alexia recognizes that red lozenge.

“This has become a pillar of strength holding the Order up, but it is not the real source of the Order’s strength. After sealing Diabolos’s flesh, they spent numerous months and years researching it, until they finished a certain medicine.”

The scene changes.

They are now in a white laboratory. More men in labcoats are huddled around a single table, fervently waiting for the moment when *that* is finished.

Then a single drop of something falls into a small vial.

“That brilliantly red liquid is said to seem almost like the living blood of Diabolos.”

The liquid in the vial is indeed a beautiful, vivid red, not unlike real blood.

The men can be seen rejoicing and cheering. Then the one who seems to be their leader licks it up.

“Anyone who licks that liquid gains enormous strength... and a body that does not age. Apparently our speculation was correct after all.”

Alpha looks at Nelson, who is looking downwards as if to hide his face.

“Now then, a question. Who here thinks that the man in a labcoat over there...”

So saying, Alpha points towards a certain person standing near the edge of the group in labcoats.

“...bears resemblance to Acting Archbishop Nelson over here?”

“...!”

Alexia hurriedly looks at Nelson’s face.

Just as Alpha points out, Nelson’s face and the face of that man in a labcoat is the splitting image of each other. The similarity is so great that it’s gone beyond the level of ‘looking alike,’ to the point where it is almost certain that they are the same person.

“So what is the name of this wonderful medicine?”

“...The Tears of Diabolos.”

So mutters Nelson.

“Thank you. But actually, this Tears of Diabolos is also not a perfect product. In fact, it has two large flaws.”

Alexia has already realized one of those flaws. The current Nelson is bald. But the Nelson in the memory...

“Acting Archbishop Nelson had hair in the past. It seems that the unaging property is imperfect.”

Alexia laughs.

“That is incorrect.”

Alpha denies Alexia’s speculation.

“Me being bald is because of stress.”

So declares Nelson with certainty.

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

Alexia apologizes.

“The first flaw is that the Tears of Diabolos must be taken regularly, or else its effects will be lost. Is that correct?”

“Once a year, yes.”

“As we’d speculated. And the second flaw is that its production is extremely limited.”

“12 drops every year.”

“12 drops. And if I remember correctly, there are exactly 12 seats in the Knights of Rounds.”

“Hmph...”

Nelson barks out a laugh while still looking down.

“The Order has 12 knights possessing exceptional power called the Knights of Rounds. Everyone in the Order aims to join the Rounds, seeking the eternal life that such a position promises. Isn’t that so?”

Nelson continues laughing, a disturbing laugh emanating from the back of his throat.

“The Order is putting an enormous amount of resources into the research to perfect the Tears of Diabolos. The key to that research is the sealed body of Diabolos, and the heroes’ descendants who have strongly inherited the blood of their hero ancestor. Like me, for example, who strongly inherited Olivie’s blood.”

“Correct on all counts. And... I am the 11th Seat of the Knights of Rounds, Nelson ‘the Avaricious’.”

Nelson lifts his face up, revealing glowing red eyes.

Feeling an enormous amount of magic swirling into motion, Alexia drops into a stance.

That instant, a jet black blade pierces Nelson’s chest. That woman who had been restraining Nelson had reaped his life without any hesitation whatsoever.

Nelson falls to the ground, all strength leaving his body.

“Sorry, Alpha. But Delta felt that this man needed to be hunted down.”

*(T/N: Delta refers to herself in 3rd person. This is something mainly done by children, so when a non-child character does this, it is an indication of relative mental immaturity.)*

It was a voice that sounded somewhat soulless.

“Delta...”

“Delta is good at hunting. Just recently, there were these boars on a mountain...”

“Be quiet.”

Delta clasps her hands to her mouth and looks around ruefully.

“Too late. And also, look at your prey carefully.”

Nelson’s body is crumbling. Starting from the side, it gradually disappears entirely into nothing.

That is not the way a person dies.

It is almost like a mirror breaking...

“Incoming.”

Alpha’s warning and Delta’s response happened at the same time.

Right before being bisected by a greatsword, Delta drops to the ground, then springs forward like a beast.

Delta’s fangs clash with the greatsword.

“You beast...!”

“Delta is really good at hunting.”

So Nelson exclaims, to which Delta laughs wildly.

Delta’s canines are stained with blood, blood from the scratch on Nelson’s face. However, Nelson merely wipes the blood off his cheek as if it’s of no consequence. Indeed, the wound has already healed.

Delta greatly extends her jet black blade, then crouches on all fours, ready to pounce at any moment.

But right then.

“Delta, wait.”

Alpha’s voice causes Delta to jolt in surprise.

“Your ears are showing.”

“Ah...!”

Delta’s furry ears are protruding from a gap in her bodysuit. Incidentally, the bottom half of her face is also revealed.

As she flusteredly covers back up, this time it’s her white behind that gets revealed. Her bushy tail swings back and forth.

“Beast person...”

So gasps Rose.

“Ah, um, Alpha-samaa~, I feel like my magic is being sucked awaaayyyy~::~”

“That’s because we are close to the center of the Holy Ground.”

It is Nelson who answers Delta.

“The Holy Ground is our territory. The closer to the center, the more power you fools lose.”

Nelson’s voice is blurred. Before anyone had noticed, Nelson had become two. Or so it had seemed, but now he is only one.

“I had wanted to make my move a bit closer, but no matter, this will suffice. Allow me to formally introduce myself once more.”

Lightly resting his greatsword that is about the length of the average person’s height on his shoulder, Nelson briefly bobs his head.

“11th Seat of the Knights of Rounds, Nelson the Avaricious. You all shall now learn to regret having bared your fangs against the Order.”

His face is not that of a man of the cloth. Rather, it is filled with the ferocity of a warrior.

# Chapter 57

## Everything Is Within His Expectations

The scenery changes.

This is an empty, white space that stretches on endlessly. The sky, the ground, and even the horizon; everything is a bland white color.

Alpha and Delta are standing off against Nelson.

Nelson's figure blurs, then there are two of him.

Delta gradually inches forward, body bent low.

Alpha merely stands in place with arms crossed, not even drawing her weapon. Instead, she has her gaze focused on the two Nelsons, carefully observing them.

*"...Shi!"*

With a sharp exhalation, Delta makes a move.

Her lowered body pounces forward like a beast.

Riding that forward momentum, her jet black blade makes a horizontal slash.

Her sword that is now longer than the average person's height is devoid of technique and heart, filled entirely with pure violence.

The tremendous shock rocks the atmosphere.

Nelson attempts to parry the violence that threatens to mow down everything, and ends up being sent flying.

It appears that he had barely managed to defend himself, but on his face is unmistakable shock.

“You monster...!”

Delta laughs.

But right as she is about to pursue him in a follow-up attack, the second Nelson steps in. His greatsword attempts to intercept the advancing Delta.

But.

“One down.”

“Ah...?”

Even before he finishes his swing, the second Nelson’s head has sprouted a jet black blade.

Without anyone noticing, Alpha had circled behind him, and stabbed her sword into the back of his head. In the same motion, Alpha chops off his head.

Without sound, without killing intent, as if it’s the most normal thing in the world.

Blood fountains into the air, creating a striking stain on the white ground.

But the next instant, that corpse shatters into pieces like a mirror, then disappears.

“The feedback was indeed human. The movements and smell were also human. This is probably a part of the Holy Ground’s defense mechanism.”

So murmurs Alpha, as she looks at the blood on her sword also fading away.

“Indeed.”

Nelson hides his astonishment, then takes a stance. The next moment, he becomes 2, then 4.

“It seems that I had let down my guard a little. Now let’s see how you two fare against 4 people.”

Leaving 1 behind, the other 3 Nelsons step forward.

Delta plunges into their midst.

The risk of being surrounded by superior numbers means nothing to her. The mad charge towards prey is everything.

“So a mere beast after all...”

Nelson laughs.

Delta also laughs.

She first slices down the foremost Nelson in one attack, sword and all.

But then the two other Nelsons who now surround her assail her together.

The horizontally mowing greatswords converge from both her front and back.

Left without an escape route, Delta parries the greatsword coming from the front, then snaps her head around.

And then.

She bites the greatsword approaching from the back.

Delta’s canines pierce into the greatsword, which then shatters with a dull sound.

“Hah...?!”

A stupified exclamation escapes Nelson’s lips.

In the time it takes Nelson to rub his eyes, the two remaining Nelsons have already been killed by Delta.

“How can this...”

Alpha’s and Delta’s magic should be largely suppressed. Due to the effect of the Holy Ground, their control should also be unstable. That’s no state to put up any proper fight.

However, despite being under these conditions, these two have already killed several

Nelsons.

This is something that far exceeds the boundaries of common sense.

“Did you two Awake by yourself...? But the method to do so should have been lost long ago...”

Nelson’s question is answered only by a smile from Alpha.

Delta seems to be having trouble with controlling her slime bodysuit.

In the end, she gathers it only around her chest and lower body, creating a simple bikini armor.

With the barest minimum of her face and body properly covered, Delta nods in satisfaction.

“W-, well, this much is still within expectation.”

So says Nelson in a slightly shaky voice.

“Behold, then, my full strength!”

Together with those words, the number of Nelsons increase.

Their number is a far cry from anything so far. Going beyond 10, approaching 100 even.

“Mountain of preeeyyyyy...”

Delta laughs with delight, then plunges into their midst once again.

“Can you not even understand numerical disadvantage, you beast!”

But when Delta clashes with the Nelsons, it is Nelson’s face that stiffens.

Several Nelsons are sent flying through the air, like some sort of a joke.

“AAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!”

Delta's roar echoes like some bad quality laughter.

Then begins the massacre.

Alexia watches on with a slack jaw from far away as Delta's jet black blade spins like a tornado.

Her sword is different from Shadow's, different from Alpha's and Epsilon's.

There are no stances, no techniques, only pure violence. It is far removed from what Alexia has come to acknowledge as true strength.

Are you fine with this?

So Alexia would have asked if *he* had been present.

But she is undeniably strong. To an outrageous degree too.

With Alpha also thrown into the fray, the Nelsons are exterminated in no time at all.

"H-, how... and so easily...!?"

"You must have been a researcher."

So says Alpha, with a slight tinge of pity in her voice.

"No matter how many copies you make, you only have 1 brain. Human brains don't have the capacity to control several bodies. When you bring out a hundred bodies, then they become nothing more than mere scarecrows."

At that moment, Delta defeats the last copy, then walks forward while swinging her tail.

"One last preeyyyy..."

Her face is distorted into a fiendish smile. It is as if she is a wild beast starving for blood.

"Hiii...!"

Nelson backs away.

“And it seems like there’s a limit to the number of copies that you can produce.”

So comments Alpha while watching on.

In truth, Nelson no longer has the ability to make anymore copies.

And so...

He calls out the final guardian of the Holy Ground.

“Come, come quickly...!”

In response to that pathetic voice, there appears a tear in space.

Light spills out from the split, then forms into the figure of a woman. That figure that looks exactly like Alpha is...

“Olivie...”

So gasps Alexia.

There stands the hero Olivie. However, there is no light in her eyes. Those blank, glass bead-like eyes somehow look sorrowful.

She stands in front of Nelson, as if to protect him.

Delta laughs.

But surprisingly, she does not jump forward. Neither does she approach Olivie’s maai.

She is only observing her prey with bloodshot eyes that seem to be licking Olivie all over.

“Hero Olivie... So you really are...”

Alpha bites her lip.

Delta licks her lips, and wipes away her drool.

At that moment.

“Alpha-sama, the investigation is completed!”

A voluptuous woman in black appears. But for some reason, she is standing quite far away.

“Epsilon... Which means our preliminary inspection is over.”

Alpha turns around and begins walking away.

“Y-, you’re running away, huh!”

So shouts Nelson in an obviously relieved voice.

“What interest do I have in the life of a small fry? Our aim is the destruction of the source of your power. We now know the full details of the Holy Ground’s defenses. Next time, we’ll wrench it open with everything we have.”

“Y-, you think I’ll let you get away?”

“Ara, do you plan to pursue us?”

“Hi!”

Nelson hides behind Olivie.

“Delta, we’re going... Delta!”

Alpha grabs Delta by the back of her neck, but Delta throws off her grip and bares her teeth.

“GAHH!!”

“...”

Then with a start, she returns to herself.

“Haun, I’m sorry...”

“We’re going.”

With ears flattened and tail curled, Delta submissively follows along behind Alpha.

“Alpha-sama, please hurry! The exit is this way! Hurry, hurry!”

Epsilon is furiously swinging her hands while repeating ‘hurry.’ The two lumps of slime are going *boing boing*.

Everyone goes into the shining tear in space indicated by Epsilon, then silence pervades the Holy Ground.

Nelson crumples to the ground, and breathes out a long sigh of relief.

“W-, well, I have remembered the face of that Alpha or whatever. When we get our hands on her blood, the research should make great progress. Everything is still within expectation.”

So he mutters to himself for a while.

“First, I should report up. Let’s say that I lured them into the Holy Ground, sprung a trap on them, and thus exposed Alpha’s identity.”

With that, he should be able to protect himself.

“And then... *nn?*”

That moment, Nelson feels an irregularity in the Holy Ground.

“Don’t tell me... a rat has sneaked into the center of the Holy Ground?”

Nelson looks around, then a malicious smile appears on his face.

“Hmph, I just happen to be in need of something to torture to vent this frustration. Olivie, follow.”

Then Nelson and Olivie also disappear.

# Chapter 58

## That Which Can Only Be Drawn By the Chosen

This is a place that looks like ancient ruins of some sort.

The vague, dream-like feeling that had been present the entire time is now gone. In its place is a slightly chilly air that quickly wakes me up.

The ceiling is high, and the entire surroundings is illuminated by magic light.

“So this is the center.”

Violet-san does a quick spin to take in the entire space.

“So what is it that we should destroy?”

I don't see anything that looks like a magic core. The only thing here is a huge door standing a distance away.

“Beyond the door, most likely.”

Violet-san walks on the stone paving, approaching the door.

“Makes sense.”

I follow after her.

The door is ridiculously enormous. Its width is enough for 100 people to walk abreast. Well alright, maybe that's a bit of an exaggeration.

Point is, it's a really big door.

That ancient-looking door is covered here and there with black stains that is clearly blood, underneath which are innumerable ancient letters packed tightly together. Wound around the entire door are swathes of chains thicker than the average human waist that are keeping it tightly shut.

“Would we be able to go in if we get these chains off?”

“Probably.”

I grab one of the chain links and pull.

It doesn't even budge.

“Yep, not happening.”

No matter how many tournaments for people who can't use magic I may win, something this thick is just physically impossible for me.

If I try to cut it with my sword, it'll definitely be my sword that breaks.

“You know, this thing most probably has a key.”

“I see, good point.”

We spot it in one second.

Right beside the door is a dais with a really fancy-looking sword stabbed into it.

“Whichever way anyone looks at it, this is it for sure.”

“Whichever way whoever looks at it, this is it for sure.”

The side of the sword dais is, again, packed tightly with ancient letters.

“It seems that this sword can cut through those chains.”

So says Violet-san as she reads the ancient lettering.

But I've already understood it. A sword in a dais. This pattern...

“But this sword can't be drawn, right?”

“Eh...?”

“I can tell with a single glance...”

So saying, I place a hand on the sword hilt and give it a tug, but as expected it does not budge.

“As I had thought... here, too...”

So I mutter profoundly.

“This sword can only be drawn by the chosen...”

“What...!?”

Violet-san hurriedly traces the ancient lettering on the dais with her fingers.

And so, I let go of the sword.

“The sword... is rejecting me...”

So I say on the spur of the moment, but the sword’s not actually rejecting me.

But the sword stuck in the dais being draw-able only by the chosen hero is mere common sense, a cliché used well and well again.

“The Holy Sword can only be drawn by direct descendants of the heroes... that’s indeed what it says here. I’m surprised you managed to read and decode this magic text in one look.”

“Hmph... everything exists as clichés...”

“So you’re familiar enough with magic letter secret codes to recognize the various patterns as clichés... so that’s how you knew.”

“Something like that.”

I nod with satisfaction.

A sword stuck in a dais, and a seal on a door that can only be undone with said sword. It’s indeed extremely cliché, but actually I love contrivances like this.

Isn’t it great? Really feels like a fantasy world.

“How troublesome...”

Violet-san sits on the dais and sighs.

“Any other way?”

I sit down next to Violet-san.

“None recorded on here, at least.”

“I see.”

I think for a while in the silence. Probably we’re both thinking about the other.

So I speak up first.

“You want to disappear?”

“Disappear?”

“Didn’t you say that if the core is destroyed, you’d disappear?”

“Hmm, how should I put it. Rather than ‘disappear,’ it’d be more accurate to say that I’d be ‘freed,’ I suppose.”

Violet-san looks at me and smiles.

“What’s the difference?”

“Here is a jail where memories are repeated again and again without end, for eternity. It’s a bit hard to bear for me, you see...”

So she murmurs in a voice that sounds like it might vanish at any moment.

“I see. Then let’s wait a while.”

“Wait...?”

“If we wait a while, we might be able to do something about the door. But before that... we have guests.”

Before the door appears a glowing rift in space.

The rift gradually grows to a certain size, then a bald ossan and a beautiful elf girl comes out from there.

“*Nn...?*”

“What’s the matter?”

“Not much, just that that elf-san’s face looks really similar to a friend of mine.”

But they’re different people. Their bone structure is different. So is their gait and manner too.

“*Hou...* to have brought Aurora all the way here.”

So says the bald ossan while looking at Violet-san.

“You know him?”

“I don’t remember having seen him before. But my memory is incomplete, so maybe I’ve met him before?”

The two of us are whispering to each other.

“But what a pity. The door cannot be opened by the likes of you.”

The bald ossan is smirking.

“You’re quite an unlucky one, aren’t you, lad?”

“Eh, you’re talking about me?”

I point to myself.

“I don’t know where or how you’ve wandered into here, but because you were deceived by the witch’s honeyed words, you will now have to die. Cut to pieces by this Olivie here, to be specific.”

Under Bald Ossan’s instruction, the elf-san steps forward.

Bald Ossan is not much, but this beauty is strong.

“You can’t, she is...”

“I know, she’s strong.”

“Let’s run!”

“Why?”

We’re whispering again.

“If you must hate someone, hate that witch next to you, not me. And also your foolish self! Kill him, Olivie!”

Olivie-san readies a sword that looks exactly like the Holy Sword.

I draw my cheap Academy-issued sword. Her glass bead-like eyes are looking solely at me.

I can feel a smile spreading on my face.

“Wait, you can’t fight her!”

Why?

Violet-san’s voice emanates from behind me.

# Chapter 59

## Inescapable Attack

The fight begins with Sid being sent flying.

He crashes into the stone-paved floor with incredible force, then vomits out blood.

Olivie shows no mercy to the faltering Sid. Her Holy Sword flashes horizontally, aiming for his neck.

His head flies... or at least, that's what it leads everyone to think, so fast is the swing.

In actuality, Sid had squatted down, barely managing to evade Olivie's sword. A deep 「一」 mark is carved into the stone wall behind him.

However, he knows that a follow up attack is coming immediately. And so, he takes a step forward to eliminate their maai.

But his efforts prove to be in vain.

Even faster than he can take one step forward, Olivie takes half a step back.

Olivie's attack slams into the Sid caught defenseless halfway through a step.

With a high-pitched '*kiin*' sound, his sword snaps.

It seems that he had raised his guard in time, but the cost is half of his sword. And he still ends up slamming into the ground anyway, coming to a stop only after bounding several times.

This can no longer be called a fight, as one-sided as it is.

But this is only natural.

This is no time to talk about technique and whatnot. Their comparative strength, speed, stamina, and general physical stats are like heaven and earth.

Just like how a proper fight cannot be established between an adult and a baby, this tragedy is what results when a boy who cannot use magic crosses swords with a hero who can.

It is already a miracle that the fight did not end in the first exchange.

“Olivie, don’t let a mere brat give you trouble.”

So says Nelson in a vexed tone, accompanied by a tsk.

While Olivie stops moving, Sid gets up. His attempt to wipe his nosebleed causes a streak to remain on his face. The sputum that he spits out with a ‘*che*’ is unmistakably stained with blood.

He gazes at the half of a sword that he has left, then swings it as if in confirmation. It is almost as if he believes he would still have a chance to use that sword.

“What do you think you are doing?”

“*Nn?*”

Sid tilts his head in puzzlement at Nelson’s question.

“Are you actually thinking that you can do something with that broken sword?”

“I wonder. But it’s true that the things I can do have decreased quite significantly.”

“What’s with that face.”

“*Nn?*”

“Why the fuck are you smiling.”

Having been asked so, Sid touches his own face. He discovers that he really is smiling.

“There’s none that I find more offensive than those who do not understand their own place. The only reason why you are alive, is due in full to sheer luck.”

Nelson waves his arm, at which Olivie once again springs into motion.

She takes his back once again effortlessly, then swings down her Holy Sword.

There's no time for parrying, for blocking, nor even evading.

The only thing he can do is throw himself forward.

Then blood fountains from Sid's back.

Skin is ripped, and muscles torn, but at the very least it was not a fatal strike. That is the only way that he has been able to hold onto life for so long.

Olivie continues her assault on the defenseless Sid.

It is a merciless onslaught that grants no respite.

Blood fountains again and again, as the number of not so superficial wounds on Sid's body continues to grow.

However, he just doesn't die.

"Wh-, how...?"

So questions Nelson. His voice is colored with disbelief.

"How are you still alive?"

Confirming that Nelson has indicated for Olivie to back off, Sid drags his bloodstained body up.

"Fights without conversation, are monotonous. That's, why I'm still alive."

"What are you saying?"

"She has no heart. My questions, they fall on dead ears."

He laughs somewhat sorrowfully. That mouth of his is glistening with the bright color of blood.

"That's enough. Kill him."

The gaze in Nelson's eyes is as if he's looking at something disgusting.

But the moment Olivie moves, a figure jumps into the fight.

"Please stop."

The beautiful woman with jet black hair and violet eyes grabs Sid's shoulders and supports him.

"What's wrong?"

"Please, no more..."

So says Aurora in what sounds like a beg.

She had known it would end like this from the very start. The instant Aurora had laid eyes on Olivie, she knew that this woman is strong.

Aurora's memory is incomplete. Her memories only tell her part of what happened in her life. And Olivie is nowhere in those memories. But for some reason, she knows that Olivie is dangerous. There's no memory, but her heart is afraid, as if it knows.

That's why she tried to stop this fight.

But in opposition to her expectations, Sid chose to take up his sword.

Maybe if it's him... Such a faint anticipation had caused her to be late.

But this is already more than enough.

In her entire life of being despised and scorned, there has never been anyone who stood up for her, even at the cost of their own life. Now she has a memory that she would never forget. It's already plenty.

"There's no need for you to die. I'll handle the rest somehow."

"What can a witch robbed of her magic do?"

So scoffs Nelson.

“I can at least help him to escape.”

Aurora steps forward, as if to protect Sid.

“To think that I’d see the day where the witch protects someone. Is there anything more laughable than this? But... if you swear to cooperate with us, then I won’t mind letting the brat go.”

“Cooperate?”

“Indeed, cooperation. It’s all because you continue to reject us that we have been delayed so.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Hmph, so do you don’t remember. Anyways, all you have to do is swear to cooperate. If you take too long, the brat may end up dying, you know?”

Aurora turns around and looks into Sid’s face for a moment.

“I understand...”

“Umm, can you guys not proceed the conversation all by yourselves?”

Sid’s laid-back voice thrusts in between the two’s conversation. Aurora turns around again, this time to glare at Sid.

“Look here, it’s for your sake that I...”

“No need.”

Sid walks forward and stands in front of Aurora.

“I’ve been listening for a while, but why are you guys talking as if I’m going to lose? How disagreeable.”

“I find you more pitiful by the minute, brat. To think that you don’t understand the situation you are in. If you had kept quiet and stayed obediently, I might even have actually let you go.”

“As I said, no need.”

Sid turns around, and looks at Aurora.

“And you, just stay there and keep watching.”

“I’m tired of this. Just kill him already.”

“WAITTT!!”

But Aurora’s hands are not long enough.

Sid steps in and collides into Olivie.

Olivie meets his tactless and frank charge with her Holy Sword.

Her choice is a thrust.

That attack of unbelievable speed tears through the air, and plunges into his abdomen.

With complete ruthlessness, her sword even reappears on the other side.

“...Caughtcha.”

While impaled, he smiles, exposing all his bloodstained teeth.

Then he grabs Olivie’s arm and drags her towards him with all his strength. His muscles bulge and scream from exceeding their limits.

For a split second, Olivie’s movement stops.

This distance is just right for a half-broken sword’s maai.

Sid’s sword aims for Olivie’s jugular, but she manages to avoid it by jerking her upper body backwards.

However, in doing so, she loses her balance.

Sid lets go of his sword, hugs Olivie close, then pushes her down.

Then he plunges his teeth into her jugular.

His teeth stab into her thin neck, and rip her jugular vein open.

Hugging her with all the strength he can muster, pinning down her flailing arms, and tearing her neck apart piece by piece. Every time he bites into her neck, her entire body convulses.

Until finally, Olivie shatters into nothing, like the way a mirror breaks.

All that's left is the bloodstained Sid.

“Wha-, what, but Olivie... What the fuck are you!! Why aren't you dead even though there's a sword piercing through your stomach!!!”

Nelson's question is only natural. The front to back wound in Sid's abdomen is fatal in all appearances.

It's already baffling enough that he's not dead, but to even kill Olivie with that wound? That's not something that a human can do.

“Humans die very easily. It's not rare for people to die just from a mere bump in the back of their head. I am no exception. Just a mere bump, in the correct part of the back of my head, and I might very well be gone.”

He stands up while examining his wounds, as if to confirm the state of his body.

“But if the vital points are protected, humans are quite tough. Even though my abdomen is pierced, since I protected my major blood vessels and the important organs, here I still stand. Don't you think that's just so wonderful?”

“Wonderful...?”

“It is so! By counterattacking when the opponent attacks, it saves you the effort of getting close. When your face is punched, you can punch their face at the same time. If they stab your abdomen, you can rip their neck apart with your teeth. When attack and defense become one, the delay for countering is shortened to the absolute limit. It becomes a counterattack that borders on being nigh inescapable.”

“Your head... your head is fucked up!”

“So you’re alright?”

Sid nods in reply to the worried Aurora.

“Well then, elf-san has disappeared. Does that mean my next opponent is now you, ossan?”

Nelson is extremely flustered.

“O-, okay, you win! I never even imagined that Olivie would lose! You’re just too strong! Everything was my mistake, my fault, so please forgive me!”

Nelson hangs his head, but then begins chuckling.

“...Did you actually think that I would say something like that? Sure, I’m surprised that a boy who can’t use magic managed to defeat Olivie. You really are something, brat, even if it was all due to luck. Regardless, a win is a win. Well done.”

Nelson looks up, clapping his hands.

“But don’t get ahead of yourself after defeating a single low quality copy. The amount of magic stored in the Holy Ground is beyond your ken. With it, I can do even something like THIS.”

Then Nelson flings his arms, causing light to fill up their surroundings.

When the light subsides, it reveals Olivie.

To be specific, not one Olivie.

But rather, an innumerable number of Olivies, enough to completely fill the ruins.

“H-, how can this be...”

Aurora trembles.

Though Sid has yet to receive a fatal wound, the ones he did receive are by no means light. His body cannot withstand a fight with one more Olivie, let alone this many.

“This is the power of the Holy Ground!!!”

The countless number of Olivies all leap towards Sid.

Sid smiles thinly.

“That’s quite a surprise indeed. But... time’s up.”

The Olivies approaching him from all directions... are bisected.

“WHAT?!”

Since when has that jet black sword been in his hands?

“Where did that sword come from... no, rather than that, you can use magic?!”

Sid’s body is enveloped with crackling violet-colored magic.

Magic of extremely high density, to the point where it is visible. That magic that has been refined to an unimaginable level is shining oh so beautifully.

“If the magic I weave gets sucked away, then all I have to do is make it so dense that it can’t be sucked away. Though it took a bit of time, it’s pretty easy, actually.”

How could it be easy. Even Aurora, she is who called ‘the Witch,’ cannot accomplish this feat.

“Tha-, that’s... impossible!! As if anyone can actually do that!! H-, hurry up and kill hiiimmmmm!!”

So shouts Nelson with a face spasming with fear.

Once again, a countless number of Olivies charge forward.

But Sid extends his jet black blade, then swings it in a complete circle.

“This has gotten be a fucking joke! Olivie is, that Olivie is, the Olivies are!!”

“I told you, didn’t I? That time’s up.”

Again and again, the Olivies rush towards Sid.

They come, and Sid cuts them down. They come, and Sid cuts them down. Each exchange takes only several brief moments.

But each time, more blood drips out from Sid's wounds, causing his face to distort with pain.

This equilibrium will not last long. This is clear in everyone's eyes.

"HAHAHA, that's the way, press him, keep pressing him!!"

So laughs Nelson with the face of a cornered rat.

As Aurora looks at Sid in his predicament, tears fall unbidden from her eyes

'If it's him'... that faint anticipation had once again risen in her heart.

But anymore than this...

"Please, be safe..."

Aurora prays for his survival.

That moment.

"Hey, so we have to draw the Holy Sword, cut the chains, and destroy the core, right?"

In the midst of this desperate situation, so Sid asks Aurora.

"Eh? Yes..."

So confirms Aurora in confusion.

"If I skip all the annoying procedures and directly destroy everything, there shouldn't be any problem, right?"

"There shouldn't be, but... don't tell me, eh, wait, you're joking right?"

Sid grins, then does another 360° sweep with his sword.

The Olivies are all blown away, opening up some space around him.

Sid transfers his sword to his other hand, then holds it high above his head.

His violet magic begins to whirl in a spiral, gathering towards his jet black sword.

“I AM...”

“Wh-, what is that magic?! N-, no, NO, NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!”

The Olivies dash at their full speed.

The closest one thrusts with her Holy Sword.

The strike with her entire weight behind it reaches his defenseless chest.

Her sword accurately pierces the position of his heart. The bloodstained sword tip emerges from his back.

Aurora screams, and reaches out with a hand.

But.

“...ALL-RANGE TAEPODONG!!!”

Even with his chest stabbed straight through, he swings his sword down, and plunges it into the ground.

Violet magic stains the entire world in an instant.

All the Olivies are evaporated, Nelson is evaporated, and the Holy Sword is evaporated.

The violet magic swallows everything as far as the eye can see.

What he had just used was the short-ranged all-direction annihilation secret technique ‘I Am All-Range Taepodong.’

That day, the Holy Ground was erased.

# Chapter 60

## Puzzle Piece

When he comes to, Sid finds himself in a pitch black place.

Even when he strains his eyes, he cannot see anything. It is a darkness that seems to have no end.

In this darkness where there is no up or down, no left or right, and where even his sense of self seems to be fading away, something seems to be looming towards him.

It is a grotesque right arm restrained by chains.

It seems to be so far away, yet so close as to be within reach.

Abruptly, the chains shatter.

The fragments fall away, each piece breaking into even smaller pieces.

The now freed right arm reaches towards Sid, as if to grab him.

Sid raises his jet black sword in readiness, then...

The world is enveloped in light.

Sid finds himself standing in a forest in early morning. It is the exact same place where he had gone into the door.

He quickly scans his surroundings, but that right arm is nowhere to be seen. The bright morning light enters his eyes, causing him to squint.

“So even with your heart pierced, you won’t die.”

Hearing a voice addressing him from behind, Sid turns around. There stands a somewhat indistinct-looking Aurora.

“I shifted the position of my heart. But I am a bit tired...”

He looks up at the morning sky, sighs, then sits with his back leaning against a tree.

“You are a person of surprises. Way more surprises than even me, it seems.”

She sits beside him, then reaches out towards the wound on his chest.

Blood does not get onto Aurora’s hand. In fact, her hand cannot even touch him. It merely phases through.

“So you really are disappearing.”

“So it seems.”

The two sit there, gazing at the beautiful morning sun.

“I did actually call you. Sorry for lying about it.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

“I also lied to about about a few other things.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

Birdsong filters through the leaves. Morning dew shines, glitters.

“I had always wanted to disappear. I wanted to forget everything.”

“Un.”

“But now I have one memory that I really do not want to forget. Even if I disappear, I wish for this memory to remain forever.”

Then she smiles.

“Thank you, for this precious memory.”

But she is gradually fading away. The forced smile on her face is colored with sorrow.

“I had fun too. Thank you.”

“One day, if you ever meet the real me...”

She whispers to him with her hand positioned over his cheek. But he can no longer see her.

There is no one there, merely the morning continuing on in its silence.

“ ‘Please kill me,’ huh...”

He murmurs Aurora’s final words, then touches his own cheek. For some reason, it feels like her warmth is still lingering.



Alpha and Epsilon look down on Lindwurm from a mountaintop.

Alpha’s dress is ruffled by the wind, leading to her white legs being visible in glimpses.

“The Holy Ground has been erased.”

“So it seems.”

Alpha presses the bridge of her nose.

“Retrieval of the Holy Sword?”

“The Holy Sword was evaporated.”

Alpha sighs.

“Sampling of the core?”

“The core was also evaporated.”

Alpha shakes her head.

“The simplest and the surest solution. How like him.”

“The only one who could actually accomplish it is Shadow-sama alone.”

So says Epsilon with pride in her voice.

“The path he walks, is the path we walk.”

Alpha’s beautiful blond hair glitters in reflection of the morning sun. While gazing at the faraway city of Lindwurm, she narrows her eyes.

“Beta?”

“Guiding the princesses. If all goes well, she should be able to plant herself.”

“Noted. Investigation at the Holy Ground?”

“We gathered all information that we could at the present stage.”

“Tell me.”

Epsilon explains, while Alpha listens.

Her brilliant mind instantaneously sorts through the information.

“Enough. That matter?”

“Our hypothesis was... indeed correct.”

So answers Epsilon with the simplest word choice possible, but only after a brief moment of hesitation.

“Aurora the Witch of Calamity... by another name, the demon Diabolos.”

Alpha directs her blue eyes towards the faraway morning sun.

“I see... so that’s why he...”

The sound of a puzzle piece falling into place seems to reverberate in the air.



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