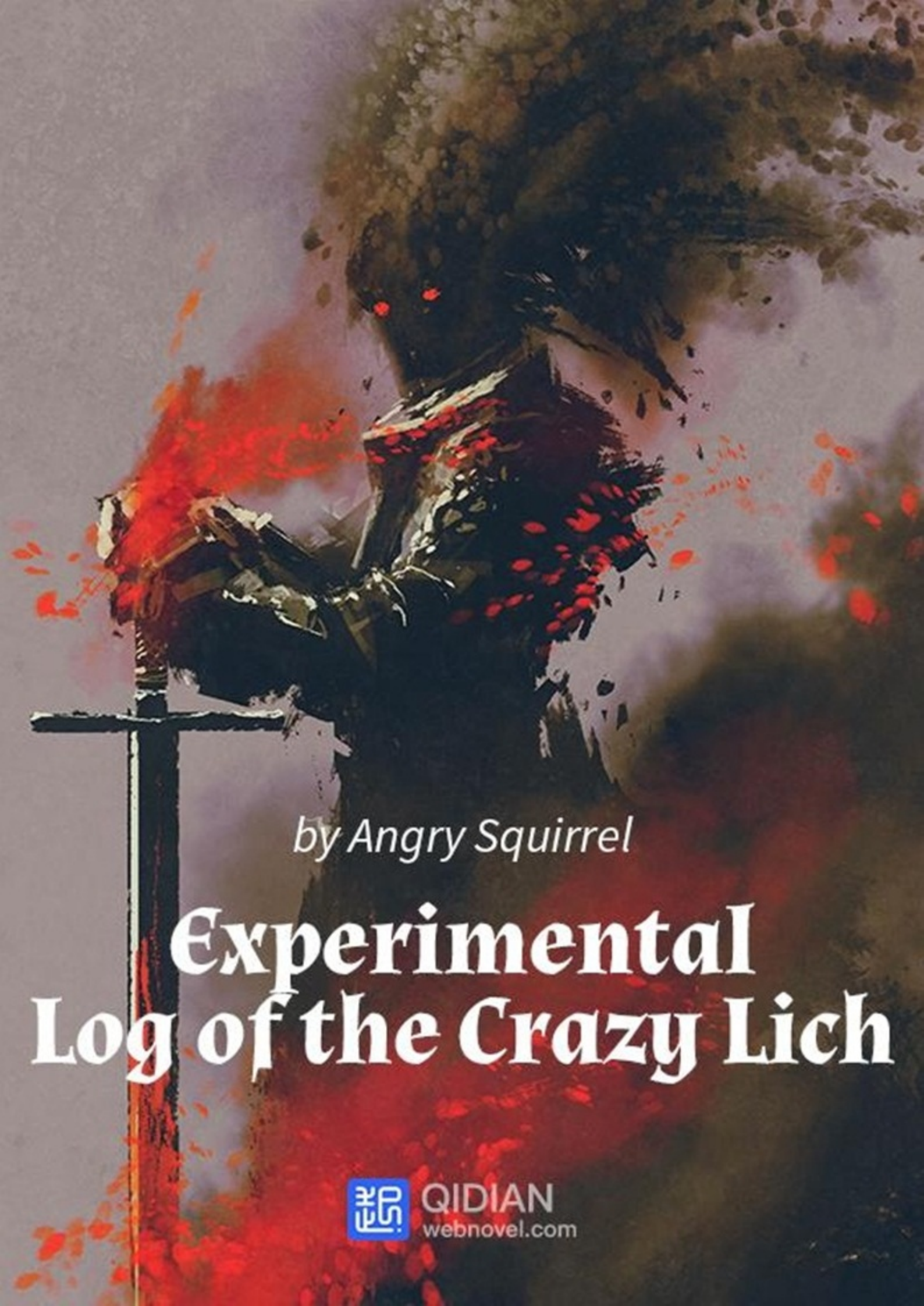


by Angry Squirrel

Experimental Log of the Crazy Lich

QIDIAN
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The Experimental Log of the Crazy Lich

– Feng wu yao de shi yan ri zhi –

- Book 3 -

-Author-
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Chapter 201
Post-Combat Dealings

A battle would never have true victors. Unlike in those legends and epics, war would only leave behind ruins, hatred, and endless generations of revenge cycles.

The majority of ordinary people do not enjoy war, but why, then, does war still exist? Perhaps it is because of personal interests—as long as there is no effective or better method of mediating disagreements and clashes, and as long as ambitious individuals secretly manipulate and incite matters behind the scenes, war will never cease to exist.

In this battle that involved the entire Northlands, the beastmen fought for their ancestral homeland, while the elves had participated in the hope of returning to their former glory. In their perspective, they hadn't done anything wrong.

From the viewpoint of history, factions that start the battles would typically be the biggest losers in the end. Moreover, this battle was no different from any other battle in history, with every species fighting for their own race to have more space to live in.

However, some things couldn't simply be measured by right and wrong. No matter what the reason was for starting this battle, it wouldn't change the fact that the icy Northlands was now soaked in so much blood, with countless souls having cursed the Gods and the invaders before their deaths. The relationships between the various species, which had just begun to thaw, were now at rock bottom once again.

"Someone needs to pay the price!"

A post-combat reckoning was basically now the norm. Those who lost the battle would be dragged into a court to receive an absolutely unfair judgement. During such times, even the fairest of judges would selectively go blind and hand out numerous death sentences by virtue of the surviving victims' crying tears and angry shouts.

Alright, I knew that it was all rather meaningless, but it was indeed a way to vent.

Not only was it a sacrifice to help appease the spirits of the dead who died despite

doing nothing wrong, but it could help the survivors vent their anger and pain. Punishing the guilty was also the fastest way to aid the survivors in clearing their grudges and returning to a normal way of life.

After this particular battle, however, we ran into some problems with the typical post-combat reckoning.

If we compared those who had the most serious losses, perhaps even the pitiful Sleuweir Kingdom couldn't compare to the beastmen who started this war. In this bloody battle, the plateau beastmen had lost most of their accumulated tribes that had developed over the past few centuries. It was obvious that they wouldn't recover for a significantly long period of time after this battle, and because of the beastmen's tradition, where their tribe leaders personally led from the front, the large majority of well-known beastmen tribe leaders had all died in this battle.

"Kill those beastmen bastards; we want revenge! Why are their children and females innocent? Weren't those beastmen killing our children and females for their sake? They can kill our children and women, so why can't we kill theirs!?"

After the glow of victory faded from the fortune of survival, the survivors looked at the hole-riddled world before them, and they angrily shouted to counterattack the plateaus and kill all the beastmen and exterminate their entire species.

The citizens' grudges were quite difficult to deal with, especially since they suffered so much from the war. It was impossible to use logic and reason on some things. I could talk an entire day about "non-aggression" and "not starting a new war," and wax philosophical about the endless vicious cycle of warfare, and all the citizens would simply reply, "So we can't take revenge? Why is it that only they can come kill us?" and all my efforts would be for naught.

"…Even without the 'non-aggression' premise, our country can't afford another war right now, not to mention that the remaining plateau beastmen would never allow the humans to slaughter them in revenge as we pleased."

Leaving the plateau beastmen alone would evidently be a future source of trouble for later generations, and I already had a plan for dealing with them, but now was definitely not the time to pick a new fight.

"Let's find some scapegoats, then. Perfect—there are still a few who escaped and

they’re causing trouble; let’s kill them off to scare the rest of the beastmen."

Perhaps I should "celebrate" the fact that in the chilly winter night of the final battle, not all the beastmen perished. Even among the beastmen, there were some afraid of death. Several tribe leaders chose to not bring their tribes into the meat grinder of death and instead secretly escaped under the cover of night.

After their path of return became impossible for them, they would naturally transform into dangerous guerilla bands for the sake of their own survival. That was why after the situation had slightly steadied, I sent out the entire squad of Aurora Knights to hunt these beastmen down.

So, even if their numbers weren’t all that many, their wanted posters were put up everywhere, spreading the various impressions I created for them; some of my wanted posters called them Camel Baba and the 40 Wolf Thieves[1] [1] , and some the 3 Tigresses and the 105 male Beastmen. They were hence quickly captured and held in prison carts, which would parade about every city so that the survivors could spit on them and toss rocks at them. Finally, they would receive judgement for their crimes, and pretty much all of them would end up being hanged.

History possessed plenty of evidence that invaders who failed in their invasion would end up the most pitiful group of all from the war. Their territory would be seized, they would definitely have revenge taken upon them, and a reckoning awaited them—nobody would take pity on them for their losses, as they deserved what they got. They were both the victims of war as well as the murderers who started the battle.

Apart from these tangible and intangible conditions, the victors would also never give the losers another chance to rise up again out of consideration for the future. There would definitely be numerous strict restrictions forced upon the losers, and the invaders, who had been so proud of themselves when they started the war, would have to accept even the most stringent of conditions in order to live on and survive, no matter how humiliated they felt.

And these stringent conditions and humiliating restrictions would always intensify the conflict between them and sow the seeds for a new, future war.

This was why I was especially careful with the treatment of the beastmen after the war. Even though I had already prepared a plan beforehand, I still invited multiple advisers and held detailed discussions regarding this topic.

With my encouragement, each adviser gave their own opinions, but they were all nothing more than common ideas, what with trade restrictions, cutting off their food supplies, forcing the beastmen to give us hostages, and reparation fees. I almost wanted to fall asleep as I listened to these boring, standard ideas.

"Humph. Trade restrictions? Even if they wanted to trade, are there still any merchants trading with the beastmen? Any human merchants that would dare to do so would probably be killed off as spies. Cut their food supplies? Let's first finish remapping the area since Emordilorcan randomly changed all the topography. Force the beastmen to give us hostages and reparation fees? You should at least do your homework first; there are so many beastmen tribes, just which ones do you want to give you hostages and reparations? If you force them too much, then it'll just be another battle."

But when an adviser named Pierobs gave his idea, I woke up immediately in fright.

"The archaic system of tribe leaders needs to be eliminated; only communism can save the world! In order to completely eradicate inequality and conflict from the world, we need a complete revolution to pull out the old dictatorship systems by the roots…"

The previous non-creative ideas made me drowsy, but this adviser was too creative; he wanted to eliminate the foundation of this world's ruling feudal system that was based on nobles and royalty? He was quite daring. More than 70% of the countries in this world were monarchy-based, so he could be executed as a heretic just for his beliefs.

"…Cut off the heads of those selfish tribe leaders who only care about themselves and create a brand-new society, making the foolish beastmen create a new high-efficiency communist society, which will…"

I couldn't help but take another look at this guy who typically appeared to be peaceful and quiet. This youngster was animated to the point that his saliva was flying everywhere, his fists were clenched tightly, and his eyebrows were jumping up and down. It seemed like he had endless amounts of rage within him, similar to that legendary revolutionary from my previous world. To spout such an unrealistic concept in a feudal age, I was even beginning to suspect if he was actually a transmigrator.

"…allow us to demand reparations and hostages from them!"

Okay, I retract my previous thoughts; it was just an insane man. After coming around

full circle, he was still focused on obtaining combat reparations and hostages?

"Milord, my apologies; Pierobs[2] [2] is in a bad shape these days. He is affected emotionally because he was dumped by his girlfriend, and he recently hit his head on a rock, so he's been a little…"

Another adviser wiggled his finger and pointed at Pierobs' head, indicating that Pierobs was a little funny in the head. Right after, Pierobs seemed to become even more animated, while his fellow advisers hurriedly began dragging him away, worried that he would spout something even more ridiculous.

"…You rotten bastards left over from the useless feudal age will never be able to defeat the farmer warrior saints. Those foolish kings will all have their heads chopped off, and the mighty rise of communism is foreordained. This will be a blizzard, a mighty blizzard that nobody will be able to avoid. You incompetent…"

Okay, his companions finally succeeded in gagging his mouth and matters finally quieted down. He was, however, still struggling violently while being dragged away.

"Shut up! Ahhh! Don't bite me! I'm helping you; stop biting me!"

"Cough, it seems that some of our advisers are under too much pressure and need some time to recuperate. Go ahead and give him half a year of vacation, and if he still needs more rest, give him another additional half a year."

Although I said this, the conference room remained silent. I knew that if this continued, there wouldn't be any result, so I could only toss out my own prepared plan.

"Didn't Centaur Anya say her tribe also wanted to come aboveground? Actually, the plateau is a nice place, and it's definitely much better than the dark Underground, so let's have them come. Our participation will only increase the conflict, and the beastmen have their own rules, so in order to deal with the beastmen, we should leave it to other beastmen…"

After chattering on for several hours, I was finally able to resolve this issue, but the second issue was even more of a headache.

"The elves? They're truly such trouble."

If I tried my hardest to find who was the unluckiest in this battle, the elves would

probably be my number one choice. Their Guardian God ended perishing, the four major elven kingdoms' main armies were completely wiped out, and while only Tassel Kingdom among them possessed some remaining combat forces, all of Tassel Kingdom's royalty was dead, and it was difficult to say if their remaining forces even counted as elves.

From a certain standpoint, the Tassel Royalty was also one of the main perpetrators of the war, but their previous King Atrion died in body and soul together with Felix, and punishing the banshee Suana, who had always been against war to begin with, wouldn't be the right thing to do either.

But this wasn't even the greatest trouble. The biggest problem was how their environment ended up suddenly changing. After their unnatural bending of nature for several thousand years was finally broken, the life-threatening climate had become the strictest challenge for their lives, and most of the remaining elves were still fighting against the weather just in order to survive.

"Forget it. Let's stop considering these things and save them from their disaster first. Otherwise, with all of them dead, this will be nothing but an empty discussion."

The Borealis had already completed its preparations. After it finished unloading the mined metals obtained from the barbarian tribes, it was to be used by the second disaster relief squad in order to arrive before the first relief squad. And I was a member of this second disaster relief squad.

Note:

1. This is a reference to the folk tale *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves.*

2. This may be a reference to Maximilien François Marie Isidore de Robespierre, who was a French lawyer, politician, and one of the best known and most influential figures associated with the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror.

Chapter 202
Disaster Relief

After distorting the laws of nature for thousands of years, the northern elves finally received retribution. The furious forces of nature sent forth heavy hailstorms to cleanse and purify this country of sinners. Blizzards akin to raging dragons ravaged the land as they pleased, and the last patches of green hope left from the previous guardian began to fade away—I seem to be getting too poetic, so let me just be direct.

After the now deceased Elf Guardian God's magic barrier, which had kept out the true forces of nature, vanished, the enormous difference between the climates clashed. The massive difference in temperature created a speedy yet unsteady weather front, generating hailstorms, tornados and other natural disasters. The Forest Guardian God's death also hastened the rate at which the plants would die, and tornados swept away much sand and dirt, causing massive erosion. All these natural calamities added up, making it almost impossible to steady the situation.

"If we leave them alone, the northern elves will probably become extinct. However, we're unwilling to save them for free."

This was the mutual realization that most northern human kingdoms came to. Their speed at "assisting" the elves was rather fast—or perhaps I should call it their speed at looting.

Although the elves had long since taught the secrets of magic to the other species, as the species with the longest history of magic-usage, they still possessed a significant amount of esoteric magic secret spells, techniques, and curses. At the very least, the elves were still the best at runes, foreign languages of other planes, nature magic, and many other fields, which incited the jealousy of the various human kingdoms.

Even if some elven secrets were accidentally revealed on occasion, those lucky enough to learn them would likely hoard it for themselves. At any rate, the small northern kingdoms had no chance to benefit.

While the other three elven kingdoms—apart from Tassel Kingdom—sustained serious losses, at the very least their royalty was still intact. Even though their main

armies were now almost completely nonexistent, they still had rear support and logistical squads; they still possessed the capabilities to reorganize and save themselves while retaining their guard against the humans.

The other elven kingdoms still existed, but they were too far away and there wasn't enough time to save them. Although the Elven Gods seemed to want to do something, they still didn't take action. If we forcefully tried to "save" them, however, it probably wouldn't be all too different from an invasion, which would be rather overboard. We also needed to take into consideration the possible chain reactions that could occur.

To be honest, it was the sudden appearance of a few dozen elven SemiGods that stopped the human kingdoms plans of annexing the elven territory. Those elven SemiGods were obviously the reinforcements from the other elven kingdoms, and the fact that they were all SemiGods was the best evidence that the Elven Gods were already beginning to interfere.

That's why our aid for the other three elven kingdoms could only be limited to sending them the resources of food and anti-winter supplies that they direly lacked in exchange for gold and elven magical items. Their true treasures of elven magical secrets would be impossible to obtain.

Tassel Kingdom, however, was different. The True God Lorci had used her divine power to cause all the elves of Tassel Kingdom to turn into fallen elves, transforming them into dark gray-skinned grayblood elves. It was doubtful that any other elves would accept them. After all, compared to the elves on the surface, the grayblood elves were much more similar to their Underground dark elf brethren in both physical appearance and characteristics.

This was a vicious move by Lorci; this basically cut off all hope of the Tassel elves of ever returning to the other elves. The Tassel elves that had no other possible route to take could only follow her. However, since Lorci suddenly ended up perishing, all the Tassel grayblood elves sank into despair—the other elven kingdoms hated them for their betrayal, while the humans hated them for being the perpetrators of the battle.

If the Tassel Kingdom royalty was still alive, then they'd still be of some use, but it was a pity that if they were still alive, they'd probably just be dragged out to be executed.

There was nothing more convincing than the accusation coming from a dead victim's soul. When banshee Suana returned, dark plots were revealed for all to see, and the

previous King Atrion was now known by all as an ambitious warmonger. Since this battle was the direct cause of the Elven Forest Guardian God Clareladin's death and the rapid worsening of their environment, the renown of the royalty and nobility was rapidly hitting rock-bottom.

Add on the fact that they had lost so many in this war, and the Tassel government was completely incapable of organizing themselves to help save their own citizens from the harsh winter. The other elven kingdoms close by probably would have added fuel to the fire by raising armies for revenge if it weren't for the fact that they were also dealing with wintry natural disasters.

After the several requests for aid asking the other elven kingdoms for assistance had been rejected, Tassel could only ask their other neighbor, Sleuweir Kingdom, for help out of a lack of any other options to survive. Even if they were just recently in battle, and even if most of the warmongers were now dead, a deep blood grudge still existed between them. The Tassel elves hadn't held much hope in this request for assistance.

But Sleuweir actually agreed to their request. Queen Glina did take into consideration the feelings of her own citizens and didn't send out Sleuweir's own army as a disaster relief squad, but she made it convenient for the other humans to go over and "rescue" the elves.

Those other human countries' "disaster relief squads" that came without even needing to be invited began the work of saving the elves under the name of the Mist Alliance.

Although it couldn't be denied that they were indeed rather selfish and basically acted like robbers while simultaneously saving the elves, it was indisputable that they did managed to save many grayblood elves on the verge of death.

And among all the disaster relief squads, the one that stood out the most was from a rather faraway small country—East Mist Communal Country.

Princess Knight Reyne, who had become famous through this battle, led the squad together with all the believers of the Church of Law. They were far different from the other "disaster relief squads" that were no different from bandits. They really were working their utmost to save the elves.

Everywhere they went, they would supply the elves with resources, search and find

suffering elves, help construct temporary shelters for the elven refugees, and answer requests to perform emergency rescues. They had an incredibly good reputation.

"Repaying grievances with kindness? I definitely don't think you're such a nice person."

"Hmph, of course I'm not so foolish. I'm just not as stupidly shallow as the others. Do you really think they'll be able to reap huge benefits from the refugees, who are on guard against them and treating them like the thieves they are? My target was never that simple to begin with."

Soon, when the refugees began immigrating, my words were confirmed and my choice helped me reap benefits.

Through the continuous disasters, the Tassel royalty had lost all authority, and the neighboring elven countries were angrily preparing for revenge while the natural calamities turned this originally comfortable paradise into hell on earth. No matter if they wanted to admit it or not, Tassel Kingdom was basically falling apart, and now that the other elven kingdoms were shutting them out, several human countries attempted to open their gates to the grayblood elves now looking to immigrate.

But, over ninety percent of the grayblood elves who immigrated chose the East Mist Communal Country. Their huge wave of immigration would bring many changes, and at the very least, they would bring countless amounts of tomes and knowledge with them.

Yep, this was my target to begin with. Robbing them while they were down wasn't very meaningful. As long as I received most of their population, of course I would obtain everything in the end.

Their choice was made in part due to East Mist Communal Country's recent fame, but more because of the good reputation that East Mist enjoyed for all this while.

Not only did the East Mist Communal Country not get involved with the elven slave trade, but it was also a country that strictly prohibited slavery, whereas the other countries all tended to have elven slavery to some degree. In order to prevent themselves from suddenly becoming a random human's slave, and with the personal comparisons they could see for themselves from the other countries' behavior, most gray elves with at least a normal amount of intelligence ended up choosing the East

Mist.

And with the natural calamities helping me, I also did my best to convince Suana. Rather than staying there in such difficult conditions next to elven neighbors who were filled with hatred for them, she might as well have her entire species immigrate. Otherwise, even if they survived this winter, what would they do about the next? The moment the Elven Gods had some free time, with how narrow-minded they were, they would probably immediately begin plotting revenge for Tassel's betrayal. The other three northern elven kingdoms would be more than happy to be the vanguard, and this wasn't even mentioning the fact that Glina would probably be unable to stop all the people in Sleuweir from looking for revenge.

For a country to reach this point meant the end for them.

"Immigrate. In the entire Northlands, it's likely that only the East Mist Communal Country, which barely suffered any losses in this battle, that would be able to truly accept your tribe. You've also seen the reputation they've built up over the years, and they're also worshiping the Law God in this country—every species has equal rights as citizens. Even the Guiltless[1] [1] can live there out in the open under the sun, so of course your gray elves will be able to do so as well."

Suana didn't reply immediately, and nor did I pressure her into making a hurried decision. I knew that she would definitely end up agreeing in the end. With all the reports of calamities, as long as the Tassel grayblood elves didn't want to go extinct, the path I offered her was the best choice of all. She could only act exactly as I planned.

To be honest, I indeed had selfish aims as well, but she would still make the choice I wanted in the end because this was their only path of survival. Without a doubt, this was an entirely out-in-the-open plot for mutual benefits that I made clear to Suana from the start, and Suana's agreement was just a matter of time. Before she agreed, I would patiently help with the rescue efforts in order to show my sincerity.

In the rescue efforts, although the ferocious weather caused all small airships apart from the Borealis to be completely unusable, the Aurora Knights and elite warriors still gave the elves a deep impression, and many received a boost to their fame.

The "Angel Wing Aurora Knights," "Mountain-Sized Floating Rescue Airship," and "Handsome Dragonslaying Princess with Slightly Strange Sexual Preferences" all helped improve East Mist's reputation as well as give the gray elves hope and

expectations towards East Mist. As long as Suana made the final decision and summoned her entire tribe to immigrate, the major transition would definitely be successful.

Of course, there were also some things that I didn't know whether to laugh or cry about…

"'Forever a Friend of the Centaur Tribe?' What's this?"

"Oh, that's Lord Beifeng's new title. Since large amounts of forests were destroyed, the Tassel Kingdom's centaurs in the forests lost their own homes, right? But those stubborn tribe leaders were unwilling to leave their homes even on the verge of death. Just as they were all seemingly about to die off, Lord Beifeng intervened!"

It might not be the tribe leaders' fault for being stubborn, as from what I knew, these centaurs of the forest and the Rainbow Deer Tribe all belonged personally to the now deceased Forest Guardian God. They might have signed some sort of contract that prevented them from leaving, but right now, my complete attention was drawn by something else.

"…When did Beifeng start becoming a lord in people's eyes?"

It was obvious, just from this servant's comments, that he was a supporter of Beifeng. Considering that this servant was a half-beastman from Shawen that might have already been poisoned by Beifeng, I turned to ask another human servant official.

"What did Beifeng do? Forget it if it's 18+ restricted content; that I don't want to know."

"I heard the forest centaurs were just waiting for death when Lord Beifeng and Casio went to them and challenged those stubborn tribe leaders according to their ancient traditions. With their excellent abilities, they succeeded in winning every single duel so far, and as long as they defeat some more of the eldest and most respected tribe leaders, they'll be able to take the centaurs out of the forest!"

"Oh, he really did do a good job."

I was rather astonished. To my knowledge, although that fellow seemed so respectable and honest, he would never do something that didn't have any benefits for him. I didn't expect him to work so hard at saving others.

Thud!

Elisa, who was on a nearby reclining chair, suddenly slammed the thick recipe book she was reading shut as she adjusted her eyeglasses and corrected my misunderstanding.

"The centaurs' favorite sport is wrestling, and according to their ancient customs, they typically take off all their clothing and wrestle while naked in rivers or under waterfalls. And those centaur tribe leaders are mostly strong males…"

Alright, I was no longer able to give my opinion of this any longer. After some hesitation, I could only manage to eke out one sentence.

"…Good job."

What else could I say? No matter what, saving the elves' allies would improve East Mist's reputation. As long as a certain individual's personal desires weren't unveiled, I had no need to stop him. Instead, I even had to support him.

"But keep a tight watch on that bastard, and don't allow him to do something ridiculous. It's already dangerous enough to leave Beifeng in a forest filled with animals. Also, those centaurs… ugh. I just recalled the way he looked at Casio in their first meeting. As I thought, I should have just killed him off at that time. If he creates some scandal this time—no—he definitely already created some scandal; I should say if his scandal gets exposed…"

I started panicking as I thought about it, so I suddenly slapped the table and stood up.

"No! I need to hurry out there and stop him! I definitely can't allow him to ruin East Mist's reputation."

Yet just as I was angrily roaring, filled with the sense of justice, I was stopped.

"No rush; eat your lunch before you leave."

"Who knows what ridiculous news he'll be the center of next! It'll be too late by the time I finish my lunch!"

"Amelia worked so hard on cooking this lunch. You should at least eat a few bites."

Of course, it was too late already, but not in the forest of the centaurs. Based on my past few days' experience, after eating this meal I'd be back as a tourist in River Styx yet again. If I couldn't find an excuse to escape, then it'd be too late for me.

"No, I doubt I'll be able to go anywhere at all once I'm finished eating."

"Even if you don't eat, you're not allowed to go anywhere. I spent so much effort on teaching Amelia how to cook."

"I know you have no good intentions at all in teaching Amelia how to cook! Ever since you took that book titled 'Dark Life-Stealing Cooking Techniques, Complete Edition,' I already expected this would happen."

'Dark Life-Stealing Cooking Techniques, Complete Edition?' This is clearly 'England's Classic Recipes.' Although I don't know what country England is supposed to be, their cooking recipes are indeed unique and creative. Not to mention that they're easy to learn, and it's quite convenient for Amelia to learn from."

"Yeah, they really are quite simple. There are only two types—either baking in an oven or boiling in a pot, and no spices of any kind are necessary. Just add whatever spices you like when eating; this is the true original flavor. This cooking method is outlandish enough already, and when you add Amelia's magical cauldron…"

"It's already finished. I spent lots of effort on today's main dish, please look forward to it." Behind me, I suddenly heard Amelia's voice.

When I turned around, I saw a huge fish head pointing towards the heavens, and its wide-open mouth still had saliva that wasn't cleaned off yet. The huge fish's eyes that were in a daze seemed to be complaining about its pitiful end.

"England's famous dish, Looking at the Stars."

Blargh!

A strong retching sensation immediately tossed and turned in my stomach. It would have been fine if it was just 'England's famous dish,' but Amelia added her own understanding to it.

"Isn't this a Deep Demon Fish? It's a mega-dangerous magical beast with high intelligence, and it's incredibly difficult to deal with. Isn't it a specialty from the

Underground's dark river? How did you get it? Eh! It's actually still alive!"

"You actually dare kill me for a dish? I curse you—I curse you—I curse you and your children for ten thousand generations! Ahh!"

Amelia laughed, pleased with herself as she retracted her fist that had just knocked the fish unconscious.

"Didn't the recipe say the most important part was for the ingredients to retain the original flavor, and that the highest-level ingredients were the best? Deep Demon Fish will definitely have a good taste. And, it'll be the freshest when it's still alive. Yep, delicious!"

As she said so, Amelia even personally had a taste right then and there.

"Ah, it hurts, my gills are gone! Don't eat my eyes!"

As I witnessed and listened to the half-eaten dish's curses, this abnormal scene became even more frightening to the point that I didn't even know what to say anymore. I could only cautiously retreat, intending to find a path of escape.

But, behind me, some even more frightening words were spoken.

"Awesome, now we have ingredients for dinner as well."

"Teacher, what shall we cook for dinner? Although I feel more confident than before after finishing this dish, I still think that simple is better."

"Something simpler than English dishes—let's make Japanese food, sashimi!"

"Something even easier than tossing it into a pot and boiling? Then will we be able to just eat it right away after cutting it up?"

"That's right, this dish called sashimi is like this…"

Alright, before the topic could frighten me any further, I had already escaped. At this moment, I already made a decision to just eat outside for an extended duration of time.

Note:

1. The undead, as named by Lilith and Roland in Chapter 198.

Chapter 203
Migration

The disaster relief for the northern elves went rather well. From a certain standpoint, it was an excellent platform to flaunt our military might and organizational capabilities.

Imperceptibly, the Eastern Mist Communal Country was already showing off plenty of might. Their Aurora Knights that were capable of flying through hailstorms as they pleased, the Borealis that could ignore fierce weather conditions such as tornadoes, the huge engineering contraptions that could clear away so much rubble, and the incredibly adaptable Four Elemental Swordcasters—they were all the best examples of East Mist's power, which also strengthened our control of the Mist Alliance.

Yet there was one other group of reinforcements aiding with the disaster relief that nobody expected. Their arrival further increased the speed of the relief significantly, but there was a small problem—this group was from the Underground World, and was called the evilest existence of all by the Holy Church.

In the previous battle, Annie Layde had established a certain amount of friendship with Suana; this led her to unhesitatingly bring her elites to Suana's aid this time around.

Chaos, however, continued to exist within the dark elves, and the Underground World needed to keep them under control; the Underground Lords were unable to send their main forces. However, they possessed a scarily strong foundational strength—just their elites alone were a significant force to be reckoned with.

With their dozens of Gold-ranked and Legend-ranked individuals having arrived, not only did they speed up the disaster relief, but the Underground World's true strength also somewhat frightened the other countries.

The most eye-catching of all—to the point where they could be said to be the foundational pillar of strength of the Underground—were a group of dark elf Law Knights.

Yep. In the entire world, only Sulfur Mountain City could boast of such a group of dark elf knights. Town Security had sent them here to assist in the disaster relief, and since they were already experienced in keeping order within cities as well as in dealing with various "dangers," searching through rubble and saving people were basically their specialty.

The lowest of them were of the Silver rank, and Law Knights were excellent tanks to begin with. Their enchanted armor was also the newest edition from this year. As the only main forces of Sulfur Mountain City, City Lord Annie unhesitatingly gave them the best equipment.

Only a holy sword per individual in the past? Sulfur Mountain City was now much richer than before; they were all equipped with enchanted mithril heavy armor along with various trinkets crafted by the engineers. These female elves, who looked more like canned food, totally ignored the hail and tornadoes.

After many long years of working as Town Security, something like demolition was normal for them. They were also used to dealing with disputes and explosions; this allowed them to excel at rescuing the elves from crumbling buildings.

They could also help heal the injured immediately since they had plenty of Holy Knights in their ranks. In just a short while, stories about them spread throughout the entire disaster area.

"Buried too deep and the injured can’t be found? Three high-ranked Holy Knights arrived and filled the entire heap of rubble with holy light, helping protect those still alive."

"After finding an injured elf behind a wall, she actually ripped the wall apart with her bare hands, even using her body to block the falling debris, and she herself was not hurt as she rescued the elf. Simply amazing."

The Sulfur Mountain City Town Security definitely surpassed the level of the imperial squads representing those human mega-empires. Their equipment was extravagant enough to make even Legends jealous, and any one of them could go straight into an epic and be the main character. This elite squad, excellently equipped down to their very teeth, used this disaster relief as an opportunity to reveal their true strength. This led those who were originally waiting in the shadows for a chance to strike to change their minds and hide their ambition.

And, so, the "dark elf knights" from Sulfur Mountain City started becoming famous…

"What? They're only Town Security? That must be a cover-up; how could such a strong knight squad be used for Town Security?"

The incident that gave people the deepest impression was when the warriors from Sulfur Mountain City suddenly had a "conflict" with the Eastern Mist Communal Country's relief army. They even trapped the Church of Law's venerated, highest-ranked priest Xueti in a corner and gave him a vicious beating…

Yep, actually, just hearing the familiar name "Gentlemen Alliance" as a mercenary squad in the East Mist relief army caused the Town Security forces to run wild.

"You bastards! After leaving you alone for a while, you've multiplied so much in number! But we're here now. Today shall be your end… Xueti, we caught you red-handed! We've finally captured you again! Sisters, deal with them!"

Alright, the Gentlemen Alliance indeed had people who were difficult for anyone to accept, such as that Clothes-Slicing Swordsman and so on, but Xueti was somewhat wronged; he actually didn't do all that much. It was just that Archbishop Xueti was so concerned about the elves suffering from the winter catastrophe that he took off his robes and undershirts for the elves to put on against the cold, and he only wore a pair of underpants as he continued his disaster relief.

Even if it lacked elegance, the Archbishop's strong body had a masculine attractiveness to it, not to mention that this was due to the situation at hand; nobody would read too much into it. However, it was evident that these dark elves, who had "obsessions about being proper," were utterly unable to tolerate his actions. They treated him as a moral hazard, which was truly somewhat overboard.

"Everyone knows the dark elves themselves aren't exactly paragons of virtue. They must have been thinking dirty thoughts themselves to misunderstand to such a degree. For someone who's biased to begin with, the entire world is tilted. If that person's heart is dirty, she'll think everyone else is also dirty!"

In the end, due to the combined protests against injustice by all the other countries, Captain Yawen of Town Security could only come out and personally apologize. Fortunately, Xueti was incredibly magnanimous and immediately forgave their rashness. It was obvious, though, that Yawen and the other Town Security elves

weren't going to actually let bygones be bygones.

"We actually had to lower our heads and apologize to that pervert! This was basically the most pitiful we've ever been in history. No, this is the second most pitiful incident; the most pitiful is that this pervert actually became our boss." —Yawen.

And not even two full days later, they caused yet another incident…

They chased around the Friend of the Centaur Tribe, the Legendary Beast Master Beifeng, like a rabbit. The first incident with Xueti was still understandable in the general public's view, but Beifeng was known to them as kind and respectable, even somewhat dull, and a good fellow. This Dracon Beifeng, who was instantly attacked by Town Security the moment they laid eyes on him, was far too pitiful in the eyes of the general public.

"Do we even need a reason to beat up Beifeng? Alright then, let's just punish him for the crime of being Beifeng."

Perhaps this reason would work in Sulfur Mountain City, but as the bystanders saw it, this was clearly unreasonable and a blatant abuse of power.

"Do you hear that? The crime of being Beifeng? Punishing him for being Beifeng? He clearly didn't even do anything; this is too much! They're just big bullies!"

"Everyone knows who's in the right. Perhaps these elf ladies still have some biased views against me, Beifeng. I can understand. Or perhaps they're suffering from too much stress, and if beating me up can relieve their pressure and help alleviate their biased views, then please, come!"

Beifeng's magnanimity made the dark elf knights seem more unreasonable—maybe even insane in contrast.

"Listen to Beifeng's resolve; he's basically a saint! Sulfur Mountain City's Town Security, even if they're astonishingly powerful, their moral characters and narrow-mindedness are… humph, not even scratching the surface of Lords Xueti or Beifeng's! Ptui!"

Alright, in a way, this was all just a repeat of certain past events at Sulfur Mountain City. The Gentlemen Alliance had succeeded once again in toying with Town Security, albeit paying a small price in doing so this time.

Of course, if I personally appeared, I could indeed clear up all misunderstandings, but that would mean I would have to explain those past incidents in the Underground World and about Beifeng and Xueti's true natures… I hesitated for just one second before making my decision. The Gentlemen Alliance had messed around with the Town Security for many times before this anyways, and I might as well leave the Church of Law and the aboveground Gentlemen Alliance's reputations intact.

Soon, however, I didn't have time to spare for such small matters.

Thanks to the Underground World's Lord Annie's "sincere persuasion," Suana finally made her decision to have her entire tribe immigrate. Of course, her target was the Eastern Mist Communal Country's sparsely populated wide swaths of land.

"Sincere persuasion? Annie knows how to do that? Wasn't she always supremely ineloquent? I thought that she was just like Adam, only knowing how to persuade others with her fists. What happened—did she learn something new?"

"…You're actually treating it as true? Suana and the gray elves were just using Annie as an excuse, to leave themselves at least a little face."

What really happened was that when Annie was chatting with Suana, she casually mentioned "It seems that this place is unlivable now. How about coming to the Underground World together with me? If not, I think Brother Roland's East Mist is okay as well." Obviously, such a casual invitation would seem to lack sincerity, and the real reason for Suana to have the resolution to decide the fate of her entire tribe couldn't possibly involve a concept as abstract as "sincerity" to begin with.

"It seems they think we're reliable enough to carry them, so they got on board."

After Suana became the new queen of Tassel Kingdom, even she had to abandon all personal emotions and place the benefits to her tribe first and foremost.

The current Tassel Kingdom had obviously angered too many. Even if they made it past the winter catastrophe, it was definite that there would be others looking to rub salt in their wounds. Moreover, since their entire species was now a new one, they couldn't count on the Elven Gods anymore, and they needed to find a faction to join and side under in order to ensure their survival.

Although it was already guaranteed that they needed to join another faction, the important part was which faction to join. If that faction ended up falling, then there

would truly be no more future for the gray elves.

If the other human kingdoms had been able to display an excellent force of might, perhaps the elves might have made another choice, but the Eastern Mist Communal Country was the indisputable main character in both the battle and the disaster relief that came afterward. The power and foundational strength that they showed was just one facet; their tight connections with the Underground World, the new Guiltless faction, the Church of Law and many others were also critical factors.

Most important of all was East Mist's obvious rapid development and new technology, along with the plan for the Mist Alliance, which was likely to involve the entire Northlands. For a politician like Suana who valued what would benefit her tribe above all, the choice she should make was quite clear. The rest was dealing with internal disagreement and coming up with a compromise that those disagreeing could accept.

To be honest, in order to have the elves, who had no concept of the flow of time at all and would always get themselves locked down in pointless arguments, to come to a decision so quickly, Suana had truly given it her all. It could be said that she possessed her own selfish way of thinking as well.

"Am I an elf? Or an undead? I'm clearly an undead now, but the surviving gray elves are all relying on me. Perhaps only the home of the Guiltless, the East Mist, can be my home as well. I'm tired—so tired. As long as my tribe can survive through this, I shall find some place to rest; I'm already dead, anyways."

After the dishonorable plot that had incited the battle was revealed, the Council of Elders that had originally held the reins of power ended up being overthrown. Those elders, those co-conspirators of the former king, Atrion, were all dragged down from their pedestals by furious gray elf civilians. Any elders who were able to keep their lives in the end were among the most fortunate.

The ironic part, however, was that Suana had accomplished what her father Atrion had always dreamed of and worked hard all his life for—completely controlling all of Tassel Kingdom, yet it was at the cost of her own life and the very existence of Tassel Kingdom itself.

After such a massive immigration, even the most optimistic of the Tassel gray elves knew that no matter how generous East Mist was, they wouldn't possibly allow them to become a country within a country. In the short-term, perhaps they could still live

in a relatively isolated district, but if they were to continue to reside there for the long-term—or perhaps forever—the only choice was for them to be scattered among the original residents. Not only would this be beneficial for the Eastern Mist Communal Country, but it would also be beneficial for the gray elves.

And once all this happened, Tassel Kingdom, which had several thousand years of history, would be at an end. All that would remain would be a new species of the Eastern Mist Communal Country—the East Mist gray elves.

When the huge hordes of elven migration squads embarked upon their journey, the gray elves that were already becoming homesick would turn their heads and gaze backward with every few steps, as if they were praying for a sudden miracle to erase the natural catastrophes and the dark clouds of war… and it was at this moment that a familiar song rang out again.

"Dajh da jd, ka su odd as da…"

[Our distant relatives, where did you go, we miss you here in the homeland…]

Once again, the undead banshee Suana started singing that familiar traveler's song. Back in the day, when dark clouds of war loomed over their homeland, Tassel had sung this very song as she left her birthplace, by herself, to search for a utopia for her tribe.

"Fre de ld, kad…"

[Are the ancient trees at home still verdant green, that familiar spring lake always reminds me of my childhood, the sky was so blue…]

Perhaps Tassel from that time long ago was smiling just like this as she bid farewell to her friends and family in her homeland.

"My wonderful childhood is now over, and a nightmarish war is right before me, but I, Little Tassel, love singing ever so much, and I believe that there will be a peaceful and beautiful land on the other side of the mountains. Hmm—perhaps there's no such land behind these mountains, but behind the mountains that are behind those mountains, there definitely will be such a place…"

This situation was all too similar to when Tassel had departed to found a kingdom in the past. Even though it was supposed to be an optimistic and even joyous song, a number of younger elves had already begun to sob softly, while even more of them

began singing the song together in a low voice. All the low elven voices soon joined together, echoing throughout the vast skies.

"My dear Aunt Susan, I miss you so much. But Little Tassel still can't return home yet; although I still haven't found my dream utopia homeland, I believe that four-leaf clovers are always hiding beneath the horses' hooves and my dream utopia homeland is right in front of me."

Tassel was the type to never give up, and she sang her song everywhere as she stepped quickly and lightly in that chaotic era, crossing mountains and oceans, crossing this mountain, that mountain over there, and the mountain behind this mountain behind this mountain, until finally…

"…I found it; it's right over there! The ancient tree in my dream is pointing me in its direction; I'm about to see my dream utopia homeland."

Indeed, she had found it! The hesitation and melancholy in the song had all vanished, while the joy was now at its climax.

"Dda jd ad! Dal dada aty…"

[My relatives, I finally found a dreamland for us, our new home is in the north…]

Chapter 204
The Goal That Has Never Changed

"The Battle of Traitors" or "The Meaningless Battle"—no matter what later generations thought of it, the long battle, which had lasted from autumn to winter in the Year of the Griffin, was destined to leave its mark in history books. As the grand opening of yet another Holy War, this battle's influence would last for dozens, hundreds—even thousands of years.

The Elven Gods' plan had immediately met with a hard wall and the beastmen's southern invasion would have to wait for the next Holy War. Due to a certain ex-lich's plotting and taking advantage of their weakness, I was able to plant visitors from the Underground World in both elven and beastmen territories.

When the aftermath from this battle settled down, the Underground Lords would establish several dozens of satellite cities in these two areas, which would become the representative cities of the Underground in the aboveground world. Naturally, there were plenty of dark elves living in these cities, and no matter whether they wanted to or not, they would become a buffer zone between the Sleuweir Kingdom and the elven kingdoms.

Of course, considering that Annie, Centaur Anya, Little Red and various other factions had all already applied to join the Mist Alliance, this could be said to be a new series of military outposts for the newly established alliance.

As for the terrible natural environment where they were now living? To be honest, it wasn't much different from the Underground World. As long as they prepared beforehand, with the new Mist Alliance's full support, the Underground World's residents had full confidence in creating new livable cities in this frigid land.

Taking the Tassel elves who might want to return to their homeland into consideration, I had the Underground residents leave a sufficiently large piece of land that included Tassel's capital, Tassel City, for the elves; they could still retain a small piece of homeland to return to.

Of course, if my plan was entirely successful, the gray elves would lead a nice life in

East Mist and wouldn't even want to return to the north where it was now snow and ice year-round and much more desolate.

As for the beastmen from the plateaus, they may seem difficult to deal with, but due to the serious losses taken by the beastmen coupled with an ancient custom of theirs, it was actually quite easy.

"When a tribe suffers serious losses, the tribe shall join a stronger tribe—and be annexed by it—in order to ensure the survival of the tribe."

When the plateau beastmen who suffered losses to the point where not a single family was left untouched saw the strong and fresh Underground beastmen moving in large numbers into their territory, they were unable to stop them. No, I should correct myself—they were delighted to see themselves being annexed, as they lacked male beastmen and numerous resources after losing the battle to such a degree.

"If hatred is a dark ink that's impossible to whiten, then just mix it with a large amount of clear water to dilute it. Even if pain is difficult to bear, time can lessen everything."

Perhaps the merging of the Underground and plateau beastmen would require several dozens, even several hundreds of years. But when the Underground beastmen annexed this wild area that would always bring war, according to my agreement with the Underground beastmen, both them and the beastmen became a part of the new Mist Alliance.

Of course, merging and getting along with each other was always a mutual effort. In order to avoid getting into another cycle of war with the beastmen, I would also inject other species' members into this area in order to dilute its one-species makeup and create a balance between various species.

This may seem to be an underhanded move, but it was also the only marvelous move that would truly break the cycle of battles between us and the beastmen where the beastmen would have a large southern invasion every few decades, even if I might never see the effects of this move of mine in my lifetime.

“…War is bad, but if war really does break out, then at the very least I need to grab the opportunity and change something, such as completely eliminating the foundational reason for having the next war."

And so, this was what I said next.

"Beastmen countries? Elven countries? Hey—hey—hey—why do we need to make such distinctions? Henceforth, all borders shall be eliminated between every member country of the Mist Alliance. Only the simplest of procedures will be required for anyone to travel or move as they please within this entire area."

This was doubtlessly a groundbreaking proposal for this feudal generation where land was at the center of everything and population was considered an important resource. Every lord had their own system for managing their citizens and census; allowing citizens to travel as they pleased was basically unheard of.

Just this suggestion that went against the times caused an uproar and even fierce opposition from the member countries of the Mist Alliance. The Rhodes Kingdom, which had already agreed to join the Mist Alliance, was even now intentionally slowing down the official process, thinking of backing out.

"I object! If we give them freedom, those bastard citizens will just all run off, and nobody will plant crops in the fields! Our territories will become desolate and useless. This definitely can't be allowed!"

"That's because you're far too harsh on your ordinary citizens, which is the only reason you're worrying that they'll all leave. I feel that this is an excellent suggestion. Under this system, only territories under wise and well-reputed lords will flourish more and more, while unjust lords like you will be much worse off!"

"…There's more to it that you're not seeing. This old one [1] 1 and my ancestors have all been making such a great effort, but my territory naturally has a hostile terrain that's impossible to improve. If a large amount of my citizens run off, this old one would be too ashamed to face my ancestors."

Considering that East Mist's reputation was quite high and that Sleuweir was currently undergoing reconstruction during its weak period, I believed that I could borrow the renown gained from the battle to forcefully push this idea of mine. Yet the forceful opposition from the other local countries' leaders caused me to be unable to pass it in the end.

Well, since free movement between all countries of the Mist Alliance was no longer a possibility, I tried for the next best thing—I passed a movement policy between countries. Of course, the procedures required would be incredibly complex, and the number of people allotted for moving was also quite limited in number. But if someone

chose either the beastmen or the elves' territory, there were no limits, and that person would even receive a large number of benefits for free.

“…I had wanted to truly unify the Mist Alliance and completely eliminate racial prejudices within, so this freedom of movement, a representation of a peaceful age, is something I absolutely have to realize. It seems I underestimated the old stubborn fools of this generation's adherence to their outdated ideals. In that case, I'll just bide my time; if this generation is no good, then I'll wait for the second, and if the second's still no good, how about the fourth or the fifth? Then, from today on, I'm also going to use the Church of Law to deal with those that are a bit overboard."

My goal had never changed. I wanted to have Sulfur Mountain City's flourishment be reenacted aboveground, to have taurens and Holy Knights drink together in bars, to have "evil" dark elves also able to have holy jobs, to have everyone live in a way that wasn't determined by what species they belonged to, to live instead in a country where they would be judged by their personal qualities rather than their species. This was my dream, my wonderful dream that I had had for half my life already.

"In order to have all the species live together under a blue sky, the first thing I need to do is to make them see their new neighbors without bias."

Only by accomplishing this would I be able to truly destroy this so-called concept known as a Holy War. Otherwise, the loser species from this time would always come back again in the future, and nobody would ever win unless they exterminated an entire race—yet was that possible? It was never possible to kill off an entire species! Hatred would only beget new chains of revenge, and the snowball effect of battle would only keep increasing. What awaited in the end would only be total destruction with no winners on either side.

"True peace can't be accomplished without an accumulated buildup of thousands of years. In that case, while I'm still alive, at the very least I can go for peace on the surface…”

I had already created the standard known as law for judging people individually. The next step was to improve the relationship between all the species, letting them personally witness that their neighbors weren't born evil, that their neighbors didn't need to drink blood and eat human meat every day.

Bias was always born out of a combination of a sense of distance, foreignness, and fear.

Many countries also used the popular and effective method of demonizing neighboring countries or other species in order to turn attention away from internal disagreements. Not to mention that there would always be those with no sense of morality whatsoever spreading false rumors to incite others, letting there be always those who believed that other species ate humans for food. It was only natural that there would be bias.

In the eyes of most people, when all these stories and rumors combined, the beastmen were human-eating wild animals, the Sharal halfbloods were demons who were humans by day and beasts by night, and the northern barbarians were an undeveloped, illiterate tribe incapable of proper speech. In the eyes of those major human countries in the central plains, our People of the Mist was also no better than a bunch of poor savages that lacked culture.

Just as how rumors would always become more ridiculous as they spread, biased people would always become more and more biased, which would further increase the conflicts between species, with even a small incident becoming a huge one.

And once a conflict intensified, it would be time for "glorious achievements for the country" and "slaying demons and beasts" in war. Those executioners would invade other countries to kill their females and young and would be decorated as epic heroes—the Mist Kingdom from long ago had collapsed just like this. In the overarching human society, the Mist Kingdom was different from all the other human kingdoms and was viewed with bias. Under the incitement of false tales, the neighboring countries treated the Mist Kingdom as the reason they were financially poor, and in the end that unnecessary battle ended up occurring explosively.

"Increased communication and improved relationships are the only things that can eliminate bias. They were the foundation that allowed for the miracle of many species living together peacefully in Sulfur Mountain City. Pushing for such a system is the most important thing right now. On this alone, I shall never back down!"

Sulfur Mountain City was a small-scale experiment for my utopia. Now that I knew the requirements and pre-requisites for my goal and the fact that it could work, how could I possibly give up?

Perhaps I could compromise on other topics, but on this, I would never ever back down!

Those lords' objections? Hehe! That was never a problem to begin with. Maybe I was acting too kind these days, and they'd all forgotten what I'd done in the past. Since I had already transformed into an evil demon before, who cared if I have to be demonized again? As long as the results was good, I was never one who minded dirtying my hands.

“…Elisa, the new 'Observer Squad' has been successfully created, right? Here's your first mission; give me a list of all those who opposed me on this topic—no— add even those who were neutral to the list. On this issue, I won't permit sitting on the fence."

“…Do we need to directly eliminate those people?"

"No, collect evidence of their crimes. I'm convinced that all these lords are probably guilty of some crimes. Don't let them find out what you're doing; these lords are all very cautious about such things…”

"Then we're only to collect evidence on their crimes, and have the old fellows in the courts come out and get some exercise?"

"Yes, make your preparations as thoroughly as possible. We're going to eliminate all of them in one fell swoop. As for the date, let's make it today, two years from now. We have plenty of patience. This will even help increase reputation of the Church of Law as well as bring in funds for the national treasury when we confiscate those lords' funds."

"What if there's a family among them that's as crime-free as an angel? That's not completely impossible."

"This isn't your first day on the job with me; do I still need to waste words…”

"I was just confirming whether or not you were still the same boss I knew. Perhaps a relaxing life has changed you, or perhaps the beauty under the sunshine has caused you to stray away from the darkness."

Did this require any hesitation? I would still make the same decision. Afraid of getting my hands dirty? I think they had never even been clean to begin with.

"If there are any among them that are truly as pure as an angel, I'll give that person another chance to choose. If they still decide to stand against me and be an obstacle to realizing my plan—heh! Let that person go become a real angel in the heavens."

Elisa faded into the shadows, leaving only the echo of her sentence behind.

"Your wish is our command."

…

Fierce, widespread sandstorms raged throughout the lands, and gigantic floating rocks filled the skies. However, what was most difficult to accept was that everything here was black and white, entirely colorless.

The monochrome was mentally difficult to adapt to, as looking at such surroundings for just a moment would cause dizziness and discomfort. And this wasn't even mentioning the sand, which everyone kept inhaling due to the fierce winds, making it difficult to breathe.

In the distance, mountains could be seen slowly advancing. Those towering peaks were hidden in the clouds, but when assisted by binoculars, one would discover that those mountains were, in actuality, stone giants and beasts. They were simply massive to the extent that their upper halves couldn't even be discerned through the clouds and floating islands.

This was obviously an inhospitable place; it was the Earth Elemental Plane!

Here, on a certain floating island, a group of visitors had just arrived and were beginning to set up camp.

As I felt the tremendous will of the earth in the distance, I smiled in satisfaction.

"Little bro Emordilorcan, I wonder how you're recuperating from your injuries? I'm here to see how you're doing."

I could sense that somewhere deep within the core of the earth, that familiar Earth Elemental God was in a deep sleep. Perhaps he would be astonished to find us here when he woke up.

"You want to run away after antagonizing me? Hmph! Don't even dream about it!"

I had wanted to say a few more aggressive words to look cool, but behind me, numerous complaints had already been expressed.

"Roland! Stop smiling so foolishly; hurry up and come help us set up the tents!" Adam seemed to be in a bad mood, probably because he realized that he would be sent to the frontlines again as a meat shield.

"Yeah, stop lazing around. Do you think that standing on that rock and talking to yourself means that you don't need to work? Hurry up and come help us already."

Alright, my motive in pretending to make exclamations while standing here was seen through, and under the watchful, angry gazes of everyone, I obediently started helping out.

Camping in such an environment was obviously no easy task. The tents of those goblin merchants, who had claimed to sell dimensional-related items, were obviously fake products. Not even bringing up the fact that the tents couldn't even stand up properly, the "anti-sand enchantments" on them were nothing but a joke, as the endless amount of sand blown by the wind almost immediately ended up burying the tents. And so, after a short discussion, we decided to just dig some holes in the ground as our temporary quarters.

"If we don't eliminate the problem at the root, it'll just come back to us again and again. Everyone's seen Emordilorcan's hatred and desire for revenge from last time, and his final, vicious revenge against us hit us where we were weakest, almost causing our defeat. Such a guy will definitely take revenge on us again someday, and if he gives it his all and causes some major earthquakes in Antuen or a fissure to run through Diffindor, then we'd suffer major losses. It's best to beat him while he's down!"

I was no fool who would only passively react to threats. Since Emordilorcan had both the ability and motive to threaten us, and he might come out again at any time for revenge, it was only natural that I would want the advantage by making the first move. However, he was quite strong, and he would only be stronger in the Earth Elemental Plane, so without sufficient strength behind me as backup, attacking him here would be tantamount to suicide.

Hence, I sent out an invitation letter, but there was no response for a long time.

Two weeks ago, that familiar "friend" finally agreed to my invitation, but he brought along an unexpected guest.

The guest was an ethereal shadow that seemed to fluctuate between solidity and

transparence, and when she took off her hat, I saw a blue-haired elven maiden.

Her long, silky hair reached all the way to the ground, and her crystal-like eyes seemed to be smiling warmly. Although I did not recognize her beautiful face as she smiled at me, the waves of divine power she emanated resembled ripples of water and were quite familiar to me. After only a short moment of surprise, I sucked in a breath of cold air.

"Aylos? The Water Elemental Goddess?"

Note:

1. He is referring to himself in third person.

Chapter 205
God Quest

"It is better to be a naïve idiot than it is to be Emordilorcan."—Roland Mist.

There was no such quote in this world until I arrived. From a certain standpoint, Emordilorcan should even thank me for helping him be remembered by history.

Cough, I should get back to the point. When Aylos appeared before me, my first thought was that she had learned the truth about the incident in Auland and was now here for revenge.

My fear, however, turned out to be for naught. It transpired that after the Wind Elemental God Camdian received my invitation letter, he brought another Elemental Goddess who also had a deep grudge against Emordilorcan in order to increase our chances of victory.

"Back in the day, Emordilorcan joined the group assault against Sidunwar. If it wasn't for his Earth Seal that blocked the water veins that connected to the ocean, my husband Sidunwar wouldn't have perished in that battle."

Her light-seeming words contained bone-piercing hatred, and her crystal-like eyes were filled with a grudge that had not dissipated but had instead only increased over the years.

In a way, Emordilorcan was truly amazing. At the very least, I didn't have the confidence to live so well after angering so many people.

[No, according to the System's calculations, there are far more that hate you. There is at least ten times the number of pitiful people that have suffered due to you compared to Emordilorcan. The number of your enemies, in both number and strength, can't be surpassed by anyone in this world. In fact, I have been wondering if I should give you the title 'Public Enemy #1.']

"Shut up! Nobody will think that you're mute if you don't talk… Sorry, sorry, I wasn't talking about you!"

I hurriedly apologized to Aylos, who had a shocked expression.

In a way, this was my first ever meeting with Aylos. After all, it was definitely overboard to tell her to shut up when she was talking about the reason for her deep grudge and her husband's pitiful death.

Fortunately for me, perhaps it was expected of Aylos as the Water Elemental Goddess, but she seemed to have a very "good temper." She only smiled and seemed to completely ignore my outburst.

Since we all had the same goal, it was only natural that our discussion would be quite successful. This time, in order to truly kill off Emordilorcan once and for all, our invading team could be considered rather extravagant.

Although my team didn't consist of many—there were only seven members, in fact—even the weakest among us was at the Legend rank. Margaret, Adam, and Amelia—my three strongest veteran SemiGod supporters—had all arrived, and they were the main forces for this battle. Eaglestorm, Beifeng, and Reyne—these three legends could be nothing more than our helpers, and it was also a good chance for them to improve themselves.

This was the strongest team that I could field that wouldn't affect the normal day-to-day operations of the Northlands. As for taking Princess Reyne from East Mist? To be honest, Kelly and the others took care of most of the paperwork; Reyne was nothing more than a rubber stamper.

As for our reinforcements, I was only originally counting on Camdian to join us. After all, he harbored a deep hatred for Emordilorcan, and everyone knew the basic logic of 'removing a problem at its roots,' but I didn't expect the Water Elemental Goddess to join us as well. After all, from what I recalled, we did have some small conflicts with her, and she should have been rather busy.

"The battle in Auland? That's a matter between the seafolk and the humans. I've already done all that was necessary for me to do. That Queen of Storms does remember you quite clearly, though; after all, you killed three of her beloved pets and even created that monster with their bodies. As long as she has some free time, she'll definitely directly take revenge upon you."

Aylos' words were quite believable. As for the Queen of Storm's reaction, it was just as

I expected. As per my understanding of the Ancient Elemental Gods after much contact with them, I realized that they indeed lacked interest in the Holy War; they had experienced it multiple times already.

While the benefits could be great, the risks were greater. Without enough benefits to be gained, it would be impossible to have those sly old foxes fight with their all and risk their lives.

For example, what attracted Emordilorcan to fight to his fullest for the beastmen was the role of 'Guardian God of the Beastmen' that had been left empty for such a long time. If the Earth Elemental Dimensional Door had successfully connected the Earth Elemental Plane to the mortal plane, Emordilorcan could have obtained the Divine Obligations of 'Guardian God of the Beastmen' as well as 'Guardian God of the Northlands.' This would make him a True God and rapidly increase his power.

However, it was evident that the Water Elemental Goddess would be unable to obtain any of these conditions in Auland.

"The Storm Queen's always been on guard against me, so she couldn't possibly allow more of the seafolk to become my believers, and nor do I have any need to fight for her with all my might. For me, revenge is the most important thing of all, and the conflict between you and the Storm Queen has nothing to do with me. Moreover. if you return my husband's possession to me, I can agree to a request of yours as long as it isn't overboard; I can also help you mediate this conflict."

Aylos displayed a rather sincere expression. To her, the Ocean Bottle itself wasn't important; it was a memory of her late husband.

"Possession? Oh, that bottle!"

Hearing this, I immediately looked in Camdian's direction. I had only brought it out that one time in the underground labyrinth in order to seal the Earth Elemental God. It seemed that this guy had rather sharp eyes.

Camdian simply shrugged and exhibited a rather casual expression. "Sidunwar, who controlled the seven seas, had a similar status to the God of Holy Light for you humans. It's impossible for me to not recognize his God Equipment, even if the divine power contained within it has almost completely disappeared."

I hesitated for a moment, not because I was unwilling to part with that God Equipment

since it had only minimal divine power remaining and its practical usage was practically nil. The reason for my hesitation was because it was a part of my mega high-level quest.

[Congratulations to my host for triggering a Legend-rank God Quest: Revival of the Ancient Sea God]

[The Ancient Sea God Sidunwar was the strongest God of his time. At his pinnacle, there were multiple Main God-level existences under his faction. Back then, the Queen of the Storms was just a rookie who couldn't even fit into the ranks. Although he was crazy to challenge the Order Goddess Astrya and is now dead, thanks to fate and coincidence his God Equipment, which contains his secrets and inheritance, is now in your hands. It has even been activated by divine power from the same source. Perhaps, in this dusk before Armageddon when many Gods are now active, the power of the Ancient Sea God can be revived.]

This God Quest was truly ridiculous and had three parts to it. The first step required me to gather sea-related divine power to feed Sidunwar's Ocean Bottle so that it could evolve into a SemiGod Equipment. The final reward was an astonishing 100,000 Fate Points, with zero punishment involved if I fail.

With my understanding of this System of mine that loved to set pitfalls for me, the larger the reward, the more difficult the quest would be. With such munificent rewards, the final level of this quest would probably be unimaginably difficult.

Recently, various bothersome things had been on my plate all at once, so I had set this quest aside.

"On one hand is an incredibly difficult quest that I may be unable to complete even if I try my utmost, while on my other hand are tangible benefits that I can receive immediately. I already have too many bothersome things to deal with, and this particular bother isn't too important to take care of. Let's just forget it."

And, so, I personally handed the Ocean Bottle to Aylos. She received it from me and clutched it to her chest with an expression filled with nostalgia and sadness.

"…Thank you. If only Sidunwar was willing to listen to me, he wouldn't have ended like—wait, what!?"

Just as she said only half of what she intended, Aylos suddenly stopped in shock. All

that nostalgia and sadness vanished completely, to be replaced with astonishment on that pretty face of hers.

"How is this possible! There's actually still his Divine Spirit contained within here, and it's in the midst of reviving? How is this possible? Sidunwar can still revive? My husband still has a hope of reviving?"

I'd never seen anyone's expressions change so rapidly. From sadness to surprise, from surprise to delight, and in the very next second, her delight turned to despair!

"NO! Sidunwar! I can feel your Divine Spirit disappearing; what's happening!? Your Divine Spirit was clearly stable just earlier; why is it beginning to disappear!?"

Everyone else also had expressions of shock. Although the existences known as Gods were just like cockroaches, incredibly difficult to truly kill off, for a God who had died so incredibly long ago to still have the possibility of revival was completely outside of everyone's realm of understanding. And just when he had the hope of revival, it started vanishing, which was even more incomprehensible.

Hearing Aylos's cry, I was momentarily surprised before I immediately grabbed the Ocean's Bottle from her hands. The moment it returned to me, the Divine Spirit contained within the Ocean's Bottle indeed began to stabilize.

It was obvious that Sidunwar's life was currently being maintained by my System. So, when the Ocean's Bottle no longer belonged to me, the System lost its power to maintain his life, causing the Divine Spirit to naturally start dissipating on its own. After all, this God Quest's main goal in the end was to revive this mega-veteran God from long ago.

Aylos was about to reflexively grab the Ocean's Bottle back from me, but she discovered the return of Sidunwar's Divine Spirit and realized that it somehow had to do with me.

Although she didn't understand how I did it, it was an indisputable fact that was right in front of her. For a Divine Spirit that was already beginning to disappear to stabilize again was completely against the common sense of this world.

"How did you do it? This is impossible!"

I hesitated for a moment before making another decision that was actually rather easy

to make… There actually wasn't anything to hesitate about, as the Ocean Bottle would certainly remain by my side judging from the current situation. I was hesitating about whether or not to laugh loudly three times and say, "Your husband's life is in my hands. If you want him to live, then obey me." Or whether I should whisper into her ear with a perverted smile, saying, "Madam, your husband can no longer be without me; be mine as well."

Fine then, these sudden flashes of inspiration were unable to be spoken out loud since there were too many spectators. I was afraid of getting beaten up.

"This is my personal secret. I think I'm perhaps the only one in the entire world who can maintain his Divine Spirit and revive him."

Alright, I was doing my best to appear calm and steady, but my lips were arching upward and betraying my smugness. This was basically a heaven-sent gift; as long as Aylos wanted to revive her husband, I basically had another ace card fighter in my ranks.

Yep, just a fighter, nothing like forcing her into some pornographic videos or anything like that. I hate that the most; those thinking dirty thoughts should all go do some self-reflection.

Aylos' expression was rapidly changing. As a veteran whose age could be calculated in centuries rather than years, she would, of course, know what it meant to be under someone else's thumb.

The atmosphere instantly became chilly.

At such a time, I needed assistance in sealing the deal. After I was done playing the part of the bad cop, I needed someone to play the part of the good cop, which was why I glanced behind me.

"Cough, Milady Aylos, please rest assured; we don't have any extravagant requests. We would like to revive His Lordship Sidunwar as well, but there's still some difficulty involved, such as needing sea-related divine power to strengthen his Divine Spirit, and the current Sea Gods are all so strong to the point where we don't dare antagonize them…"

From a certain standpoint, Reyne was an excellent descendant of the Mist as well as my apprentice. She had a sharp mind and was also shameless, able to infer the critical

parts by herself just from the knowledge that I needed the Ocean Bottle to increase its sea-related divine power and Divine Obligation. She managed to hit Aylos right where she was the weakest.

Aylos' face kept flickering between cyan and white, and even her elemental body was now shining. Although her expression still seemed icy on the surface, her overly wild emotions almost caused her to reveal her true appearance.

"Say it; just tell me what conditions you have."

I exchanged glances with Reyne, and both of us smiled. This was no longer even a negotiation—this was a lamb offering herself up to be slaughtered.

"Relax; we're easy to deal with. You only need to…"

When I told her my condition, Aylos' expression was filled with surprise. She wasn't surprised that my condition was too strict; she was surprised because it was too easy.

I smiled when I saw her expression noticeably relax.

"Let's take it slowly. She was so tense just now; how could we possibly take her for all she's worth? Since the critical bait is in my hands, I'm not afraid of this fish getting off the hook. If I force her too much from the very start, it's easy to make her resent us, so let's use something simple first to get her used to it. Once she's fallen into the habit of obeying my orders, she won't be able to get free anymore. Hehehe!"

"Hehehe!"

My secret smile overlapped with Reyne's. We merely exchanged smiles and all of the above was communicated nonverbally.

Meanwhile, behind my back, everyone else was having another discussion.

"It's all over; Reyne has been corrupted by Roland as well." Margaret had a helpless expression on her face. One Roland was annoying enough to deal with, and Elisa, who he taught, was also incredibly difficult to deal with. Adding in a Reyne, who was becoming more black-bellied every day, it was something that would indeed make her feel helpless.

"…That might not be the case. At the very least, I've never seen a single descendant of

the Mist that's a normal person. Just look at Glina and Karwenz. Roland probably just activated Reyne's inner potential! That entire family has the bloodline of perverts." Amelia gave an even more vicious conclusion.

Adam nodded vigorously as he watched Reyne and Roland flash evil smiles in unison, and he recalled how he had suffered due to Roland in the past.

I wasn't in a hurry to go fight Emordilorcan to the death. Apart from having to gather information about this place, there were many things that I still needed to do in this Earth Elemental Plane that was far away from the mortal plane and thus the sights of the Gods.

This Holy War and battle had taught me a deep lesson I'd never forget. Especially with Karwenz, Emordilorcan, and Felix's appearances—all these God-level, powerful existences kept sounding the warning alarm in my mind.

High-level combat ability had far too much influence on the overall combat situation. Every time one of them acted, it could just about turn the entire situation around, and in the past, Emperor Yongye's forbidden spells would always be able to overturn any combat situation, but the current me…

"I'm so weak; it's so pathetic how weak I am!"

Yep, I was so weak. It was almost two years now since I had obtained this double Diamond Bloodline, but I had just reached the Silver rank, and I only had a shallow understanding of my bloodline's power and job class abilities. Perhaps this would be an incredible achievement for anyone else, but I considered it a failure.

"Most of my attention has been preoccupied with other matters. Walking a tightrope every time, I'll fall off eventually, and who knows what will happen in the future. I don't have that much free time, so I need to quickly improve my power rank."

Of course, to me, my rank was never a real issue, as true combat ability only had a partial connection to rank. But increasing my rank would bring about foundational changes, and my opponents would only become stronger and stronger in the future.

"Normal methods can't be counted on. In that case, let's use some trickery. Life and death and endless reincarnation?! Hehe! That might not always be the case!"

Chapter 206
Divine Sin

"Endless reincarnation forms a cycle of life and death."

If souls were the foundation of this world, then reincarnation was its most basic precept. The living were the living while the dead would enter the cycle of reincarnation to reinvigorate this world.

That was why it was a huge taboo to create a life that wouldn't enter the cycle of reincarnation; don't even mention personally breaking the cycle of reincarnation or making the dead come alive again. That was why I had never heard of anything related to resurrection magic in all the years I have been around—not even the basic idea of how it could be done.

No matter how ambitious and arrogant Emperor Yongye was back in the day, even he knew that there were some areas he must tread with caution. In the end, he only broke the taboo regarding Lisa, which still caused Ayer to come looking for him.

Afterwards, through some idle chatter, I had learned that Ayer's main Divine Obligation was to protect the boundary between life and death and to maintain the natural cycle of reincarnation. Pulling a newly-dead soul that just entered the cycle doubtlessly triggered his limits, and when you add on the fact that the entire River Styx was part of his Divine Domain, I was basically committing armed robbery right in front of a police station—he absolutely couldn't ignore me.

Don't even mention the River Styx; even in the mortal plane, anyone who dared break certain taboos would end up mysteriously dying. However, this was a different place, and the True Gods weren't omniscient. There were always places that even they couldn't peer into.

"Souls have the cycle of reincarnation, and the physical elements making up the world also need to be cycled. This world is composed of the four basic elements of earth, wind, water, and fire. The Elemental Planes are the source of each basic element, and they are also the resource warehouses for replenishing the basic elements in this world. But, the natural laws of the Elemental Planes are too simplistic. Due to the

overload of only one particular element and the lack of natural laws, these planes could even reject the Divine Domains of True Gods, turning into a forbidden zone for True Gods where even they couldn't peek into. Hehe, back in the day, a few youngsters even almost managed to successfully fool me."

I recalled that those were Ayer's words. He basically said everything but "if you want to do something forbidden, then go to the Elemental Planes." This was basically no different from a policeman teaching a criminal how to beat the system, so how could I possibly miss his meaning?

Of course, if Ayer wanted to stop me, he could still stop me since he was never an ordinary True God to begin with. In fact, he had found out about this vulnerability in the system after someone else discovered it first and then perished by Ayer's hands.

But of course, in such a situation, Ayer could choose whether to interfere or not. And if I was the one breaking the taboos, he could just pretend to not see anything.

What was I about to do? One would know simply by seeing the shivering cat before me, which seemed to be on the brink of death.

The black cat was curled up into a ball and her watery eyes were filled with tears—it was as if she was a normal housecat about to be forced to take a shower, using the look in her eyes to request her master to spare her.

"Um, is it really necessary?"

"What a waste of time! What do you think? I've never seen you afraid before in all these years, and isn't this your dream? You're getting scared at such a junction?"

That silly cat took a deep breath as her pupils suddenly dilated before expanding again, and her cat ears finally stopped shivering.

"Come, I'm not afraid!"

I was still hesitating, but not because of whether I should begin this experiment or not. It was no matter if Harloys agreed or not as I had long since planned this experiment anyways; instead, I was hesitating about whether or not to tell her, "Your ears have indeed stopped trembling, but your tail keeps thrashing about, betraying your thoughts!"

"Cough, your tail."

"Ah!"

Harloys exclaimed at this and instantly clutched her tail with her claws, but even holding her tail tightly didn't stop it from twitching as if she had a cramp. After a short period of silence and awkwardness, Harloys grit her teeth and transformed into a blonde loli.

"…Your cat ears are still there."

"Ah!" This was the first time I had ever seen Harloys acting so panicked.

"…Humans don't have long, black cat tails."

Harloys continued panicking.

"…Nor do humans grow cat whiskers."

"Can you just finish saying everything at once! Is it that fun to tease me?"

"Teasing a cat should be done over a series of times—oh right, I just recorded the earlier scene with a memory crystal. You were quite cute, and I'll appreciate it slowly in the future when I have free time… Hey, hey, what's with your claws? Are you intending to kill your master?"

"I'm cleaning out my sect of traitorous disciples! Take this! Vicious tiger coming down the mountain!"

"Vicious tiger? Haha! More like a cute cat."

Alright, after this was the typical playfighting. At the very least, the playfighting helped her finally relax. It was only natural that she would be scared to such an extent. If anything went wrong with this experiment, she would definitely end up having her soul destroyed, forever losing the chance to be reincarnated.

From a certain standpoint, the phrase that the older one got, the more one was afraid of death was quite correct. Both Harloys and I still had too many unresolved regrets, so neither of us wanted to die right here and now.

"Perhaps your current physical body's imitation sensory mechanisms aren't bad, but it's different from the real five senses. And while the cells of Greed can indeed continuously copy and imitate the metabolism of a normal life, it's just that—simple copying. It can only imitate and not give you the true qualities of the living, and nor can it truly subtly recreate a normal life's maturity and growth. This means that it's difficult for you to truly become stronger from the foundation. There's nothing that can truly replace living, continuously growing cells that have endless energy and potential. You've probably already forgotten the feeling of becoming stronger through cultivation. The feeling of breathing to awaken your body and have magic course through your veins can never replace that feeling of cultivation. If you want to continue getting stronger—no, if we want to continue getting stronger, this is unavoidable. Besides, would I ever do you wrong?"

Okay, I instantly knew that I said something bad. The previous words had moved her significantly, and she had calmed down already, but the final sentence was obviously unnecessary.

"…You dare say such a thing? How many times have you wronged me?"

"At the very least, we're in the same boat now. You're currently my magical pet, and you growing stronger means me growing stronger. If you die, my soul will be greatly weakened and will lose a huge piece. Do you think I would wrong myself?"

Okay, I instantly knew that I said something bad again. Her cat tail and cat ears instantly reappeared, and even her blonde hair that reached her waist was all standing up on end. It was as if the cat Banshee Queen was so angered that all her hair stood up just like a real cat.

"…I'm pretty sure you've wronged yourself numerous times as well! Hey, does anyone ever try coaxing others like how you do? It's even harder to feel assured now."

I only shrugged and didn't explain myself.

Neither of us was a novice greenhorn. Sometimes we just needed to complain a little, but we still knew what needed to be done. Harloys soon calmed down again, at the same time as the arrival of the other participant for this experiment. This well-prepared yet unreasonable experiment was now ready to begin.

"Shadow!"

I felt many things as I looked at this twisted Shadow.

From the very start, the Frigid Nightmare "Shadow" was no ordinary Frigid Nightmare. After hatching through an abnormal contract, it was cut off from its host's soul connection and was left by itself for about three hundred years, like a baby that was separated from its mother's nourishment before finally becoming a "dead egg."

It was no wonder that the Frigid Nightmares were never able to hatch it since the dead egg was already dead. How could it possibly be hatched using ordinary methods? However, I was an undead, and I even used to be the top-level existence of undead magic—a lich…

I'll skip the process as the awakening procedure isn't suitable for seeing the light of day. In the end, I received an unexpected product—a half-living, half-dead ethereal Frigid Nightmare.

He was living. As an elemental lifeform, his physical body contained his will and soul, and he was just born, so of course he was living.

He was also dead. He had died long ago before hatching, and the only way he could move about in this world was through the power of necromancy magic controlling his incomplete body.

"Frigid Nightmares are a mix between elemental life and soul spirits to begin with, and when you add undead magic and a piece of my soul into the mix, the final product would be anyone's guess. If you had to categorize it, you could only describe it as a dead living creature."

The awakened Shadow was abnormally dangerous. His true power was completely uncalculatable using ranks; he both existed in this world and didn't exist in this world. Apart from area-of-effect attacks that specifically targeted souls, no other attack would even affect him. He could consume souls, but it was unknown what he would transform into if he obtained them.

"…His very existence is something unexplainable by the tenets of magic. 'Shadow' is actually an existence that broke the cycle of reincarnation, and I somewhat understand why it's taboo now. This kind of existence if far too dangerous. He instinctually desires to fill the hole in his soul and devour all life. If it weren't for the fact that I hatched him and he listens to me due to his leftover instinct as a Frigid

Nightmare, perhaps I would be the first one to be devoured by him."

At first, I had intended to use divine power to help nourish him so he could completely evolve, but in the end, it only made the situation worse. He indeed received nourishment from Wumianzhe's divine power, but his evolution had instead developed in the worst possible way.

"An existence that shouldn't exist and has unexpected divine power—a Divine Sin! Damn it! I should have expected that Shadow was actually a Divine Sin that hadn't finished evolving!"

This was the worst possible change of all. Divine Sins were a type of existence feared even by the Gods, and they naturally hated this world. I created his soul back when I was in the midst of despair, hatred, and anger, while divine power and the Frigid Nightmare egg gave him a physical body. As long as he was properly born, he would definitely cause a massive catastrophe for the entire world.

What was fortunate was that he still hadn't developed any intelligence. He merely instinctively desired the destruction of all things, and I could still temporarily suppress him, but if I ever let my guard slip… something even more devastating than a war involving the Gods would likely occur.

But, to completely seal him away seemed like a waste, which was how I came up with the idea for this experiment.

"If Shadow is a dead living creature, then Harloys the Banshee Queen who transformed into Greed is basically a living dead creature. If the two of them can combine and mutually compensate for each other's lacking areas, perhaps they'd be able to twist the cycle of reincarnation and have the dead become the living without undergoing reincarnation!"

In theory, this was workable. No matter how twisted he became, Shadow was still a product of my soul, and Harloys was my magical pet that had a contract with my soul. Shadow was a living creature without a sense of will or a proper physical body, while Harloys was a dead person who still had life and a physical body. With me acting as the catalyst for the two of them in helping adjust their soul wavelengths to be identical, I would help them combine using the same logic as how God's Descent worked.

And so, that was what happened before me.

"God's Descent! Shadow, descend upon Harloys!"

A light shot into the blonde-haired girl's body. Soon, the twisted light completely vanished, and then Harloys' entire body transformed into a twisted ethereal shadow that kept flashing and changing form.

Her entire body hen transformed into a huge pillar of light that shot into the clouds. The tremendous divine energy in this area made it impossible to stay.

"If everything is successful, Harloys will receive a life and physical body, transforming into a divine life. She might even receive some of the Divine Sin's power if she's lucky. And if she combines with me afterward as my magical pet… I seem to have broken every taboo all at once; hopefully, Ayer won't mind too much."

Harloys and Shadow's synchronization would take quite a while, so I started focusing on the other work ahead of me. In this Earth Elemental Plane, enemies truly were everywhere, so any loosening of vigilance could result in disaster.

"Where's Beifeng? Why hasn't he returned yet?"

As a hunter, scouting was basically his class's natural talent. Ever since we set up camp, I had him scout all around us, and he happily left for the task.

"He's back and is just crouching over there. He seems to be feeling downcast." Reyne pointed at the Dracon who was currently curled up into a ball and clutching his legs. That bastard had even curled his tail into the ball.

At seeing this, I was surprised for a moment before I laughed out loud.

"Eh? Do you know what's going on? This is the first time I've ever seen Beifeng like this."

"Hehe, when we were coming here, I was afraid that bastard would refuse to come, so I told him that we were going to the Earth Elemental Plane where the creatures would be wondrously strange and the likes of which he's never seen before. He happily agreed upon hearing that and left those centaurs behind."

Reyne was surprised for a moment to hear this from me before coming to a sudden realization.

"So you fooled him into coming here? No wonder he's so depressed."

"Hmph, I didn't lie to him one bit. This is the Earth Elemental Plane, after all. Those Earth Elemental creatures are indeed strange and wondrous; it's his fault for not asking clearly. He was getting too close to those centaurs and was getting involved in some scandals; it is a good opportunity for him to get away and calm down for a few days."

"Is this your so-called 'truthful lying?' It's as amazing as I expected."

"Haha, but of course."

I laughed, smug in satisfaction, as Reyne seemed to learn much from me. She even took out a small notebook and noted this down while Adam behind us sneered at the sight.

"Yesterday, he was still complaining about how his own apprentice wronged him and how he shot himself in the foot. From how I see it, this will just be the same. Margaret, how about we have a little bet?"

"I refuse to bet. Roland is one hundred percent going to shoot himself in the foot again. He's a professional at doing so. If there's no doubt about it, how could we possibly bet?"

I decided to ignore the loud "discussion" behind my back, simply walking over to Beifeng. I decided to give him some encouragement since we still needed him to work for us.

But right when I reached his side, I heard him muttering to himself.

"…Even though their appearances are rather attractive, there are no holes! What should I do without any holes…"

Ptui! Right then and there I spat out all my saliva. This bastard even found elemental creatures attractive! He was completely unworthy of my pity.

"Cough—cough." I softly coughed twice and had already mentally prepared my next words, which would be "true love is limitless, so this is no good. Beifeng, what happened to your true love?" in order to tease him.

But, he suddenly stood up, lifted his arms, and pointed his middle fingers at the dark-

gray sky.

"Damned heavens! You think this can stop me? Who cares if there are no holes?! There's plenty of people that create holes when there are none to begin with! True love is limitless; true love is undefeatable! Ahhh!"

And then that Dracon's depression instantly cleared up. He was filled with the will to battle as he rushed out while I remained there in a state of shock.

Boom!

But before he took many steps, a bolt of thunder crashed down on him, causing him to collapse, burnt to a black crisp.

I looked towards Margaret and Adam, thinking that they couldn't stand this anymore and cast a spell on Beifeng.

However, everyone shook their heads, and even Camdian made an exclamation of astonishment. "There was no gathering of the thunder element at all; it was a pure natural lightning strike. A lightning strike actually appeared in the Earth Elemental Plane? Is this the legendary heavenly tribulation? This is my first time witnessing it!"

The natural power of thunder was of course far stronger than anything a human mage could muster up, but the burnt Dracon didn't surrender as he struggled to crawl up again and continued pointing his middle finger at the sky.

"Damned heavens! You shall never stop me from my true love!"

Boom!

As Beifeng roared out in anger, he actually managed to agilely tumble on the ground and dodge a new lightning strike before running off into the distance.

Boom!

"Ah!"

Boom!

"Ah!"

That burnt-black warrior of true love was now emitting the tasty aroma of cooked meat as he stubbornly crawled off into the distance…

“…True love is unstoppable!"

Boom!

"Ah!"

It seemed this was going to be a long ongoing battle about true love, or perhaps we wouldn’t need to go hunting for lunch today…

Chapter 207
The Deadline of Two Months

The weather in the Earth Elemental Plane was quite unpleasant. At least one-third of each day would be spent amid sandstorms where nothing could be seen. The rather terrifying sounds of the sandstorms could be heard even in our underground caves.

Of course, we had the ability to go out even in such weather, but many things would be impossible to accomplish outside; it was more effective to remain at camp and save our energy. There were many things to be done at camp as well.

Some of us were adapting to the environment, some were polishing their swords, some simply slept, and someone had long since lost their patience.

"Ahhh! This is so frustrating; when will this annoying sandstorm finally stop? The heavy smell of earth in this plane makes me want to vomit; let's hurry up and kill off Emordilorcan and go home already. Camdian, are you still not finished with your preparations? Are you still as weak and cowardly as always?"

"I call it caution, my respectable Lady Aylos. Before we get used to the nature of this Earth Elemental Plane, our combat ability will be halved—especially for you whose powers are countered by earth. You'll probably be at even less than half. Meanwhile, Emordilorcan will have an endless amount of power to replenish himself, so we must first get accustomed to the nature of this plane."

"Hmph, how boring. I'm going to sleep; call me when the time is set."

"Alright, Lady Aylos. I wish you sweet dreams!"

We were all rather surprised at how the two Elemental Gods talked to each other. Their personalities were completely opposite from what we had expected.

Aylos' icy and exquisite appearance had, in a way, fooled us. After being together for a short while, her icy-beauty impression had vanished; underneath her beauty that seemed like water was an impatient personality as wild as fire.

Not only was the Water Elemental Goddess like this, but based on my experience so far, all of the other Elemental Gods were similar in being the complete opposites of their elements' natures.

"According to common logic, fire mages will become easily angered and impatient, thunder and wind mages will become casual and free-spirited, water and ice mages will become easygoing and calm, while earth mages will become docile and honest. This should be the influence of the elements' own natures."

Yet by just looking at the Elemental Gods before us, it could be seen that that could be no further from the truth.

"This is totally different from what everyone expected. The Wind Elemental God who should have been extremely free-spirited is actually the super-cautious type, the Water Elemental Goddess that should have been gentle and easygoing is actually a hot-tempered lady, and Emordilorcan who should have been docile and honest as the Earth Elemental God is actually a vicious, sly fox. Then what will the personality of the Fire Elemental Goddess who should have been fiery and domineering be? I bet she's a little girl who loves peace and flowers."

Fine then. A future coincidental meeting will help me discover that my worldview-shattering guess had actually been correct. Meanwhile, since we had time for idle chatter, when we asked what we were all thinking, Camdian helped explain things to us.

"The natures of our elements? Yes, it's true to begin with, and I wasn't such a cautious individual in the past. But after being cheated or on the worse end of things for enough times, I became the cautious type. As for Lady Aylos, all water elementals have mega-slow personalities, so communicating with them could probably make anyone impatient. Staying in such an environment would probably change anyone into a slow personality themselves or change them into a mega-impatient type like her. Emordilorcan's probably the same case. If it wasn't for how vicious and sly he could be, how could he possibly defeat the other veteran earth elementals and become the Earth Elemental God, living until today?"

It seemed that stories weren't always true. Even with innate natures, they couldn't compare to personalities shaped by later influences in life. This gossip was quite interesting to hear, but right now, I didn't have the time to consider other things. My own troubles were quite bothersome as well.

"Silver Dignity; Golden Will?"

As I listened to the sandstorm outside, I sunk into deep contemplation. This time, the Slaying a God quest had given me abundant rewards. Apart from that God Equipment Felix's Hatred and various materials, my wallet was now filled with approximately 70,000 Fate Points.

These points were definitely sufficient to exchange for some necessary skills and improve my overall rank to Gold, but I was hesitating.

Every rank had its foundational differences. Taking the next step without sufficient understanding would mean missing out on the path's necessary experience. Obtaining this experience later down the road would be impossible; it might even become a bottleneck for future progression.

The Gold rank was special among all the ranks; just casually entering Gold would definitely not be a wise idea.

My system had planned my path for me before the Gold rank, with levels 1 through 60. All the basic common job classes were present here, and there wasn't much difference between them. Most job classes' commonly-used combat techniques and skills would be mastered while still at the Silver rank, and the main goal was to perfect one's mastery before changing fundamentally, finally transforming common and foundational abilities into personalized styles.

"I have to make a choice? It seems just sitting here in contemplation won't be enough."

Any system of knowledge's steps for improvement would consist of going from only one skill to becoming a generalist, before going back from a generalist to a specialist. Cultivation was naturally the same.

The Iron and Bronze ranks were for training the physical body and activating one's potential and talents, and at the Silver rank, combat techniques and so on would be familiarized. After that, the physical body would no longer be able to be improved, and it was time to develop one's mental potential and combine everything they have learned, creating an internal world of their own.

The next step would be for the person's individual internal world to be able to affect the outside world. That was the so-called "Golden Will," and also the point where a choice would have to be made.

When a normal job class was cultivated to the limit, it would be time to choose a promoted class. And these promoted job classes, such as "Beast King Hunter," "Shadow Dancer" and so on were merely paths that strong people from the past had developed on their own.

Following another's path would perhaps be a quick and easy progress, but there were no identical people in this world. Even twins with identical genes would have numerous differences between them, and someone else's path was always someone else's to begin with—it couldn't possibly be one hundred percent appropriate for you. Walking down that path to a certain extent would always give rise to insurmountable obstacles.

Of course, there were always exceptions, such as Reyne. From a certain standpoint, she was basically a female clone of Karwenz, and all she needed to do was walk down the same path as him. With the exact same Soul Imprint supporting her, she would certainly reach an incredibly high level.

As an aside, although the surgery to switch out Glina's blood was an incredible success, it wouldn't be possible to do the same with Reyne. She had become Karwenz's host once already and possessed a far stronger connection with the Chaos Abyss. Forcefully switching out her blood would be no different from switching her soul, not to mention that this would be interfering with one of Karwenz's critical personal benefits and he would almost certainly emerge and give me trouble, which was something I did not desire.

And, so, the method I used for Reyne was to slowly inject my fresh blood and use magic medicine to suppress Karwenz's bloodline so that it wouldn't be too active. This was obviously no long-term solution, but I could only hope that Reyne could find a way to break free on her own to separate herself from Karwenz. Only by cutting off the connection would she be able to free herself from the beckoning of the Chaos Abyss.

"Don't desire power from others; improve your own techniques and willpower through continuous battle to create your own combat style. By the time I return, I hope to see a brand-new you."

Saying this, I kicked Reyne away. Perhaps the Earth Elemental Plane wasn't suitable for living in, but it was definitely a great place for cultivation—in such a hostile environment, merely surviving would help one become stronger.

Moreover, I haven't been giving Reyne any of my blood recently. I was hoping that she could use her own willpower to resist the Chaos Abyss. This wasn't any type of strange strategy where "a lion would push its baby lion down a cliff to strengthen the baby's body" or anything like that; I've always felt that some animals' ways of raising their babies were incomprehensible.

Did the ability to climb a cliff have anything to do with survival? Babies should be growing under their parents' care, learning techniques to hunt and growing stronger in body and mind. Kicking them off a cliff when they weren't even mature yet would cause either the baby lion to fall to death or starve to death.

Cough, I seem to have gotten sidetracked again; where was I? Oh right, why I wasn't injecting my blood… actually, the reason was quite simple. I didn't want to die, and I wanted even less to die due to the strange reason of anemia.

Back when I helped Glina exchange her blood, I used up almost one-third of the blood in my body. This was already near the fatal limit for a normal person. I hadn't even regained my lost blood yet when I already helped Reyne inject blood twice, so I've become incredibly anemic recently.

Not even mentioning the headaches and dizziness, but whenever I woke up every morning, my blurry vision caused by anemia was basically impossible to deal with. I'd already mistaken Reyne and Elisa for each other twice already and went into a few wrong places, causing some rather laughable incidents.

"Your vision is blurry? That's why you were naked in the morning and running around out in public for all to see? To use such an excuse, you must think we're all little children."

"Let me explain! At the time, I was just dazedly following a procession to go to the showering halls, and when I heard them saying they were going to take off their clothes, I thought that we reached the showers already, but who knew—who knew…"

"Who knew that you actually followed Eaglestorm and Xueti's procession and you guys all started taking off your clothes right in public?"

"…When I discovered what was going on, it was already too late! I'm not someone who can't be saved!"

"Yep, you saved yourself; you stole a bystander's clothes and then walked back home

all proudly. However…" When she got to this point, Elisa glared at me coldly and adjusted her eyeglasses. The icy condescension in her eyes was humiliating.

"…You ended up robbing a lady's clothes instead. Not only did you wear some lacy female clothing home, but you even had a lady stay by herself in an alley, naked, for half an hour. Do you know how much effort we spent on convincing the witnesses that they saw Princess Reyne who was intending to change her style rather than an insane His Highness Roland? For the newly-created Observers Squad to go all out for such a first mission is nothing more than utter humiliation."

I couldn't reply to Elisa at the time. Back then, I was so dizzy and couldn't see anything so I could only dart into an alley. It was so difficult to catch anyone at all, so how could I care about anything else?

"But that doesn't seem right. Although I couldn't see the person's face at the time, I remembered that person had a muscular body. Wasn't she actually a man—a muscular man? That person also happily gave me their clothing."

"She's one of Omar's good friends, one of the core members of the 'Muscle-Loving Club.' To be honest, she kept viewing this incident with pride, and if it weren't for us stopping her she would probably go around bragging to everyone about her female charisma. If that happened, your reputation isn't important, but if you got us dragged into it…"

Alright, seeing everyone approach me with evil intentions, all I could do was clutch my head, crouch, and then shout out loudly.

"Don't hit my face!"

Recalling back to the beating I received from everyone that morning, my cheek started twinging. Elisa really didn't hold back at all on me even though I clearly told her to not hit my face.

There was no helping it. Thanks to my prior experiences, injecting any more of my blood into Reyne would be impossible until I at least recovered completely. I could only count on her own willpower.

After saying goodbye to Reyne, it was also time for me to get going. This wasn't only a place for their cultivation, but it was also the place I chose for my personal cultivation as well.

"Rather than staying inside and considering my future combat style and development path, let's just use actual combat to test things out instead."

In order to reach the peak, I had never considered the already created high-ranked job classes. My path to Gold had to belong to me alone, and since the mortal plane's situation was now somewhat steadied, I finally had some time to consider my personal future.

If it were someone else, using such a short period of time to complete the foundational change from Silver to Gold would be impossible, but I had countless amounts of combat experience and knowledge to back me up. And this wasn't even mentioning my system's Fate Points, which would help increase the speed and effectiveness of my cultivation. These two months of actual combat training would be enough for me to finish walking down this path.

"Alright, everyone, see you all in two months."

And so, this temporary team split up for the time being as everyone prepared in their own way for combat as according to our plans.

Emordilorcan would definitely be difficult to deal with. The Earth Elemental God was now in his home plane, and he could use the Earth Elemental Plane's power as he pleased to strengthen himself, making himself nigh undefeatable. If it weren't for the fact that Emordilorcan was obviously heavily injured and that he was in a state of hibernation to help himself recover, there was no way I would follow him all the way here.

Even so, dealing with the heavily injured Emordilorcan was no easy matter. As visitors from another plane, we needed time to get used to the natural laws of this world. This was especially more so for the Wind and Water Elemental Gods Camdian and Aylos. Before they could finally get used to the Earth Elemental Plane, they'd likely be able to use less than half of their actual power.

The others were the same as well. How well a mage performed on the battlefield depended on how much preparation was done beforehand. Amelia and Margaret both wanted time to prepare for combat and the scene of combat beforehand, placing traps and creating cannon fodder. Their two months would be very busy.

And it was the same for me, Adam, and Reyne. While we would make the most of these

two months to increase our overall capabilities, we also needed to get used to fighting in the Earth Elemental Plane. The two months would likely pass by in a flash for us.

There was one more person? Cough, let's just forget about him, okay? What? I absolutely have to talk about him? Fine then, don't regret it… That fellow's gentlemanly, undying body was perhaps already cultivated to the highest level. Even after receiving such a heavenly tribulation, he recovered quickly and left our camp without returning.

Margaret had indeed stayed in contact with him and was aware of what Beifeng was up to. Yet judging by the look of disgust on Margaret's face—when she was always the expressionless type to begin with—I decided not to ask what happened.

"Beifeng said he can convince a group of fighters to come over and help us. I believe he can most likely accomplish it."

Okay, although this was a piece of good news, I couldn't be happy about it at all since I really didn't want to know how he was going to do it! Nor did I want to guess. At this moment, for the first time, I started regretting having Beifeng come here and assist us.

Soon enough, with help from Margaret's random teleportation, I put on a tan woolen cape and thick gnomish anti-wind goggles as I began my own journey of cultivation.

"Oh my, what a passionate host you are."

Before I even steadied myself after the random teleportation spell, the entire ground began shaking. A piece of land suddenly sunk into the ground, and a scorpion-shaped monster crawled out—it was only slightly smaller than a dragon in size.

The scorpion's plating seemed to be as hard as iron, and its barbed tail seemed to be gathering energy, while the hundreds of eyeballs on its tiny head were all staring at me with an obvious murderous intent.

"You discovered me from my footsteps? Oh man—oh man, it seems the next two months will be quite difficult."

Even though I said so, I laughed out loud in joy.

"I haven't enjoyed the simple feeling of battle in so long. Little scorpion, let me have some fun with you."

Chapter 208
An Old Acquaintance and the City of Sand

"The secrets of the Elemental Planes? I don't know either; you should go find the mages for information instead. Why are you acting so surprised? Even I, Ayer, am not someone who knows everything. If it seems like I have a lot of knowledge, that's only because I've had such a long life. The history of the Four Elemental Planes is even greater than that of the mortal plane. The Goddess of Creation Eich had used them as the foundation for creating all the other planes, and I wasn't even born yet at the time. How could I possibly know?"

When I asked Ayer about the ancient secrets of the Elemental Planes, I received such an unexpected answer. And when he mentioned the Goddess of Creation, the black-clothed icy Death God was actually filled with a nostalgic expression.

"The Four Elemental Gods may have a pretty name but they're really nothing more than warehouse managers working for the Goddess of Creation. Eich entrusted them with the power to control part of the very Elemental Planes themselves, but they definitely do not possess the power to truly rule over the Elemental Planes. Hehe! Nobody is able to rule over any Elemental Plane, as that would mean that that individual has the power to rule over one-fourth of the entire world and its living creatures."

And when I checked this information from other sources as well—Margaret gave it to me in a friendly gesture—it also proved the veracity of Ayer's words. The most obvious evidence, however, was that when the Four Elemental Gods were sealed, the Elemental Planes still existed and went on as usual. If an Elemental God were to die, a new Elemental God would naturally be born again in just a few hundred years.

Theoretically speaking, the Goddess of Chaos Cynthia inherited part of this power from her mother Eich. Cynthia would be able to control the Four Elemental Gods and indirectly control these planes; Cynthia's Will was still affecting the Elemental Planes, which was why the Earth Elemental Plane displayed many traits of Chaos.

The Earth Elemental Plane was far different from what most people thought of it. This wasn't a world devoid of nothing other than sandstorms and earth elementals, but it

was rather the opposite. As the most ancient elemental plane of the four, its natural resources and specialties were incredibly abundant.

Various ancient species continued to reproduce successfully here, and precious gems and rare minerals were commonplace. Buried under the ancient hills were valuables that would be impossible to find in any other plane.

Of course, the most common type of resident here were elemental creatures related to the earth, but they were different from the humanoid elementals in the mortal plane. The earth elementals here weren't accustomed to humanoid shapes; their shapes were, instead, wondrously strange and abnormal. Some took the form of dragons while some were typical stone giants. There were also giant crabs or insect shaped elementals; typically, they would choose to imitate strong existences that they had seen before.

Although they boasted of differences in appearances and species, they all possessed one thing in common; all these creatures were part earth elemental, and had the ability to devour each other and evolve into stronger existences.

According to stories, in the very beginning, Emordilorcan had been a weak stone giant. Because this place had a high amount of elemental power, the body parts of these elemental creatures made for excellent magical materials.

Any place with benefits to be gained would attract intelligent species. If there were enormous benefits to be reaped, it was only natural that there would be those looking to strike it big while not fearing death. After the "warehouse manager" Elemental Gods were sealed, these Elemental Planes were just like warehouses with their doors left unlocked and wide open; there were numerous methods to invade them. Various factions had already set up their own permanent outposts in each of the Elemental Planes.

In an area known as the Karo Hills was the outpost of the Mage Country, Arlodant. Hundreds of mage towers and magic contraptions created a defensive energy field, and the semicircular dark purple magic barrier blocked all the sandstorms from being able to affect "Karo City." Karo was also the largest non-native settlement in the Earth Elemental Plane for the nearest several thousand kilometers.

Various species could be seen walking in Karo's streets. Although most were still humans, elves, beastmen, and other common species from the mortal plane, there

were also some demons from the lower planes. You could even see a few machine lifeforms or ethereal lifeforms from other worlds. Of course, there were also goblin merchants that could be found literally everywhere. However, there was one species among them that was one of the rarest to be found in the mortal planes—half-elementals.

They always had complex reasons for coming into existence. Some were the descendants of high-level elementals and ordinary species while some had been ordinary species elementalized by the Elemental Plane, but their most obvious traits were their physical appearances. Their skin colors would always be rather eye-catching, with speckled, tan skin, or fiery-red skin, not to mention that they typically had various crystals embedded in their faces. Their appearances could be rather frightening.

Yet due to their bodies' partial elementalization, they were also natural-born elemental mages. They had excellent innate element-sensing abilities, and with just a little training they would always be able to become superb elemental mages. They didn't even have to worry about their element's magic turning on themselves; they always grew quickly in power.

For the Mage Country, apart from all the special resources to be gained here, the Earth Elemental Plane's half-elementals were excellent seeds that could join their ranks. As for the earth magic archmages, the Earth Elemental Plane's high concentration of earth element density was the best cultivation location for them of all. With all sorts of rare elemental creatures and resources here, how could they possibly give up on coming to such a location?

But, recently, Karo had met with some trouble.

The Earth Elemental God had returned. These uninvited guests finally had to face the homeowner.

Obviously, Emordilorcan, who was still the master of this plane in name, wouldn't allow his home to have uninvited guests. More and more earth elemental creatures suddenly changed their attitude towards Karo, and attacks by elemental beasts were becoming more frequent.

Due to the Elemental Tide's increase and the return of Emordilorcan, the sandstorms became stronger in magnitude as well. Karo's magic barrier was keeping out the

sandstorms by now using 50% more energy than the same time last year.

"This won't be good if it continues."

It was becoming harder and harder to travel to and from the Earth Elemental Plane, and the magic power required to move between planes and the magic upkeep of Karo kept increasing as well. As a half-elemental archmage who was born and raised in the Earth Elemental Plane, Atadia had much on his plate to worry about.

Dozens of years ago, Atadia had joined the Mage Country and became an acolyte, and now, he was a Gold-rank archmage. Atadia couldn't be more familiar with the city of Karo, but recently, he kept feeling more and more uncomfortable, as if this beautiful city filled with the culture of magic was a restraint upon him. Somewhere in the wilderness, there was a will that was summoning him.

And it wasn't limited to only him. In the past three months, there were over a dozen acolytes that disappeared into the sandstorms, leaving only their mage robes and staves behind.

"Emordilorcan? How troublesome."

As a Gold-ranked archmage, Atadia was no novice unaware of what was going on. The only existence that could influence the entire Earth Elemental Plane to such a degree could only be that legendary Earth Elemental God.

Since Atadia was no weakling, he could still resist this summoning in his soul, but those novice acolytes found it impossible to resist. Every half-elemental was precious, and losing them like this was painful for him. Yet this wasn't even the biggest problem. Two days ago, an acolyte had gone wild and actually rushed into the magic mechanism area, attempting to break the magic barrier device, which was rather shocking.

"There's still no response from our Mage Country? They should at least send us a few more archmages to help control the situation."

"No. The Mage Country has also met with its own trouble. The Bardi Empire suddenly started a series of small conflicts with us, and most of our strongest mages have left for the frontlines. From what I gleaned through my personal channels, similar problems are occurring in the Wind and Water Elemental Planes. Add on the fact that transport and travel between the Elemental Planes keep increasing in difficulty, and perhaps not only will we not receive more aid, but we'll probably even receive less

assistance than usual."

"If there's a problem with the current dimensional traveling, then can't we borrow the goblins' dimensional traveling services? Their time-space tearing devices should still be usable, right?"

"Their 20% fixed rate of failure is just too much. It's still okay to transport resources, but it's too dangerous to use for anything living. Also, those goblins recently changed their rules, and have actually been making us purchase 'insurance;' otherwise, they won't transport anything for us, and any losses incurred won't be paid by them."

"Insurance? What's that?"

"Something that's been getting popular recently among the goblins. It seems to have been spread by the Underground goblins. That's a system where you pay a certain amount to the goblins as a deposit, and if an accident occurs where you incur losses, the goblins will pay you for your losses."

"Isn't that a good thing? Then you might as well buy it. We've always sucked up any losses ourselves in the past."

"The problem is that even if we purchased their insurance, they wouldn't give us any money back. The archmage Edwin in charge of dimensional transportation has been incredibly angered by them recently."

"Why's that? Don't the goblins always stress a merchant's honesty?"

"They claimed that we put special magnetic items into the products we were transporting, which affected the dimensional teleportation. They are saying that we were at fault for the failed teleportation, and even requested that we pay them for their losses."

"What the hell? If certain special items can't be teleported, shouldn't they tell us beforehand? Only telling us after the fact; then what about the next time? I doubt that archmage Edwin would let them use that excuse again."

"The second time we had even worse luck. We met with a dimensional storm, and half our resources were lost."

"This time, the goblins should have paid up."

"No, they didn't, because their insurance contact had an additional clause stating, 'losses caused by uncontrollable outside factors will not be paid by us.' A dimensional storm is a natural disaster and is counted as such an uncontrollable outside factor."

"Then why are we still purchasing that insurance or whatever!? Isn't it just a merchant's trap? Aren't we buying it just in case we incur losses during the teleportation?"

"…Yeah, we only found out about it after being on the suffering end. In order to receive payment for our losses during teleportation, we were supposed to buy a special 'teleportation insurance.' In the end, for the third attempt, archmage Edwin ended up signing every single additional insurance option."

"Don't tell me we were on the losing end again? Would the goblins actually go against their own contract?"

"…This time the goblins' time-space tearing device actually exploded, which was when we learned that in such a situation, we need to purchase an additional 'accidental explosion insurance,' otherwise there are still no reparations for us."

"Just buy it then; why don't you just buy all the insurance?"

"But the problem is that the 'explosion insurance' is more expensive than all the other insurances added together. But, as everyone knows about goblin products, not having explosion insurance is basically equal to no insurance. Archmage Edwin was so angry that he ended up getting a stroke."

Atadia's mouth was wide agape and he was rendered speechless, but this wasn't the end. The mage acolyte giving him the report had an expression of not knowing whether to laugh or cry as he continued.

"The goblin merchants in our city have also learned these techniques, and are selling all sorts of insurance. Recently, there have been many half-elementals going missing, right? Those goblins even made an insurance for in case they go missing, and they're especially targeting young acolytes for this insurance. They're spreading stories about the disappearances all over, making people worried for their own safety."

"…Did they pay out any money? There's no need to answer; I've already guessed it. They definitely didn't pay!"

"Your wisdom could light up the skies. Indeed, those damned swindling merchants didn't pay a single copper coin! They actually said that the insured person himself needed to request the insurance payment! Since those people have all gone missing, how could they possibly request payment?"

Suddenly, a needling high-pitched voice sounded from behind Atadia and the mage acolyte.

"Hello, I'm from the Anli Goblin Insurance Company. Have you heard of us?"

Atadia turned around to see a short goblin wearing extravagant clothing, all smiles with a business bag in his tiny hand.

"Do you know? There's been a gang of kidnappers going around lately, causing the disappearance of many half-elementals. But our Anli Goblin Insurance Company specializes in this field, and we have set up several… I don't know which type of insurance you need, but if you're not satisfied, we—"

"Get the hell out!"

Atadia, who was always well-known for being a friendly individual, was angered to the point of roaring, but the goblin salesman still didn't intend to give up.

"Hell insurance? We have that as well! Although I don't know why this strange insurance request has been so popular lately, our customers are the Gods! You go to hell, we'll pay up!"

…

In Karo's archmage conference, the Epic archmage Kaid had an expression filled with worry as well. As the highest ranking archmage in Karo, he knew far more about what was going on than his subordinates.

As a true top-level archmage, the Controllers of Truth's information network would always remember to give him a personal report, so of course he knew that the situation in Eich was changing at a rapid pace. Especially with regards to the conflict between his Mage Country and the Bardi Empire; it was no small conflict at all. If it wasn't dealt with properly, it would become an all-out new war.

The Mage Country's support could no longer be counted on, as the worsening

environment in the Earth Elemental Plane indicated the return of the legendary threat known as Emordilorcan. And, they were also dealing with internal problems as well.

"Teacher, those damned goblins are getting worse every day! They're spreading rumors everywhere and causing people to panic, and not only that, they've recently begun increasing prices on basic goods and getting rich off of our country's disaster! We should exile them!"

For Atadia, who was typically the calm type to be angered to such a degree, it seemed that the goblins had indeed gone overboard this time.

"Then we'll just starve to death. Seventy percent of the business done here is by the goblins. Perhaps you could teach us how to create bread with magic?" Another mage, Soranto, remained calm as usual, but his sarcasm made Atadia rather displeased.

"If you think the goblins are difficult to deal with, that's only because you're too simple-minded."

"Hmph, then our resident genius Soranto will surely be able to deal with those greedy misers. Fine then, how about you go have a discussion with the goblins about the recent problem of the increase in food prices?"

“…I'm unable to do it either, but that doesn't mean that nobody's capable of the task. I recommend a certain person that's actually able to get the upper hand in negotiating with the goblins. The goblins have contracts that have more than fifty clauses and seven or eight pages, yet that guy's contracts are actually thicker than books, with over eight hundred clauses. Just his talking can cause the goblins to go into a daze. Recently, he's been making money by having special negotiations with the goblins. Now, wherever he appears, those misers will directly surrender and pay up."

Soranto's words astonished the other two present archmages. A human able to gain the upper hand in a business negotiation with the sly goblins was incomprehensible and unheard of.

"Is he a major merchant from somewhere?"

"No, he seems to be a wandering adventurer, and goblin negotiation is just his side job whenever he happens to be in Karo. Most of the time, he's out hunting, and while his power level isn't much to speak of, he's a rather lucky one."

"What do you mean?"

"He's obviously nothing more than at the Silver rank, but the first time he came to Karo he actually had an Emperor Scorpion's poison stinger on him. That's a strong creature that even Gold-ranked warriors wouldn't dare face alone."

"Perhaps he hid his true power level. For someone to be out there by himself, it wouldn't be strange."

"At first, that's what we thought as well. But archmage Aru who specializes in divination magic met him personally, and there's no mistaking that he really is just at the Silver rank. But what's even more astonishing is what happened later."

"Hmm?"

"The second time he returned to Karo, he had an Earth Elemental Lord's crystal core with him. That's something that no Gold-ranked warrior would be able to deal with. And every time after that, he keeps bringing back stronger and stronger monster materials, in a shorter and shorter time, and…"

Soranto intentionally paused here, apparently trying to make everyone curious. Seeing how his master and all his senior brothers were watching him, he was satisfied and continued with his tale.

"The last time he returned to Karo, he brought back a twice-evolved magic mountain giant's heart! Magic mountain giants already require Gold-ranked warriors to deal with, and if it's a twice-evolved one, maybe not even a Legend would suffice! How is it possible?! That's an evolved mountain giant that has limitless power in this environment. Even I would have to be careful dealing with one."

This time, it was Kaid's turn to be shocked. "Does he have a team to support him?"

"How would that be possible? It's just him alone coming back to Karo each time to eat and sleep, and would he have his team stay outside and eat sand? Besides, detection magic indicates that every time he goes out, he directly heads for the highly dangerous areas, while his prey always has nothing more than some ice damage and cut wounds. He should be a magical swordsman of the ice element."

"Ice damage? There's almost zero water element present in this plane, so he's still able to cause ice damage to the earth elemental creatures in this place where ice magic has

minimal power?"

This was even more incomprehensible. Archmage Kaid started getting interested in this rumored person. "Arrange a meeting for me with this person; I'm getting rather curious. Oh right, what's his name?"

"Roland. Although his nickname seems to be Blackhand, 'Blackhand Roland.'"

When he heard this, Kaid stood up with an expression filled with surprise and disbelief. A dozen seconds later, he finally shook his head.

"If it's him, anything is indeed possible. Hurry up and arrange a meeting with him for me as soon as possible. Forget it, I'll personally go find him. You guys should come with me as well. If he's who I think he is, he might be your teacher's senior!"

Chapter 209
Chicken-Meatball Flavored

With sandstorms and stone pillars everywhere, this was the home of the earth elementals. However, based on the fundamental countering between the elements, wherever there was an excess of the earth element, there would naturally be less of the water element. Not only were sources of water priceless, but this place also lacked any traces of ice or water magic.

Using water or ice element magic in this Earth Elemental Plane with imbalanced elements was no different from forcibly trying to cause artificial rain to fall in a desert. Not only would the difficulty be greatly magnified, but its might would also significantly decrease, and this power drop had nothing to do with personal strength. The stronger the mage, the more one would need to borrow power from nature, and the strongest forbidden curses were nothing more than the products of synchronizations between people and nature. This all meant that ice and water mages were weakened more than anyone else here.

This was also why most of the mages in Karo City were earth mages. In such an environment, their cultivation would be far easier, and their actual power levels would be greatly increased.

As for the strange concept of training in harsh environments and placing large burdens on yourself while training, this was more suitable for muscular warriors. Magic was an academic technique which required precision and logic, where a kingdom could be lost for want of a nail. Getting used to an environment where the mage's element was rare would not only not be beneficial, it would actually cause the mage's elemental power to weaken due to a long period of cultivation in an area lacking the mage's element.

If everyone could simply transform into powerful Legends simply by living in areas of low magical power rather than moving to areas of high magical power—well, that would be more suitable for some tale's heroic main character. If it was possible in real life, then wouldn't everyone turn into superheroes and all acolytes turn into archmages with the coming of the Elemental Tide?

Yet, sometimes, the world was simply illogical. In this Earth Elemental Plane where ice, snow, rain, and water were almost nonexistent, there was currently a patch of abnormally frozen corpses.

It was a group of vicious and sly Burrowing Mantle Spiders. They typically lived underground for long periods of time and excelled in hunting prey with ambushes and traps. When walking by, innocent people and even magical beasts would be bitten on the legs and dragged underground, where the spider's sixteen sharp stone fangs would rip them apart.

However, these dangerous existences were all lying dead on the ground, with only minuscule wounds to be seen on their bodies. What killed them was the fatal icy chill that had entered their wounds.

And, right now, I was rather annoyed; not because of the enemy creatures before me, but rather…

"Urgh! How disgusting."

I had made a temporary barbeque rack and had just taken a hunk of mantle spider leg.

After heating it up and skinning it, there was actually some snow-white meat underneath all the thick layers of earthen spider shell. However, cooking it produced only a disgusting aroma of lime powder.

"Ptui! Ptui! Ptui! I failed again."

Even though I said so, I still furrowed my eyebrows and continued chewing.

[You have now tasted your 64th abnormal delicacy. You still lack 36 more to go for your 'Food God—Nothing is Off-Limits' achievement. You also lack 9,936 more to go for the 'He Who Stands at the Top of the Food Chain' achievement. However, since this creature has sixteen feet, it doesn't count for your 'We Eat Everything with Four Legs Besides Tables and Chairs' achievement. And since this creature's taste doesn't quite reach even half of the legendary 'Taste the Sky, So Delicious' achievement, it will not count for that one, either. Please keep trying harder.]

"Sigh, this achievement seems so difficult to achieve; I have to find something with four legs that tastes even more disgusting… Ptui! Am I stupid? I don't want to get that damned achievement."

Yep, I never had any type of abnormal collection habits; I understood that my system's achievements had always made suffer since long ago. Either the achievements would indeed be useful and the process of obtaining it be ridiculous, or I would receive one without even realizing it but there would be painful side effects. At any rate, the system wouldn't be happy unless I was suffering.

I've already checked all these achievements and requirements for obtaining them. I was rather interested in the one called 'He Who Stands at the Top of the Food Chain.'

[Epic Achievement: 'He Who Stands at the Top of the Food Chain.' After consuming 10,000 living or nonliving foods that no normal person would eat, you shall receive the honorable title of 'Bear Grylls, Devourer of the Void.' Equipping this will cause you to seem more threatening to all living creatures, and it will give you the ability 'Bear Grylls Glare.' Any targets under this effect will feel as if they have met their mortal enemy or natural counter and will be unable to move for a short while. A friendly reminder from your System: this skill has a special effect on Beifeng. Another friendly reminder from your system: that's right, I have long since stopped treating Beifeng as human.]

Well, I understood what the System meant when it said Beifeng was unhuman. As for this additional skill, it was a practical one. After all, combat between high-level warriors could be decided in just an instant. Being able to paralyze the enemy with just a stare and immobilize him was just like the petrifying gaze of a medusa; it would be an incomparably useful skill.

Yet, from another standpoint, the better the ability, the more ridiculous the requirements to achieve it.

Just how long was it supposed to take me to eat 10,000 food objects? Not to mention that they had to be food that no normal person would think of eating. It was basically a marathon straight to hell, and I normally wouldn't even consider it. I ate 64 abnormal creatures in the short space of a month for only one reason—hunger.

All the rations I had originally taken to the Earth Elemental Plane had already perished during my continuous battles. These strange earth elemental creatures were always sizable and had large area-of-effect attacks, such as a huge jaw appearing out of nowhere and engulfing you, which would attack my entire body. My skin was tough and it wasn't a problem, but it wasn't the same for my clothing. If it weren't for the fact that I could replenish additional clothing at Karo, perhaps I would be able to complete

another achievement for my System regarding the number of times I ran around naked…

Even so, if it weren't for Erebella's ice armor protecting my body, I would probably end up naked most of the time. However, even if I saved face, there was nothing I could do about my hunger. After all, it would be too inefficient to go back to Karo every few kilometers, so I could only imitate Bear Grylls and eat whatever I found, grinding my achievement along the way.

Well, the 'Hungry Enough to Eat Literally Anything' achievement was actually surprisingly useful. After equipping it, it doubled my stomach's capacity as well as increased my resistance against poisonous and disgusting foods, which was the only reason I could even tolerate eating all these disgusting things.

"Wahh! This tastes like both wax and limestone; it's so horrible… Something so disgusting isn't even at half the level of 'Taste the Sky?' Just how horrible is British cooking supposed to be!?"

[I can tell you quite clearly that it's still quite far off. If you're willing to spend 100 Fate Points, I can exchange it for an original flavored 'Taste the Sky' for you to try. It's definitely delicious!]

"Never! I refuse to believe you. I still remember the last time."

Suffering once was already enough. If I was dumb enough to make the same mistake twice, then I would truly be a fool.

The last time I thought about exchanging for food through my system, the result was that even though those fried noodles seemed oh so delicious on the surface, the moment I ate it I ended up fainting. When I woke up, I discovered that all sections of my achievement progress had increased by one, which probably meant that my soul had gone on vacation to the River Styx for an entire day.

"I'm going to have to depend on myself. That thing over there seems to resemble a lizard, so it's probably edible! Big lizard, wait for me!"

Three days later, a Legend-ranked sand dragon's heart was put up for sale in Karo's market. These underground SemiDragons had astonishing power, as not only were they extremely quick at burrowing into the ground, but they were also skilled at summoning sandstorms and were incredibly difficult to deal with. In just an instant,

that sand dragon's heart sold for an incredibly high price, but I had only one review for it.

"So crispy! Tastes like chicken! I'm going to go find another dozen!"

…

For me to choose to cultivate in the Earth Elemental Plane, it would doubtlessly be the most foolish decision possible if I had been a pure ice mage. However, for me, who had the System, increasing my power level was never going to be a problem. The critical part was to develop a personal path that was the most suitable for me.

Purposefully absorbing a large amount of earth element into my body would be nothing but slow suicide for any other ice or water element mage. However, it was just a grand gamble for me; a critically important gamble that would influence my future development.

"Create, Ice Mountain Sword!"

"Recreate, Wall of Eternal Ice!"

Chapter 210
Drawing a New World

I still remembered when the Lion King Frigid Nightmare had asked me, in the snowy mountain, what my most fundamental magic was and how I learned of magic. I had laughed out loud at the time.

"I've already found it; it's always been by my side. My magic is to draw my mental world, in which case all I need is a paintbrush."

That's right, after re-obtaining the Ice Treader Soul Imprint, my path of ice and snow was quite clear now. I would follow nature, imitate nature, recreate nature, and surpass nature!

"Fundamental magic—Ice and Snow Brush."

Materializing the ice element and changing its form was just a basic-level snow and ice sculpting technique, which every mage knew how to use. After all, before tossing out any ice shards, you would have to at least make them sharp enough to harm others. Ice magic wasn't the only one to have this basic spell; all elemental magic, as well as other types of magic and techniques, had the same concept.

"Using magic to control the elements to create a stone wall or an ice sculpture is something that perhaps any acolyte could accomplish. Yet I doubt any of those novices know how much really goes into the magic. After all, all they're doing is imitating what they've learned as they utter the incantations and pay the required amount of mana. As for how magic fundamentally works, I doubt any of them would think too much of it."

"Elemental sculpting? The most basic elemental spell with zero attack power? Haha! It seems we've met an incredible apprentice. We thought that we'd meet yet another idiot who was allured by high-level magic and would choose some strong attack magic. Yep, I definitely wasn't talking about my first-generation partner. He may have been an idiot, but he was a nice guy."

I still remembered how when I had chosen elemental sculpting, those old weirdos

were laughing so happily, as if I had done something amazing.

Elemental sculpting may be simple, but it was the foundational magic for every other type of magic out there. It was only the simplest rearranging of the elements, and by itself, it basically had zero attack power. Yet I still had unhesitatingly chosen it.

"Hu! Controlling magic, synchronizing it with the elements in nature, communicating with the elements, calculating the shape desired, transmitting your will into creating the shape, paying the required amount of mana, gathering the attracted element, arranging it into the necessary shape, and completing the sculpture are the basic steps for normal elemental sculpting. But if it's to be used as a fundamental magic, it must be like an instinct; only one step is necessary—telling the element what you want. The rest will all be skipped."

I extended my arms and caused formless female ice spirits to appear. The moment they appeared, they started frowning with their delicate eyelashes. It was obvious that the thick earth element here made it difficult for them to breathe. This was no environment they enjoyed being in.

Yet, under my willpower, they still began to dance and create the scene in my mind.

These ethereal spirits showed their true forms in the air. One, two, ten, a horde, countless numbers. The ice spirits on the outer circle began creating an isolated area, while the dancing ice spirits in the middle were dripping with silvery-white light and created a huge ice river where the droplets fell.

These crystal-clear spirits weren't true existences. They were creations of the combination of my magic and the ice element. In the past, I could only use forbidden spells to see them, but now, casting my fundamental magic required their aid. They were a source that even fundamental magic couldn't reach.

A massive ice mountain suddenly appeared in this windy and sandy location. Before this mountain, even a mountain giant was nothing more than a dwarf. Unlike its image in my mind, this was an actual, real ice mountain; even in the mortal plane, I would be unable to create such a large ice mountain. The speed of fundamental magic meant that I would conserve a large amount of mana, which was the only way I could create such a large ice mountain domain.

"Since I now have the paint and brush, let's begin drawing."

For a Silver-ranked mage to do all this would be considered unbelievable, but for me, this was just the beginning. What I was about to do next was the second reason I needed to be far away from the prying eyes of the Gods.

"Now, then, let's create a world that belongs only to me. Recreate, Wall of Frozen Earth!"

I chose to reincarnate to cultivate again rather than fixing up my phylactery, mostly because a SemiGod undead was limited in potential, and my future opponents were far too strong.

With the onset of the Elemental Tide, invaders from various planes would revisit the mortal plane and enjoy the Holy War. But the most difficult part to deal with of all would be the revival of those ancient Gods.

"Forget about the others; no matter how strong they are, I can at least attempt something. If the two highest Goddesses of Chaos and Order revive—no, they don't even need to revive—if they only send out a part of their will, all we could probably do is watch and helplessly laugh."

Yep, I considered it. If my plan still had any holes in it, it would be that the two Goddesses of Chaos and Order ended up reviving, or if they noticed that something was wrong and forced themselves to revive prematurely even at the cost of injuring themselves, and what would happen in that scenario.

"Who cares! We'd just all die in three seconds flat. After all, even I can't block a casual attack from them, even if they're currently weakened. This has nothing to do with power levels; after all, they're the children of the Goddess of Creation, the true rulers of this world. They were born with this special power."

That was what Ayer had said when he mentioned how he wouldn't be able to stand up to them for even three seconds. He had such a relaxed expression, as if he had accepted this long ago. For me, however, even if their power was impossible to resist against as I expected, once I finally truly confirmed that their powers were high to the point of completely being helpless, I still felt bitter inside. After all, if a plan had a critical flaw from the very start, it would cause anyone to despair. And in that "future," there was nobody that could stop the revival of the two Goddesses, which ended up causing the world's catastrophe.

Eich created this world, and her power was inherited by the Order and Chaos Goddesses. That meant that any life, concept, or item born whatsoever either belonged to Chaos or Order, with zero exceptions.

That meant that all residents of this world were utilizing this world's power. For the two Goddesses, it was no different from using fire to attack a fire elemental; simply meaningless.

Then, did this mean that they were truly undefeatable?

Perhaps, for everyone else, this was true. I, however, still denied it.

I wasn't a soul from this world, nor was I obeying the cycle of reincarnation!

Even if there was a natural law in this world that made the attacks of this world's residents ineffective against the Goddess of Creation, my soul wasn't from this world to begin with. The Power of Law I created was destined to be their natural counter.

Yet just this alone wouldn't be enough. The Power of Law tended towards protection and was Chaos among Order. Only having the power to defend wouldn't give me any chances at victory. If it could be considered a solid shield, I still required a sharp sword—one that could threaten even the highest of all Gods.

How to find something that was even more powerful than the Goddess of Creation was destined to be an unsolvable paradox.

Yet what I excelled at the most was to find a solution when there was supposed to be none. At this moment, even if there was clearly no correct solution in front of me, I was still going to forcibly create one of my own. If I didn't mind that I would have to use crooked methods and devious means, then there was indeed an answer.

"If I can't find anything in this world, then I'll just have to create a new world."

Yep, even I myself found it unbelievable, but I was indeed intending to challenge the Goddess of Creation's right to create worlds.

"You're literally insane!"

"Heh, you just learned this?"

Alright then, just mentioning this very idea of mine made Ayer think that I had gone insane, but since my enemy was the highest Goddess of all, who had created this entire world, any normal method would be ineffective from the very start. No normal person would even think of challenging the Chaos and Order Goddesses. If I went about it with insanity from the very start, perhaps I might have a slim chance at victory.

How to create a world? Um, I don't know either… Fine then, this was a far too difficult process for me, but I could imitate—imitate the true Goddess of Creation of this world, Eich.

Since her power separated into the two powers of Order and Chaos, then did that mean I could comprehend Eich herself as the combination of Order and Chaos? In that case, could I understand it as the "Goddess of Creation" requiring both powers and identities as part of Chaos and Order? And that her soul couldn't be a part of this world she created herself, in order to prevent being bound to it?

When I came up with this conclusion, my first reaction was instead to…

"System, be honest with me, did you plot this from the very beginning? Why did you provide me with this physical body containing two different types of powers? No, I should say, why did you entice me into choosing this physical body?"

Remembering back to that scene, this physical body and the other available bodies were completely on different levels, and the points required were just perfect, so choosing this one seemed only natural. And when I saw Ayer again after that, he even exclaimed, "I have no idea how you recovered to having such a body with just so little blood left; it's truly amazing, just like the Goddess of Creation's power."

But my question only received a mysterious response.

[…]

Alright, I won't comment on why it's obviously refusing to answer but still gave me an ellipsis. It's basically just trying to say "there is no treasure buried here" when there really was, but from a certain standpoint, its silent admittance definitely caused me to sense a plot.

But before I could challenge it or threaten it by saying I wasn't going to do anything anymore, my system spoke up first.

[We're on the same side, and our goal is the same. You die, I die. You live, I live.]

In the end, the System was serious for once in a rare occurrence. It answered me using the standpoint of its personal survival. Even if it didn't directly answer what I asked, its intention was obvious—"I won't say the specifics, but we're on the same side, so I didn't do wrong by you this time. Rather the opposite; this selection was correct all along, and your guess is also correct.]

Of course, I couldn't be satisfied with such a vague response. However, the system had accompanied me for over three hundred years already, and I still hadn't found any methods to make it materialize so I could beat it up. In the end, I could only helplessly accept it.

Alright, after resolving the question of how to go about being a Creator, what was remaining was just how to create, and what to create.

What to create was decided from the very start. Of course, I would create the scenery which left the deepest impression in my soul—that frozen Northlands was the home in my heart. Transforming it into my creation was my only choice to begin with.

And as for how to create it, that was even easier. All I had to do was imitate Eich.

Eich used the four elements to create the world, and those four elements were supplied by the Four Elemental Planes. The Four Elemental Planes' history was even longer than the Chaos and Order Goddesses, and directly using elemental power was even one of Chaos' powers. However, using the power of the four elements to create a new world was outside of the two Goddesses' divine powers.

I didn't need to create a true new world. All I needed to do was create my mental world of the "Infallible Diffindor" here again as well as recreate the northern frozen planes that were etched into my soul. Just creating a small isolated world would be enough.

Perhaps this isolated world would become an existence that could even threaten the Goddesses of Chaos and Order. Perhaps, as long as I could pull the two Goddesses into this isolated world, we'd have a chance at victory. Perhaps this isolated world would be able to cancel out their Divine Obligations and cut them off from the limitless power supplied to them by the world of Eich. There were too many possibilities that were impossible to calculate, but at the very least, we would finally have some chance at victory.

When I came to this realization, I began my preparations. From reaching my goal to the steps that were necessary, after my hard work all this time, I had quite a few pieces in my hand.

Lacking in magical logic? Margaret and Amelia both provided me with large amounts of information, and the information on the elements gotten from—okay, stolen from Karo City were precious as well, but what gave me the biggest clue was Elisa.

She was able to use the elements of ice and fire that countered each other to create her own Soul Imprint, which gave me a huge clue. At the very least, it proved that the relationship between the elements wasn't as simple as countering each other.

"The four elements that create the world? In Eich, it's wind, fire, water, and earth, which is basically the exact same as my previous world of Earth. When Earth was still ruled by idealism, the east believed that the world consisted of 'earth, water, fire, and wind,' while the west also believed in the four elements of 'earth, wind, water, and fire.' In a way, everything was astonishingly similar."

Lacking in actual logic required to create a world? The above was doubtlessly the best evidence of all. All I had to do was lay on the four elements. The ancient curse known as the Seal of the Four Elements that created an isolated, sealed dimension was doubtlessly another form of creation as well.

Needing to use four different types of elemental magic simultaneously? Hehe! Now you realize why I spent so much effort on developing the Four Elemental Swordcasters, and why they could obviously use more than four sword seals but I still addressed them by this name.

When the four elemental sword seals activated simultaneously, they would be able to create a relatively perfect elemental loop. Now then, this part was down pat already, but the next part was rather problematic. In order to create a sword seal that could be the foundation for an entire new world, the materials I needed would have to be at a minimum at a God Equipment's level.

Earlier, the only item I possessed which met those requirements was Sidunwar's Ocean Bottle. With only one God Equipment, I wouldn't even be able to take the first step of my experiment. Luckily, after 'killing' Emordilorcan on that day, he left a gray Earth Elemental Heart behind for me, which was also a God Equipment-level elemental material.

Currently, runes were inscribed all over these two God Equipment, and they were already beginning to create internally within themselves. Of course, in terms of level, the Earth Elemental Heart was far inferior to Sidunwar's Ocean Bottle, but it was still good enough for an experiment. As long as it succeeded, I could always prepare new substitute materials.

What substitute materials? How about Emordilorcan's real Earth Elemental Heart after defeating him here? This would be the exact same thing but higher quality, and the divine soul contained within it would be perfect for being one of the four pillars of birthing a new world.

Yep, from the very start, I didn't have good intentions.

All the problems were solved, all the obstacles were dealt with, and all the various assortments of necessary pieces were collected. Finally, it was time for the critical first step.

It was just drawing the frozen Northlands in my heart with elemental power, but after reaching this step, just creating a magical version of the world in my mind could never satisfy me. What I wanted was to use my own paintbrush to create a true new world! This was the path that I chose!

"Hehe, come, Sinful Devil God Form, War Angel!"

A blinding golden light and molten magma red crossed with each other. After pain shot through my entire body, they naturally combined with each other and emanated a calm, white light, akin to the sunrise.

When too many colors mixed together, they would either become an endless pitch-black or a peaceful combination of pure-white. Without a doubt, this white light represented a miracle. The Order and Chaos bloodline from the same source was actually beginning to combine.

If it weren't for reaching this step, perhaps I never would have realized that the "Arbiter Bloodline" that I possessed with two seemingly contradictory talents was supposed to be used from the very start by combining them.

My feelings mysteriously managed to calm down, as everything around me entered my senses. My molten skin transformed into dark-red runic armor, and my body naturally began floating in midair. Under the frame of a demon's meaty wings were

also the wings of light that only the highest-level angels could possess. I was filled with limitless power.

For any fanatic believer, this form, which represented Chaos and Order within one body, would be the greatest sin of all. If it weren't for the fact that the Earth Elemental Plane blocked off the view of the Gods, trouble would likely instantly come looking for me.

I also knew that my time was limited.

Just a few seconds used up much of my mana. Under this form, my magic power was comparable to any Legend-ranked archmage, but I wouldn't be able to maintain it for more than a few seconds.

"Whether I live or die will depend on this next step."

Even if I had already formed my theory, there were still too many holes in it, and don't even mention the differences between theory and actually putting it into practice. But right now, I didn't have any way to continually experiment; I couldn't change the course of the arrow that I had shot!

"Recreate, Wall of Eternal Ice."

In the ice mountain, Sidunwar's Ocean Bottle was beginning to shine with a snow-white light, while that Earth Elemental Heart was also beginning to float in midair. Its earthen-yellow light had already created a vicious sandstorm. If it weren't for the fact that I had already set up an ice and snow barrier, probably anyone even thousands of kilometers away would be able to see this phenomenon.

The Earth Elemental Heart was struggling, as if it knew its end was coming, but it now had nowhere it could escape.

"Only having ice and snow won't be a true world. In that case, let this world of ice and snow have its own true frozen earth."

While something was happening in the Earth Elemental Plane, the divine domain where the Gods resided suffered an earthquake, or perhaps it should be termed as a dimensional quake.

Indeed, apart from incredibly few existences, they weren't able to see through to the

Elemental Planes, but some things didn't require vision to detect.

"Lord Ayer, I have an inquiry from the Gods. The Temple of Fate suddenly had an earthquake, which indicated that something critically important must have happened, but when they asked the God of Fate, the God of Fate only shook his head and did not say anything. Now, rumors are flying everywhere and the situation is quite chaotic, which is why the Gods are requesting your presence for a discussion."

The messenger, Flying Wing Airos was once a famous hero in the mortal plane, who gained fame for being able to fly a thousand kilometers in a single night. However, in the Death God's main sanctuary, he was nothing more than a low-ranked messenger who didn't even dare to breathe loudly.

"…That's why they're coming to ask me? Usually, they don't even know how to self-reflect."

Ayer's calm words had a tinge of dissatisfaction to them. When faced with one of the most ancient Gods of all, the Death God, even God Envoys would be filled with fear. If Ayer decided to vent his displeasure against the Gods on Airos, he wouldn't even be able to escape as he was only a mere heroic spirit.

"Wait a moment, I'll come along with you. I just happen to have a few things to chat about."

This seemed too good to be true, and Airos was delighted to hear such words, but Ayer continued speaking.

"Go ahead without me, I'll come after I make some preparations."

What else could Airos say? He hurriedly left as if he had been spared from some punishment. The Death God's sanctuary was far too much pressure for him to bear.

But right after Airos left, the cold-faced Ayer suddenly broke out into laughter, and the sandbox behind him began to automatically rearrange its sand. The next moment, Roland and the situation around him was shown in front of the Death God.

"Roland, you interesting fellow, you truly dare to do what nobody else does. You even managed to find the correct path. Perhaps everything truly will be able to change because of you."

If anyone else had been present, they likely would never have expected to see Ayer who was famous for being cold-faced for thousands of years to be smiling in such satisfaction. In the next moment, the Death God began moving, but before he left, his black-robed arm lightly slapped down on the sandbox.

Boom!

All of the sand turned into nothing but loose sand, and in the next second, Karo's connection to the mortal plane was entirely cut off—no, it should be said that the entire Earth Elemental Plane's connection was cut off.

After that, though, Ayer began hesitating, and then he slapped the sandbox three more times.

Slap *Slap* *Slap*

This time, the Wind, Water, and Fire Elemental Planes were also cut off from the mortal plane. Only then did Ayer leave in self-satisfaction.

"What excuse should I use? A sudden dimensional quake shattered the barrier between dimensions, causing a temporary stoppage in the connection between dimensions, especially the Elemental Planes. It will not be possible to reach them until several months later. Yep, this is a nice excuse."

Chapter 211
Choice

While Roland was still thinking as hard as he could about his own path, an inconceivable scene was occurring in a plains area far away from his location.

It was as if this plains area had transformed into the Chaos Abyss, with large numbers of demons gathering into squads and beginning their hunts. Everywhere these demon squads went, dangerous earth spiders were dug up, and sand dragons were vanquished instantly like elephants overrun by ants. All these opponents, which had given Roland such headaches, were meaningless in front of this seemingly limitless demon army.

However, these tan-colored chaos demons were rather different from the pure demons of the chaos abyss. Compared to their Chaos Abyss relatives that were the representation of evil, not only were these tan demons of a different color, but they didn't use the typical fire and acid magic that was the natural talent of the demons. Instead, they were wielding the rather rare earth magic that demons almost never used. All of these tan demons also had incredible physical attack power, as if they were actually the real residents of the Earth Elemental Plane, just like the tough-skinned earth elemental creatures.

All types of earth elemental species were vanquished by them. In front of such a large demon army, even the strongest sand dragon could only barely manage to fly a few kilometers before running out of energy and collapsing on the ground.

When that sand dragon collapsed on the ground and waited for these twisted creatures to give it the fatal blow, what came for it instead was a sand boat.

Four golden ground dragons were pulling this sand boat. It was just that judging from their twisted horns and sulfur breath, they were doubtlessly the product of demonized evolution.

The sand dragon, Sardilawen, was had already become blind in one eye, and its remaining dragon eye viciously stared in the sand boat's direction. In its mind, what would come out and give it the fatal blow would probably be the leader of all these

demons, most likely some veteran demon from the Chaos Abyss.

"Wow, such a big dragon."

But the truth was far different from what the gigantic sand dragon expected. The person who walked out of the sand boat was only a young golden-haired female knight. Judging from her appearance, she was actually a human, and a really young knight at that.

Before Sardilawen could attempt to self-destruct himself for a final attack, the female knight suddenly began talking to herself.

"Alright, alright, I got it. Just demonize him, relax. I shall control Chaos, and not be controlled by Chaos."

"Roar!"

The angry dragon breath caused a sandstorm to erupt with its destructive power, but nothing happened to the female knight at all. In fact, the female knight was now already riding on top of Sardilawen's head.

Just as Sardilawen was intending to use another attack against her, the pale yellow colored light of Chaos covered him. Although his body was in much pain, he actually began recovering from his wounds, but Sardilawen was now yelping pitifully in shock because his own skin was now growing demonic scales. Barbed poisonous spikes were also sprouting on his back, and his sharp claws and fangs were beginning to elongate and grow thicker, while two extra sets of wings appeared behind him. Sardilawen was actually beginning to demonize.

"Chaos, in the end, is just twisting the rules. Although Chaos demons aren't able to be produced naturally, from a certain standpoint, any living creature that has natural laws can be demonized and turned to Chaos. However, we dragons don't need to worry about that; we're naturally born with the power to resist the natural laws. Forcefully demonize us? Not even a Demon Marquis would be able to do it; probably only the legendary Prince of the Chaos Abyss would be able to do such a thing."

Sardilawen's final remnants of consciousness were already going hazy, and he didn't have much time left. He could only mutter this to himself as he recalled his past memories.

“…The Princess of the Chaos Abyss? Why is she in such a place…?"

When the pale-yellow light faded, that weakened sand dragon had completely vanished. What remained in its place was a completely pitch-black gigantic inferno demon dragon. Just its single dusk-yellow eye was clear evidence of its identity.

ROAR!

The furiously roaring colossal dragon opened its new wings and blocked the sandstorm as it began flying towards the next gathering grounds for high-level magical beasts. The newly-born demons on the ground also obeyed their master’s summons as they headed for the next target location.

And, on the dragon’s back, in the tiny sand boat, Reyne seemed to be talking to herself as she asked a question.

"Um, Teacher Karwenz, what will you teach me next?"

"Let’s review demonization again, and then let’s practice some swordsmanship."

From the very start, Roland had made a mistake. As a descendant of the Mist, Reyne was a passable one, as she would be able to remain resolute and unbroken even in the face of difficulties and failures. The final scene in that snowy night of battle made Roland see his past self in her, but his emotional bias had caused Roland to overestimate Reyne, believing that she could defeat the allure of the Chaos Abyss all by herself.

Sometimes, not giving in to failure and despair and being able to resist temptation were two entirely different things. To give an analogy, it’s just like how some people with high abilities might not necessarily be of a good moral character, and even the resolute might not be able to ignore the temptation right before them, especially when the temptation seemed so wonderful.

The Demon Prince began beguiling Reyne instantly after she went off by herself, and the Princess Knight lived up to Roland’s expectations and resisted against the demon’s temptations… for a full five seconds.

Yep, the situation happened something like this. This was how Karwenz went about it.

"Hey, Reyne, how about I teach you? Don’t listen to Roland, just what could you

possibly learn by randomly practicing by yourself?"

"That's no good, Brother Roland said already that I shouldn't listen to you."

"I'm stronger than he is, so who do you think you should listen to. Besides, your rival is the Demon Marchioness, she can KO the current you with a single slap…"

"Please allow me to call you Second Brother!"

Okay, before he could even finish, he instantly succeeded in tempting her. Because it was far too easy; even the Abyssal Prince Karwenz was dumbfounded by Reyne's lack of moral constancy. When he heard her reply, he froze over in shock for several seconds before he finally confirmed that she wasn't joking and was being serious.

"Hehe! I know my own personal talent is insufficient. I'm aware of that. Before I met Brother Roland, I worked hard as well, but I couldn't even reach even the boundary of the Silver rank. Brother Roland is obviously overestimating me. Besides, I'm Reyne, not Roland. I've always believed that there's nothing wrong with power; if I want to be more powerful, why should I care so much about where it's from? The correct answer is obviously to become more powerful first."

Reyne's words were quite sincere, as that was what she truly believed. She was different from Roland who could receive more power simply through hard work and effort; she had only ordinary talent and had suffered quite enough already from having insufficient power. She was already numbed from the feeling of working her hardest but still not seeing any results.

From the very start, she knew that she couldn't be like Roland, nor did she intend to force herself to be like him. In this area, after she experienced countless failures and despair, she was actually quite similar to Karwenz, having an almost sick worship of power within herself.

"If I had power, East Mist wouldn't have been almost destroyed. If I had the power to control my own fate, then Auland's newly-rich wouldn't have tried to force me into a marriage and humiliate my tribe."

At 13, she had still been a fortunate princess with no worries in the world. At 14, she was already forced onto the battlefield, and now that she was 15, she was already the famous Princess Knight known throughout the entire Northlands. The trials of fate turned this former flower vase princess into having maturity far beyond her years

underneath her seemingly happy outer appearance.

She had an endless amount of desire to be able to control her own fate with her own hands. This desire of hers wasn't satisfied one bit even by Roland's arrival.

To her teacher Roland, she respected and trusted him. However, she had her own opinion on how to view power. She didn't intend to argue with Roland about this, nor did she want to affect her relationship with Roland due to their differing opinions, but she made her choice with her own decisions.

"…Perhaps, you were already waiting for this day from the moment you refused Roland's blood. Well, to be able to fool Roland, you have an incredible 'accomplice.'"

Far away, that very 'accomplice,' Amelia, was currently cooking with an oversized magical cauldron when she suddenly sneezed.

"Hmm? Someone's talking about me? Or cursing me? It's probably that bastard."

Beside her was a hole-ridden battlefield. Moreover, there was a grassy field and forest in the Earth Elemental Plane that was supposed to be devoid of greenery. It was just that these gray-yellow plants were actually growing out of the corpses of what had originally been magical beasts.

With Amelia's assistance, Reyne's bloodline hadn't been sealed to begin with; otherwise, Karwenz wouldn't have been able to contact Reyne so easily in the Earth Elemental Plane. In fact, Reyne being able to suppress Glina in all their duels was also mainly due to the power of her bloodline.

"Perhaps I should apologize to Brother Roland, but I should make my own decisions for my life. I've already had enough of shivering and hiding behind others' backs!"

The Roland Sacred Sword she was wielding still had its usual silvery holy light, but the Princess Knight's eyes were now turning dark yellow. The ethereal shadow of a demon was beginning to increase in size behind her, but it was also grasped firmly in her hands with a will like iron.

Roland had never masked his expectations and worry about the future. Reyne who seemed to always be so casual on the outside actually had an observant mind and a sensitive heart, and she hated her powerlessness. Even though she was quite clear that making deals with demons was no different from sleeping with tigers, compared to

continuing to be a useless flower vase, even if she fell into depravity in the future, she wouldn't regret the choice she made today.

"Rather than regretting about not having seized the opportunity, it's better to seize the opportunity and regret later—isn't this one of your former famous sayings? By the way, Brother Roland has many famous sayings."

Karwenz was being more serious than his usual self when he responded in her soul.

"Then I shall begin teaching you how to control Chaos. First, you must remember to maintain your sense of self, and never allow Chaos to invade your heart. Power is only a tool, and if you end up being controlled by a tool, that would be too much of a joke…"

The Chaos Prince was actually teaching someone how to resist against Chaos invading the body. Perhaps, in a way, Karwenz wasn't treating Reyne as a spare vessel for his descent anymore. Perhaps he was truly beginning to treat her as his disciple.

"…I only have one request. Use what I taught you to defeat that Glina, and teach her a vicious lesson in direct combat."

"Are you actually that angry she betrayed your bloodline? I didn't think you were such a narrow-minded person."

"Hmph, the feeling she gives me is just like that of Roland from long ago. She's probably already successfully combined with Roland's bloodline. In that case, Roland will definitely teach everything he's ever learned to her, and since you're both my descendant and disciple, how could I possibly allow you to be weaker than Roland's descendant and disciple?"

Reyne came to a realization. These powerful figures were always mysteriously serious about weird-seeming subjects. It seemed that the younger twin brother was competing with his older brother.

Since they were unable to have a direct competition, then they would simply have an indirect competition with their descendants or disciples.

"Cousin Glina? Hmph! I won't lose to her, in any area at all."

And so, Reyne accepted Karwenz's teachings and undauntedly activated her demonic blood, creating a gigantic demonized army in the Earth Elemental Plane.

At this moment, when Reyne was still learning the secrets of Chaos on her dragon's back, a sudden gigantic pillar of light caused violent sandstorms in the entire Earth Elemental Plane. Just as Reyne was about to ask Karwenz just what could have happened, she felt his shock and disbelief within herself. Someone as strong as the Abyssal Prince had actually felt fear at what just happened.

"…Roland, it looks like I underestimated you after all. It seems that the next time we meet, we'll be able to have a really good fight."

…

Of course, I didn't know that at the moment, off in the distance, Reyne had already created a strong demonic army, which would only become stronger and continue growing in size as time passed.

At the time, I had spent all of my energy on controlling the earth and water elements to combine.

"With the earth element as the bones and the water element as the bloodline, snow shall fly everywhere! The icy plains shall turn white, and when the wind and snow stop, everything shall be calm."

This wasn't any incantation or anything; I was just adding on to the efficiency of my drawing. With its assistance, the scene of my homeland would reappear in my mind.

But, this time, just being able to temporarily interfere with my mental world in this world wouldn't be able to satisfy me.

My mental world was turning into reality, and I who had turned into the "Arbiter" was now combining the real and the ethereal, creating a new world with its own inwardly-contained cycle.

Sidunwar's Ocean Bottle was still emanating magical energy. With the sword seal's assistance, all the water element had been activated, and it was emitting an endless amount of frost.

The Earth Elemental Heart had long since been transformed into the earth beneath my feet, turning into the first piece of earth for my new world.

And what I needed to do was combine water and earth element into one, moving into

the unknown from what I already knew, so that they could enter a self-contained cycle. I took a deep breath. Pointing one finger at the sky, I caused the frosty chill to begin descending, and pointing another finger at the ground, I caused the earth to rise. Then, I took another deep breath and brought my hands together.

Click!

There was a sound resembling gears setting into place. The huge explosion that I expected didn't happen; it combined far easier than I anticipated.

"Ha! It seems I was worried for nothing… Eh?"

Apparently, I was getting happy too early. The very next instant, the two elements that had just combined actually began trembling violently-it seemed like they were about to come apart and explode.

"Damn it! If this explodes…"

The next moment, I imagined a gigantic canyon, but right now, the elemental power backlash was too much for me to bear. The elemental power was about to run amok!

"Everything in theory should be correct, so why did such a situation occur… My power rank!"

Perhaps the famous phrase was correct after all. Right before death, a person's brain would work even better than usual. I instantly realized everything.

Yes, while I indeed had the ability for creation, and I had all the correct theories and foundational ideas, I had forgotten one thing. When Eich was creating, she already had unimaginable power, and any backlash and Chaos would be nothing more than a tiny wave for her. As for me? It would be an indestructible force I would be completely helpless against.

"Damn it! There's just one more step to go!"

How could I possibly feel good about failing at such a time? Yet everything was about to run amok and I was probably going to die, and I had no power to resist whatsoever.

"If only I knew, I would have at least waited until I was a SemiGod to begin trying—hmm? What just happened?"

Suddenly, everything returned to peace, and that explosive elemental power seemed as if it was a domesticated dog, now obeying the tracks I had laid out for it.

[Fate Points: 37624]

The system's sudden message informed me about the number of Fate Points I had, and currently, the Fate Points were decreasing at a high speed. This was the best evidence of what was behind the miracle that had just occurred, and it was also evidence that I had to pay a price for this miracle.

"36521, 31435, 27421, it's not like my points grow on trees! Aren't you being too black-hearted? Leave me a few; I still need them to go for Gold."

[System Reminder: If you still have the time to retort, you should hurry up and end this instead!]

Fine then, I originally wanted to give it my gratitude for saving my life, but in that case, let's forget about it. I spent all my efforts on combining the elements again, and when my damned Fate Points number reached 9214, the work was finally completed.

Click!

It was still the exact same sound of gears falling into place, but only this time, it was likely that the entire plane could hear it.

As for me, I could sense that in this new original world, I now had an isolated piece of sky and earth that belonged only to me. Even though there was nothing but snow, ice, and frozen earth inside it, it was still my personal world.

[Ding! Congratulations to my host for obtaining the ability 'Frigidwinter Earth.' Its specific effects and the logic by which it works is impossible to analyze by the System, but it's possible to analyze its basic methods of usage. Would you like an analysis?]

This was the first time I had ever heard of something impossible to analyze, so I immediately nodded as I was overjoyed. Yet I instantly regretted my decision again.

[Fate Points: 4624]

This instantly used up almost half of my already-not-many Fate Points remaining. Just as I was intending to complain, I was shocked by my system's next message.

[Frigidwinter Earth, an uncalculatable existence. Its current largest potential area is a spherical space with a radius of 136 meters. It will ignore all barriers of any kind. You can even control it to affect what's underground.]

[Recommended Usage #1: Death Chill. Any that enter this frozen area will suffer 1-100 ice damage (decided by you). This damage is impossible to mitigate. (Even for the Gods).]

[Recommended Usage #2: Ice River Sword…]

In all, I actually saw four recommended usages for it, but this was only the beginning. These were only part of the effects of this incomplete world.

Right after receiving an unexpected joy, I would, of course, receive bad news next. I immediately received a critical warning after celebrating.

[Warning: Due to the low quality of the Earth Elemental Heart creating the foundation of your world, the earth's quality is too low. Not only can 'Frigidwinter Earth' not be used to its full potential, it's even falling apart. Host, please hurry up and find a replacement material! Time before your world's collapse: 132 days, 6 hours, 10 minutes.]

Alright, I won't comment on how strong the effects were already, but it was still only half-complete. Nor will I comment on how the Earth Elemental God's Earth Elemental Heart was actually treated as too low in quality. The System was even kind enough to give me a pointer arrow, which pointed in the direction of the sleeping Earth Elemental God as a hint.

"It looks like time is going to be of the essence! Emordilorcan, just you wait for me."

Chapter 212
Great Stone Sculptor

[Congratulations to host for promoting to the unique class, Lord of Frigidwinter. This is a personal job class just for you, and it is impossible to pass on to any others.]

[Congratulations to host for entering Gold rank.]

[Congratulations to host for receiving the special isolated dimensional world, Frigidwinter Earth. The System has already prepared camouflage for it. From what the Gods can tell, this will only be a rather unique small version of your mental world, and please use it as much as you like. However, if any Gods enter it… hehe, definitely remember to kill them in order to silence them.]

[Congratulations to host for…]

The miserly system actually gave me a series of congratulations. This Gold rank wasn't a reward from my system either; I had broken through to this rank on my own. Actually, none of these were important to me. What was most important was that I had now confirmed my future path of development.

"I need to complete and perfect this world."

I needed to find God Equipment, materials, and Divine Souls to fill this newly-born world with. Completing and perfecting this world would mean the same for myself.

Perhaps this would be a thorny path, one that would take an uncalculatable amount of time, and perhaps I might never even finish it in my lifetime. On this path that only I walked, it would be impossible for anyone to give me any advice. But I knew that at the very end of this path I was walking, the treasure that I desired so much might exist.

"In that case, let's give it a try."

I couldn't suppress my excitement and joy—it was as if I was a child who had just received a new toy. I would obviously want to try it out, but I immediately heard another notification from my system at this point in time.

[Due to the cost of the camouflage system's activation and analysis of these new abilities having surpassed your ability to pay in Fate Points, please pay an additional 2147 Fate Points that you owe within 24 hours. Otherwise, the system shall confiscate your new world. You don't have money? Then let's use your newly-born baby to pay off the debt.]

Pu!

I instantly spurted blood. It actually did this to me at such a time? Give my earlier gratitude and how moved I was back to me!

But I had no time to comment on any of this. Based on my understanding of the System, when it said something was good, it might not really be that good, but whenever it said something would be bad, it would definitely be worse than I expected. Since it had already said that it would confiscate my new world if I didn't pay up within 24 hours, then it really would confiscate it by that time.

"Wait a moment; this is the core of my new job class. If you confiscate it, then won't I become a knight without a horse, a basketball player that doesn't know how to act dramatically to get fouls, a tennis player who doesn't know ultimate techniques, a tofu brain with no sugar to run it with? Won't that be meaningless then!"

[Time remaining: 23 hours, 59 minutes. System Reminder: Just keep talking about unimportant things and making fun of me, you heretic sweet-lover!]

I… I decided not to comment any longer and instead began working hard at earning points.

…

The Helod Deep Canyon was a forbidden zone in Karo City's map because this was where the tower giants resided.

'Tower giants' didn't sound like a magnificent name at all, but anyone who took a single glance at those enormous stone giants would instantly understand how they got their name.

Every tower giant was as tall as a building with several dozen floors, and their heads and shoulders would be obscured by the clouds. Their upper halves were basically fortresses, and their shoulders and heads had the shapes of buildings and were

basically the fortress's clock tower and cannon towers.

Its tremendous body meant that it had matchless physical attack power, and these tower giants were immensely destructive in melee combat. But the most fatal of all would be the hundreds of catapults within their fortresses.

The reasons for such a thing being born were inconceivable. The first pioneers to arrive in the Earth Elemental Plane had been ambushed by a tower giant, and while they suffered serious losses, they had also mistakenly believed that they were ambushed by an enemy faction's archmage.

After all, its specialized body was just like a human structure and made it obvious that it was a created object. Although the tower giants still hadn't evolved to having their own wills, their incomparably gigantic bodies and countless numbers of huge stone catapults were indisputably the best evidence that they were born to be war machines.

And for the Helod Deep Canyon's tower giants to be labeled as the highest danger level of all was because all these tower giants also contained countless numbers of residents within them that formed strange symbiotic relationships with the tower giants.

Some of them that lived within the tower giants would be stone peelers or other low-intelligence earth elemental creatures. Sometimes one could even find gargoyles or other special flying creatures within. Every tower giant was like a box of chocolates; you never knew what you would find inside it, and finding out would typically never be a good thing. [1] 1

On top of all that, tower giants even had the habit of living in groups and had a special way to communicate with each other. This meant that fighting with a single tower giant would basically be like fighting an entire war, as several dozens of tower giants would come by and create a tremendous army unit.

In the Helod Deep Canyon, the tower giant tribe numbered approximately four hundred. The exact number of tower giants and symbiotic tribes living with them were impossible to count.

Just this tower giant tribe living here in the Helod Deep Canyon made even sand dragons fear to enter this area. Only the most ancient of existences knew that the largest secret was actually within this canyon, and that these gigantic tower giants

were only the door guards personally sculpted by a certain ancient existence.

"Who's that? He's actually heading inside the Helod Deep Canyon?"

Tower giants would occasionally come out to hunt or roam around. In order to prevent unnecessary losses, every faction established a temporary outpost at the entrance to the canyon. As for Karo's outpost, in addition to keeping a watch on these big guys' movements, their more important duty was to convince newbies to go home instead of going inside.

"What? A mega SSS-ranked dangerous zone? Hmph! I was born to do great things; what's a dangerous zone to me? Danger only means it's a place where treasure is hidden and miracles can be found… Hahaha! God Equipment and inheritances, I'm coming for you! There are no stairs? Perfect, I'll simply jump off this cliff!"

Idiots like that would come along every year, and there would always be those who believed too much in hero's tales. Sometimes, the mages standing guard here would get annoyed and stop trying to convince them, allowing them to enter at their own risk.

Luckily, there weren't too many idiots this year. The mage who was in charge here, Kalin, was even worried that there wouldn't be enough funny stories to share when he would finish his shift at the end of the year. When he finally saw someone coming to the Helod Deep Canyon, he was actually rather happy.

But before he could go up to that person to warn him about the danger, he stopped of his own volition.

That figure, who was wearing a gray cape, merely glanced at him, but he felt as if he had been paralyzed by a lightning strike.

"He's so strong! I haven't heard of a thunder element archmage that had come here."

The next moment, Kalin knew that his good intentions were needless, as that figure had already vanished.

The tower giants were under the command to attack all non-earth elemental species. On his way into the canyon, that continuously flashing and vanishing figure was attacked many times, but unfortunately, those clumsy and slow tower giants weren't even able to touch him, much less see him.

Once he reached the center of the deep canyon, the gray-cloaked figure stopped, and patiently waited until a voice spoke up.

"Camdian, what could be so important that you would personally come to find me?"

Even when dealing with a powerful Elemental God, this similarly ancient top-level Earth Elemental Lord had zero hesitation and respect—it was almost as if it was treating Camdian as its junior. Nor did Camdian care about the disrespect; it was rather the opposite, as he preferred being direct as well.

"Ainslo, would you like to become the Earth Elemental God? Do you want to become an existence equal to me?"

Communication between elemental creatures was always ever so direct. They were just like an ancient tribe that lacked any knowledge about modern society. This was all the more so for elemental creatures who hadn't come into much contact with mortals; they always said exactly what they were thinking about.

“…Of course! What do you intend to do?!"

The entire canyon echoed with this tremendous voice. Ainslo didn't even try to hide its own desire. As one of the most ancient existences in the Earth Elemental Plane, Ainslo had been desiring to become the Earth Elemental God for countless years.

But there could only be one Earth Elemental God. If it weren't for the fact that Ainslo was somewhat intelligent and knew that Emordilorcan would be no easy piece of cake to deal with, Ainslo would have long since opened up the seal and fought for the honor to become the Earth Elemental God.

"Then, join our plan. This time, the Fire Elemental Goddess, the Water Elemental Goddess, and I have decided to team up and completely destroy Emordilorcan."

“…That's not enough."

After a long hesitation, that was Ainslo's reply. It wasn't that Ainslo was unwilling—it was that Ainslo didn't think that these allies would be able to win.

Camdian who was rejected wasn't angered at all. This was an answer that he expected. Although Emordilorcan had angered far too many, he was still alive and kicking after all this time of being attacked by many ganging up on him. There was no other

explanation—Emordilorcan was simply strong enough to the point that he could indeed fight simultaneously with the other three Elemental Gods at once.

In that underground labyrinth, Emordilorcan was even controlling the opening of the Earth Elemental Dimensional Door while facing many as one and even gained the upper hand. If it weren't for the fact that his Earth Elemental Dimensional Door met with a problem and he lost much of his power, who knew who would have won in the end.

In Ainslo's eyes, just casually joining this allied army against Emordilorcan would most likely end up in failure, and these outsiders from another plane would simply run off. Ainslo, however, would have to stay behind and face the full wrath of Emordilorcan, which would be too pitiful.

"If Emordilorcan was in perfect condition, of course we would be insufficient, but how about after Emordilorcan was seriously injured and even forced to self-destruct his Divine Soul? Don't you feel that it's strange? He's obviously returned to this plane for so long already but hasn't appeared even once, nor has he acted like how he always did in the past, attacking all the most powerful Earth Elemental Lords in order to solidify his own position."

"Emordilorcan was injured? For real? How did he get injured? How serious is it?"

This series of hurried questions indicated just how much Ainslo was convinced and eager to know about this.

"Of course, I personally witnessed it and even helped injure him. In fact, the Earth Elemental Heart belonging to his body in the mortal plane even became someone else's victory loot."

Boom!

The underground passage that had suddenly opened up was the best evidence of Ainslo's current attitude.

"Come in and let's continue our discussion."

Ainslo even personally came out to welcome Camdian. Unlike that tremendous voice that rattled the ears, Ainslo was actually an incredibly short elemental creature. Its ugly skin was filled with black scales, while its mottled head was filled with sharp

earth elemental crystals. Ainslo's four limbs were rather short, and its eyes were quite ugly; just judging by physical appearance, Ainslo was quite close to a goblin's.

But Camdian would never underestimate her just because of physical appearances. Ainslo was the creator of many strong earth elemental creatures, including all the tower giants. The great stone sculptor Ainslo also had the beautiful title of "Mother of 10,000 Stones."

That's right—her, not him. While elemental creatures didn't have genders to begin with, after reaching a high enough level, they could choose their own genders.

As one of the most ancient Elemental Lords in the Earth Elemental Plane, Ainslo's fame and might was no lower than the Elemental Gods. If it weren't for the fact that Emordilorcan was ridiculously strong, she actually had power on par with the other Elemental Gods.

At the very least, if Ainslo had been a Wind Elemental Lord, Camdian himself felt that he didn't have any guaranteed chances of victory against her.

"This time, we have a grand plan. In order to ensure its success, two of us Elemental Gods have personally joined in, and I've even recruited 30 something Earth Elemental Lords, and they're all very interested in this plan. Of course, that also means that they're interested in the treasured position of Earth Elemental God."

“…As long as Emordilorcan is eliminated, I won't lose to anyone."

Camdian faintly smiled and didn't say anything more. He had already heard this type of phrase more than thirty times in the past few days. Every single Earth Elemental Lord would say that to him.

"As long as Emordilorcan is eliminated, I will steal the position of Earth Elemental God for myself."

There were no promises given. These ancient existences didn't need promises either, as all of them were filled with self-confidence. They also knew that the moment Emordilorcan died for real, all promises would be worth nothing more than blank paper, and in the end the Earth Elemental Lords would have to decide things among themselves based on real strength.

This was also why Roland had Camdian take the task of personally coming out to

convince the Earth Elemental Lords. Normal people wouldn't even be able to receive a chance to speak before these ancient existences. Only the similarly ancient Wind Elemental God would know how to get all these ancient existences to temporary ally and work together for the same cause.

"Then, please take a look at this blueprint. In order to deal with Emordilorcan, we need a fortress—a huge moving fortress."

Ainslo accepted the blueprint, and then—

"…I haven't read many books, but you can't fool me! Is this really a fortress? Do you think I've never been to the mortal plane? This is obviously just a duck!"

Yep, on that blueprint was a large yellow duck, albeit without a neck. And on the top of the blueprint, there were also several large words that were written.

"Moving Fortress—Large Yellow Duck!" This was obviously the blueprint of a certain individual who had spent so much hard effort on designing it. Fine, you could also say that it was the product of terrible hobbies.

"No, no, no; I didn't understand it at first either, but you see, making it into a bird's shape is in order to reduce air resistance while it's flying, and choosing the strange shape of a featherless, neckless duck is all in order to have better contours for less drag. Apparently, this is supposed to be humanity's newest technology in the area of air resistance. It's the crystal of scholarly wisdom."

"Are you sure that you're not joking with me? This is a crystal of scholarly wisdom, not some random object made by someone with too much free time?"

It was obvious that Ainslo wouldn't be so easy to fool. She had a premonition that with just this ridiculously laughable outer appearance alone, if she ended up creating it, it would become the greatest humiliation of her long, long, life.

"Of course, the one who designed it was a major scholar of the Truth Research Society (Margaret), and this time, she's also personally joining us in the attack on Emordilorcan!"

Alright, Camdian didn't intentionally lie to Ainslo. It was Roland who had fooled Camdian about its designer to begin with. But now, the Wind Elemental God's words sounded extremely convincing. Even though Ainslo still felt rather confused and

doubtful inside, she could only agree.

"Wake up all those stone carvers and sculptors; we have a new job! Let us begin creating the Large Yellow Duck! Under the lead of I, the Great Stone Sculptor, it shall become the grandest duck in this entire world!"

Note:

1. Forrest Gump reference!

Chapter 213
The Former Student

"The Main Gods—whoops, I meant the System wouldn't give me a quest where I'd die for certain!"

I really wanted to say this, but to be honest, I still didn't know how to earn two thousand-something Fate Points within 24 hours. This was more than half a year's worth of daily quests.

But where there's a will, there's a way… I really wanted to say that as well, but the so-called way never ended up arriving.

[Time's up. I'm now going to confiscate your 'newborn baby.' Whenever you have enough points, come find me. Interest will be set at 40% with compound interest; if you take too long… heh heh, you understand.]

"The hell's with saying I understand! How much do you want to overuse this joke!?"

But, even so, there was no helping the situation. What else was I supposed to do other than earn enough Fate Points?

Alright then, my current target was to now hurry up, complete my quests, and pay off the Fate Points I owed as quickly as possible. However, my current condition obviously wasn't the best for challenging strong opponents.

And so, there was no helping it. After having set out for less than a week's time, I began my return journey.

I decided to hurry back to Karo City first. At the very least, I needed to think of how to pay off my debt and receive my "newborn baby" back again.

[Daily quests, pick one of two. The first quest is to 'Tell the World that I am the Naked King.' The second quest is 'This Uncle Isn't a Pervert: Little Girl, Why Don't You Watch This Goldfish Together With Your Uncle… ']

As I walked through Karo's streets and looked at my daily quests, it seemed to be a choice between making either myself or others suffer. Yet looking at the 50-point reward which probably wouldn't even be enough to pay off the interest, I gave up immediately.

"Messing up the original planned course and fate will be profitable? I should just find an Epic-ranked Quest somewhere and complete it."

I crouched on the street and observed the busy people around me as I thought to myself.

"Roland! It was actually you! When the scouts said that you returned, I couldn't believe it."

The person who suddenly interrupted my contemplation of important life questions was a white-bearded fellow with an excited face. I tilted my head at seeing this wrinkly old face who was so excited that his face had gone red all over.

"Oh oh oh! You're… are you that meat pie selling old man from Rubber Street? You're here looking for the two copper coins I owe you."

Pu!

Judging by how he fell on the street, in addition to the looks of the relatively young mages following him, it seemed that my guess was off the mark.

"The hotel owner? The shoe polisher right in front of where I lived? The barber next door? You're none of the above? You must be kidding! Just who exactly are you?"

I was starting to get rather frustrated. My time was quite valuable, and this white-bearded fellow actually dared to play guessing games with me!

"You don't recognize me, and you're getting angry with me? I'm Kaid, a junior student from the same time as you! Take a closer look!"

At hearing this, I paused in surprise. I could indeed recall such a junior student, but he obviously had a different appearance.

"That's not right. Kaid doesn't have such a large beard, and he was a handsome young fellow back in the day who was quite white. Nor was he as short as you."

The white-bearded fellow kept nodding. "Yep, I'm that white Kaid from back then, who used to be famous for being handsome, who all the teachers were attracted to. But now that I'm old now, how could I possibly look like back then? My back's a little hunched now, which is why I'm shorter."

"You're really Kaid? That Kaid who specialized in divination and prophecy? The Kaid who would fail his elemental magic classes until Armageddon? The Kaid who wouldn't wash his underwear for two weeks at a time? The Kaid who used fire magic to make fireworks for confessing to a girl and ended up being treated as the 'younger-brother type?'"

Alright, the more I spoke, the redder Kaid's old face got, but he didn't deny anything I said. "Yep, didn't you also fail classes together with me? That silly public confession idea even came from you, and as for not washing my underwear for two weeks, isn't that your fault for exploding the laundry room?!"

I nodded at this. It seemed that it actually did match up with my memories, but I still wanted to confirm something.

"You really are Kaid, the Kaid who chose to specialize in divination just so you could secretly spy on female teachers changing clothes and taking showers."

This time, the two students behind him looked at their teacher with strange looks in their eyes. To them, the Myth-ranked mage Kaid was a venerated, kindly elder who was easy to get along with. They never expected Kaid to have such a wild history.

"…That was Phillips! You definitely remembered wrong! I'm not interested in older women, I only like the younger ones…"

"Ohhh."

It was too late to stop now. The commotion from his students made the old teacher want to find a hole somewhere to hide in.

I had now confirmed things. However…

"You really are Kaid, that's great…"

Archmage Kaid was smiling with tears in his eyes. Being able to see an old friend again after so many years was indeed rather moving.

"Return my money! Those three and a half gold coins that you owe me, when do you intend to pay me back!? Forty percent compound interest, plus two hundred years' time, I'll just calculate it as two hundred thousand gold coins."

Everyone's expressions froze over instantly upon hearing this.

"Demons from the nine depths, please listen to my prayers…"

Fine, this guy actually started cursing me, and it seemed like a mega-level magic spell that borrowed powers from the demons. I knew that my joke had gone a little overboard, so I jokingly explained myself.

"Getting angry so quickly, you really are Kaid. Come, we should find a place to drink a little as fellow bros."

There were four great joys in life—meeting with rain after a long drought, the first night after being newly wed, becoming famous for your accomplishments, and meeting an old friend in a distant land.

There were also four great sorrows in life—only having one drop of rain, the groom being someone else, writing the wrong name on the test, and meeting a debtor in a distant land.

But, right now, Kaid, who seemingly owed me money, was quite happy. After drinking some alcohol, he even joyfully went looking for some young girls and asked, "How about letting this grandfather show you some western tricks? Look, lollipops! Look, goldfish…" and then he was dragged away by his disciples.

Today, Kaid's impression of being strict and archaic was probably utterly ruined. Perhaps, starting from tomorrow, stories of the old Kaid's new "fierceness" would be told all over the city.

"Oh my, even though this is just some free alcohol, it's still pretty good. This should be the Auland's Hualan District's special three-hundred-year-old brandy. Its price should be at least five thousand gold coins; you're really willing to go all out. Hmph, don't think that you can buy me with money. You still need to return my money to me."

[System Reminder: You bastard, can't you just stop bringing up those three and a half gold coins of yours? Also, you remembered it wrong—there weren't even any gold coins back in that time, it was obviously just three and a half copper coins. You should

learn from Kaid here. See, he's forgotten entirely about it, and he's even agreed to pay for your room and board.]

"Copper coins? Forget it; there's no difference. You should also forget about the Fate Points I owe you, then. I'll never mention these coins again."

Alright then, the system didn't answer me, but my guess was that that bastard of a system was probably preparing some sort of "glorious" achievement like "Scrooge" for me.

And right now, Kaid returned in joyous spirits. Yep, we should just ignore the tiny handprint on his cheek. It seemed that little girls wouldn't care if he was some venerated archmage and would still slap him.

"Roland, why are you drinking by yourself? It's such a rare celebration party, you should be happier. This is also where I want to introduce you to the others as an old senpai; you should at least give me some face here."

"Don't mention it. Just look at how they're all pointing; no need to mention face, they probably all think that I'm just an old demon."

"You don't say, it truly is strange. Although after reaching a certain level, the physical body will indeed become nearly indestructible, and the rate of aging will drastically slow, but for you, not only your physical body but even your soul feels like it's filled with energy, as if you're a newly-born baby. And, your current magic power doesn't feel strong."

I smiled without answering. Some things were too difficult to explain even if I wanted to.

Kaid shook his head, knowing I didn't want to say anything, and he didn't pry any further as he began chatting about the past.

"Do you still remember Ailulu? She actually got married to Caso, our fellow student…"

I had forgotten many things already, but luckily, divine power helped me recover quite a few memories of the last God's Descent. Plus, I had the records from my experimental log, so I could mostly match those to my memories.

Of course, some confusion was still unavoidable; for example, misremembering a beautiful lady as a handsome boy, misremembering me owing money as me being owed money, or misremembering copper coins as gold coins…

[System: Can you stop bringing up those three and a half gold coins already?]

Cough, getting back to the main topic, after getting old like me, mentioning past events would always be nostalgic and long-winded. This chat took up half the entire night. Except for a few of us, all the others had left already.

After chatting about so many things, even I felt rather nostalgic upon hearing about my past classmates and friends' news.

Time was cruel and would never stop ticking. With two hundred plus years having passed, the number of classmates I had that were still alive weren't many. After all, Gold was an obstacle, Legend was another obstacle, and Saint was yet another obstacle. In order to reach the limit of human life, one must reach at least the Saint rank, and the probability of that was absolutely minuscule.

"Oh right, do you still remember Teacher Amelia?" Kaid smiled mysteriously, as if he had finally found my weak spot. "Back when you were together with her, many archmages were sad to the point of despairing, and there were quite a few that used your image as a voodoo doll. She's still looking for you, and won't believe at all that you're dead, and she's always been single. It seems that she's deeply in love with you, so how do you intend to pay her back?"

I didn't react much to this, but Atadia and Soranto beside us were obviously shocked and exclaimed out loud. They had kept worrying that their teacher Kaid would continue to embarrass himself, but never expected to hear about a topic like this.

"Impossible, the gentle and kind Teacher Amelia was the dream woman for a countless number of students, how could she possibly…"

"What! I'm the Angelic Amelia Supporters Club member #1047, this definitely can't be real! Teacher, you're going to face the wrath of all us innumerable Amelia fans!"

Slap!

Kaid awkwardly smiled at me after he slapped both his students on the back of their heads to shut them up.

"You're actually tempted by physical appearance, how immature."

After those taboo things occurred, Amelia indeed had an infamous reputation, but with the passage of two hundred plus years, as long as those old fellows kept quiet about things, not many knew about Amelia's past. In the students' eyes, they probably only saw that astonishingly charismatic Teacher Amelia who seemed so gentle and easy to get close to.

"…Who was it clutching my thigh and crying that year long ago, and then running off while still crying and shouting 'I'll leave Amelia to you, you have to treat her well, or I'll never forgive you in my life?'"

This time, it was Kaid's turn to break out into a cold sweat. The next moment, he adjusted his beard and changed to a serious expression.

"That was Alibert—it was definitely that fellow! He was one of the biggest Amelia fans around back in the day."

Okay then, seeing that Kaid was treating me to three-hundred-year old brandy, I decided to somewhat save his face.

"So, Teacher Kaid had this side to him as well back in the day."

"Why are you saying that we're being tempted by physical appearances? Could it be that Teacher Amelia also has another side to her, a wild, seductive side? Ahhh, I really want to see that side."

One was exclaiming while the other one was panting. It was obvious that none of these guys could be considered normal.

Kaid and I could only exchange glances and smile wryly at the younger generation's fascination with Amelia. It was similar to how we were fooled that year as well.

"Wild? More like insane."

"Believe me, if you ever saw her other side, you'd likely be on her experiment table, and then… there wouldn't be anything else left for you."

After some hesitation, I still decided to tell them.

"Actually, Amelia found me, and we came to the Earth Elemental Plane together this time. Teacher Harloys is also together with us."

After I said this, Kaid was still fine, but the two Amelia fans' eyes turned red and seemed like they were about to jump me.

However, Kaid revealed an expression of deep contemplation. He knew that the Earth Elemental Plane was no place to be going on a honeymoon, and all three of us were considered world-class calamities, so we definitely had some kind of reason for coming here. Then, he connected the dots to the recent strange occurrences, and now revealed an expression of sudden realization.

"…Could it be that the increase of the Earth Elemental Tide and the inability to teleport between dimensions were caused by you guys?"

"Teleportation between dimensions isn't working anymore? No, we didn't cause that, but it's highly likely to be related to our goal. You know about Emordilorcan, right? As the Earth Elemental God, he's probably the only one who can seal off this entire plane. The Elemental Tide's increase is definitely related to him."

"Emordilorcan? Last I heard, didn't he go to the Northlands to join up with the beastmen?"

"…Your news is behind by at least half a year. He's returned, and he's seriously injured. This time, we came here for something big. Would you like to join us?"

[Congratulations to host for activating a Legend-ranked Quest, and a reminder from the System: Hmph, it's definitely not because I'm taking pity on you that I'm giving you a quest that can help you pay off your debt.]

"Stop sinisterly pretending to be cute, you're as un-cute as could be!"

Chapter 214
Contract and Teaching

To be honest, I was actually quite happy to meet a familiar face in a distant land, especially since he owed me money and even promised to return it with interest…

[System: Have you had enough of this topic yet? Will it ever end!?]

Cough, let me get to the main point. I finally didn't need to swindle those goblins to earn a living anymore. After all, they weren't exactly dumb, and they weren't easy to deal with.

The goblins' hard efforts, however, had another effect, which was that the Law God Wumianzhe's belief system was spread far and wide.

Of course, it was impossible to think about relying on them to actually propagate religion. Even if the concept of Law was very useful to the goblins who were individually weak, they were a group that would do anything for money, always on the border between legal and illegal. Why would they ever do something so troublesome as spreading religion?

What they spread for Wumianzhe was something else, but it was something that belonged to one of his concepts—Contracts.

This Divine Obligation that Wumianzhe obtained at Auland wasn't widely accepted in human society yet, but the goblins were happily making use of contracts. That "insurance" was obviously a type of contract, and the goblins were quite welcoming of this new concept that would protect the "weak" and was supported by the power of a True God.

There was just a small problem.

"Venerated Insurance God, Bushuizhe, please listen to my prayers, and help me sell some extra insurance today."

Forget about getting the God's name wrong, the Insurance God wouldn't be the

Merchant God either, but why would he have to help you succeed in sales—cough—I meant… What's with calling him the Insurance God!? There was actually no divine punishment for this? Was Wumianzhe such an easygoing God? That was impossible.

"Luckily, the goblins got the God's name wrong, so the prayers would be ineffective. Otherwise…"

Alright, somebody had already stated the truth. A prayer like this, which got the God's name wrong, was just like a wrong number phone call—completely meaningless. However, this would definitely anger anyone in a divine job class related to the God in question if they witnessed something so blasphemous.

Yet, sometimes, even the wrong could have the same effect as the correct. If certain wrong concepts gathered to a certain degree, it really would have the power to affect a True God's Divine Obligation. In order to prevent Wumianzhe from being addressed by incredibly uncool names like the Insurance God or Bushuizhe in the future, I intended to have the Church of Law take action right after I returned to the mortal plane.

At the very least, I couldn't allow the goblins to act as they pleased like this anymore. Perhaps it was time for me to attempt trying my hand at something as profitable as insurance.

Right now, the contracts under the name of the Law God were doubtlessly far better than the contracts with demons. Furthermore, in order to give these contracts greater effectiveness, those miserly goblins actually even constructed a Temple of the Law God in Karo City, and Wumianzhe's statue was even golden… yep, gold paint only, as they would never want to spend their lovely gold on something as useless as decoration.

Although I greatly objected to the fact that more and more goblins were treating Wumianzhe as the Insurance God, I had to admit that they were rather helpful in expanding the Law God's Divine Obligation and Divine Domain even if they had selfish objectives in spreading contracts and insurance. I suppose it counted as doing good while having bad intentions.

"Perhaps I should have a discussion with the goblins and sign an overall contract with them, adding a clause for them to spread the complete religion of the Law God. With their abilities to even come to other planes and be merchants, I'm certain that they could be effective."

As I was thinking to myself, I suddenly imagined a scene of a goblin wearing a gentlemanly hat and a suit, politely knocking on someone's door and handing that person a name card.

"Hello! Do you happen to know about Wumianzhe? You don't? That's great… whoops, I mean that's really regrettable. Our Church of Wumianzhe… if you join us now, we'll even give you a free present! Three years' worth of accident insurance… for free! If you pay one hundred gold coins, we can even give you VIP membership and add on explosion insurance for no extra cost."

Just imagining this scary scene becoming a reality made me feel like all the divine job class members of the Church of Law would be equated with common salesmen. I decided to give up on this idea of mine so that Wumianzhe wouldn't turn into the Advertising God of Dandruff.

But the most important thing right now was…

"Ahhh! When will the System return my 'world' to me?"

While I did activate a Legend Quest, which would indeed give me a significant amount of points, the surprising part was that it wasn't about killing off Emordilorcan. Instead, it was a choice between "The Battle of Two Dragons;" I could choose between helping either the Bardi Empire or the Mage Country, and improve my reputation in one of the two countries.

Obviously, if I chose the Mage Country and dragged them into this affair with me, then it would be quite useful to improve my reputation through this battle against Emordilorcan.

The reward was the large number of Fate Points that I needed, and if I chose the method of killing Emordilorcan in order to improve my reputation, then there would also be a significant reward of highest quality earth element materials for constructing my "perfect world."

But I wasn't happy about this quest at all, because this quest's choice implied something obvious.

"The Mage Country and Bardi Empire are at war?"

At hearing this, Kaid nodded with a bitter expression.

"Although it hasn't broken out into all-out war yet, over a hundred conflicts have erupted on the border in the past month. Every day, we capture several hundred spies. It's also quite obvious with their military movements. It would seem that it's only a matter of time before Bardi formally declares war."

"Just what is Orloss XIII thinking? Having his mega-level empire begin a war right before the Holy War? Did a demon devour his brain!?"

I didn't even have to ask the reason, as I understood the Truth Research Society quite well. As long as their system didn't change, they would have little interest in things like reputation or expanding their country. The Mage Country hadn't changed its boundaries in the past several thousands of years, and it was basically impossible for me to believe that they would start a war of their own volition.

As for the Bardi Empire… to be honest, the human mega-level empires were all the same, incredibly arrogant, and if any mental nutcases arrived that believed themselves to be some legendary once-in-a-thousand-years king, the countries next to them would suffer for the next hundred years. The biggest issue of all was that all these empires happened to have incredibly solid foundations, and it would be quite difficult for any other country to deal with them. Thankfully, there were numerous small countries between the major countries as a buffer zone.

But I had heard of that Orloss XIII before. He had already been the Bardi Emperor for thirty-plus years, and was always a warmonger through this entire time. He kept fighting wars with other countries, and he recently beat the Moon and Horn Thirteen Countries Alliance into submission and forced their surrender, which directly removed the buffer zone between the Bardi Empire and the Mage Country.

"I doubt that he's insane; he probably saw that all the other countries were busy preparing for the Holy War, so they could take this opportunity to expand."

"Hmph! They really believe they'll be spared in the Holy War? Foolish."

Kaid shook his head at hearing this.

"Bardi is an interior kingdom. There's basically no other species but humans both inside their borders and in the nearest countries. This Holy War really might not affect them too much. Our Mage Country is too much of a big target, and they're probably targeting our technology. It really is rather bothersome."

I opened my mouth, but didn't say anything in the end. After all, it was impossible for me to explain how I knew about the fact that the Undead Plane had a portal that would open right in the Bardi Empire's capital. If I casually let it be known, it would cause me an endless amount of trouble, and there was no way for me to prove that "history" and "the future" would be repeated.

It should be worth mentioning that when I had Reyne use the name of the Eastern Mist Communal Country to warn the human countries about how the undead would soon invade, basically nobody believed it, and the only response was disbelief and ridicule.

"Those northern hicks say that an Undead Calamity is about to arrive? Hehe, it seems they've already been scared witless by the remnants of Xiluo's forces. Let the Undead Calamity come! Even the Yongye Calamity from approximately a hundred years ago couldn't do anything to us, so why would this be any different?"

"East Mist? That Roland from the legends? Warning us about a new Undead Calamity like Yongye? Oh my, isn't this the rat warning the cat about a robber? Are you sure that this isn't just a joke?"

Alright, I did what I could, and I couldn't control things if they weren't willing to listen. But now, it was obvious that I had to make a decision.

"The Mage Country! There's no need to even think about it. I'm already sick and tired of foolish emperors, those bastards."

And after I made a choice, that evil System of mine actually gave me something useful, allowing me to temporarily borrow my "world" up to three times. It even gave me a progress bar.

[11.7%, -3421]

The second number was the number of Fate Points I owed, which kept increasing in no apparent pattern. The first one was incomprehensible.

No matter what or how I asked, the system remained abnormally silent. And the moment that progress bar increased in number even a little, my debt would grow tremendously—not at a 40% interest rate at all.

I could only helplessly experiment one time with my "world," which instantly helped me understand, and then I instantly regretted it… I had wasted one of my few chances

that were difficult to come by.

My "world" was still empty as it started out, and the air in it was still frosty, but something seemed to be new within it. At the very least, it seemed far more stable than before.

"My system has changed its ways? It's decided to become a tsundere[1]? It actually helped me out? If my guess is right, it's helping me complete and stabilize my 'world.' It's even allowing me to go into debt."

When it came to receiving payments, the system was quite reliable. It was always adamant in not doing anything for me unless it was paid, never working for free at all and keeping true to the "principle" of working only as hard as the amount it was paid. This time, the fact that it was willing to allow me to go into debt while helping me out was rather astonishing.

The system fell into an abnormal state of silence. Not only did it ignore everything I asked it, I couldn't even open up anything in its menu except the progress bar. It was basically like a computer that had overloaded itself and crashed, but from another aspect, it also meant how important the "world" was—important to the point where the system abandoned everything else and focused only on perfecting it!

But not being able to use the system didn't mean that I had nothing to do. It was rather the opposite. In order to improve my reputation for the quest, as well as prepare for the necessary upcoming battle, I did many "small things."

Karo City's arena was typically the place where other species would take care of their personal grudges, and the "wise" mages would never enjoy such a barbaric stage. Yet these days, the arena was filled to the brim with mages.

Currently, a silver-armored warrior was dueling with an archmage. The archmage kept creating walls in an attempt to prevent the warrior from getting into melee range, while he also controlled some earth elemental warriors as fodder for blocking the silver warrior.

Boom!

The earth wall that would have been sufficient to block even a giant was actually demolished, and all that silver warrior had to do was lower his head and guard himself with his shield and he could completely ignore the low-level earth elementals his

opponent summoned.

Boom!

This time, a newly created earth wall was directly destroyed as its earth element wasn't solidified enough yet.

It was unexpected; the archmage was still in the midst of an incantation when the silver warrior's sharp sword was already in front of him. He hurriedly rose his hand in surrender as his face was already pale with fear.

"Winner, Roland! Congratulations for seventeen victories in a row!"

I took off my helmet and smiled my #59th Style Holy Knight Standard Smile, which I was out of practice with these days, and waved my hand at the observers, causing many to shout out in excitement and joy.

"It seems that I still have it in me."

As a Holy Knight who used to specialize in being the pretty face to attract sponsors, using my face to improve my reputation was basically a piece of cake for me. But just this alone wouldn't be enough.

And, so, I was all smiles as I reached out my hand to the archmage that just lost to me. I pulled him up and began explaining to him about the battle just now.

"Using well-prepared earth wall traps to slow down a high-speed-type warrior is indeed a good idea, but sometimes it's just too obvious. If only you placed a small trap for tripping someone under the earth wall. As long as it succeeds in making your opponent lose balance—even for just a short moment—that could be fatal. And all you focused on was creating walls, can't you dig a pit trap with earth magic behind the wall? Since your opponent's vision will be blocked by the earth wall anyways, when a high-speed-type warrior breaks through the earth wall or jumps over it, he'll have too much speed to stop, and it's highly likely that he'll fall directly into the pit."

"Ohhh!"

Not only was this archmage not unhappy about losing, he was nodding with an expression filled with gratitude. The other spectator mages also took out their notebooks and kept writing in them. These types of combat techniques and practical

experience all came from a strong warrior's experience and couldn't be learned in any classroom.

"Scholarly academic mages always have a bad habit of preferring to use extravagant high-level spells to crush their opponents. To tell the truth, high-level spells have too long of a cast time and are too obvious; they aren't actually all that threatening to high-level warriors. As long as you hit someone in a critical area, even the lowest level ice arrow can be fatal. A simple combination of low-level magic spells is the best combination to deal with high-level warriors."

Yep, I was teaching them after every battle, and this was the method I chose to try improving my reputation. After all, in the mage society, there were plenty who could teach magical knowledge, but there were pitifully few mage teachers who could teach combat experience and practical techniques.

Yep, I was now a mage teacher. Even though in combat I typically performed the role of a warrior job class, I had appeared in front of them as a magical swordsman who practiced both swordsmanship and magic, which was why they could accept me as one of their own.

Since it was a "mage" defeating them, they could accept it even if they lost, but a warrior defeating mages continuously would doubtlessly give me a lot of unnecessary trouble.

As a former student who was senior to even their highest-ranked archmage Kaid, I naturally counted as their teacher in their eyes as well, which further reduced any enmity they may have had. And since I was considered an ancient oddity who had lived for several hundred years already, no matter how ridiculous I acted, they would treat it all as normal.

"May the Holy Light forever be by your side!"

A blinding Holy Light descended and began healing the archmage that had just lost to me. His skin began glowing pink, but all the spectator mages didn't react to this. This obviously wasn't the first time.

"This is the thirteenth time he's used holy magic to heal his opponent! Could this senior of ours even have the job class of a Legend Holy Knight?"

"Inconceivable!"

Without a doubt, the good reputation of Holy Knights would also make it much easier for me to gain reputation. At the very least, the story of my adventuring that I had made up was already being treated as real.

And if everyone else was just somewhat surprised, Kaid was shocked to the point of his jaw dropping on the ground.

"The greedy, perverted, narrow-minded, vicious, evil, grudge-bearing (30 adjectives have been skipped here for convenience) Roland was actually able to become a Holy Knight? Are the rumors of the God of Holy Light going blind actually true?"

Alright, so you think I'm greedy, perverted, (34 adjectives skipped here for convenience)? Yep, Kaid, you must have a really good memory as well. Yep, in two days, I shall allow you to witness just how grudge-bearing I'm capable of being.

"Good work. Those youngsters are really impressed with you." (Kaid, just keep being happy for the time being. I'll help the whole city learn that you're actually a lolicon.)

I was intending to tease him with that, but suddenly, a messenger came in on a horse galloping at top speed. Judging by how the messenger was waving his hand at me, it seemed that the letter I had been waiting for all this time had finally arrived.

"Kaid, it seems that the time has come. Our plan is about to begin."

Note:

1. According to Wikipedia, Tsundere is a Japanese term for a character development process that describes a person who is initially cold and even hostile towards another person before gradually showing a warmer side over time.

Chapter 215
Divine Miracle

Karo's skies were always a yellowish gray, and every day, endless sandstorms would rage against the city's barrier. Although the residents of the city didn't need to prepare against the wind and sand like they would need to if they were outside the barrier, it was only natural that the city's skies would darken as long as there was a sandstorm outside.

At such a time, Karo City's magical lights would all be lit, but Karo could no longer afford to use such a luxurious, resource-consuming item when supplies were limited, as the Earth Elemental Plane was recently cut off from the mortal plane. So, whenever the sandstorms occurred, the entire city would be pitch-dark and everyone would only be able to stay home and sleep.

This was only a small part of how terrible this environment was. Since the Earth Elemental Plane lacked vibrant colors, this world seemed too simple, and in order to prevent psychological problems, according to the Mage Country's rules, the head archmage in Karo was supposed to be switched out every three years. Yet, with this sudden incident of the teleportation between planes no longer working, Kaid who was in charge was destined to remain for quite some time.

Currently, however, in this world that only had the simple colors of black, gray, yellow, and brown for the most part, there was now a different color—a patch of endless white.

Frosty ice was filling Roland's temporary guest room. The ice crystals spread all the way to the corridor, but there was a gap in the center of where the ice gathered, where the knight of ice was currently retracting his ice magic.

"Whew! I've finally gotten used to it. This Death Chill spell that I've newly mastered is definitely a lot more useful than the 'Frost' spell. Now, my next target shall be learning the Ice River Sword."

Of course, I would never be a teacher for free like that. To be honest, I also needed a large amount of actual combat to get used to my new abilities.

My "Frigidwinter Earth" was confiscated and maintained by my System, and I couldn't use most of its abilities, but there were still two abilities that remained and were evolved forms of my original abilities. Just mastering them alone took up much of my time and energy.

Even right when it awakened, my "Frost" spell had already proved its potential. Its immitigable damage and its capability to be endlessly stacked were akin to the original nature of winter, but its greatest weakness was that it required physical contact to activate. At the time, there had been an additional explanation on it saying that it would evolve when I reached the Gold rank.

Now, it had indeed evolved into "Death Chill," a strange area-of-effect ice damage ability. It wasn't limited to that—every tick of ice damage would decrease the enemy's ice resistance level. I performed some experiments and found that an unprepared Gold-ranked mage would need about 30 seconds for him to be sleeping with ice cubes forevermore.

Simply speaking, this "Chill" inherited the same effects of "Frost" to stack limitlessly and cause immitigable damage, and I felt that I would even be able to freeze an Ice Dragon to death if the battle extended long enough. Since this ability was connected to my "Frigidwinter Earth," it seemed that even the True Gods would be unable to ignore this ice damage that was seemingly rather low.

This was doubtlessly a strong ability and would perhaps become the core of my future combat strategies. As long as I wore some heavy armor, I was already an outstanding tin can knight. Add on support abilities like holy healing, and it quickly became obvious I had the advantage in sustained, drawn-out battles.

My recent duels against the mages were evidence of how abnormally powerful my new ability was. They would be halfway through chanting a spell when they would suddenly be interrupted by a cough, or their well-prepared defense barrier would suddenly become useless, weak pieces of ice. The advantages became even more obvious while fighting against other melee opponents. The closer the opponent got to me, the greater the power of Death Chill. After exchanging blows, my opponent would start getting bothered by the ice crystals that would form on his sword—it was evident that my Death Chill wouldn't spare sword wielders. Although I still needed to find more uses of this ability, these functions alone were sufficient for me to deal with the average Legend.

The most important was that this ability wouldn't be affected by this world. If I could even use my ability to the fullest in the Earth Elemental Plane where the water and ice elements were incredibly rare, I would probably be able to use it in other True Gods' Divine Domains as well.

Yet some people had some objections to me.

"Hey—hey—hey! Back in the day, wasn't it you who said that warriors were all muscles and no brains? How come you went and leveled up in a job class that you previously called barbaric?"

With old friends who know all about your past—especially your dark history—you wouldn't be able to help but feel rather helpless, just like I was at the moment.

When faced with such a sarcastic inquiry, I really didn't know how I was supposed to respond.

"It's a long story. Right, did the Mage Country reply?"

"Yep. We barely managed to get in contact. Although the transmission lasted for only a few sentences, the Truth Symposium's reaction was quite quick, and they gave us some good news. Basically, I have full authority to deal with this sudden situation, which means whatever I say, goes."

Kaid was chuckling in delight as he said so. In a way, this also indicated the Mage Country and Truth Symposium's trust in him; they viewed him as important.

This was to be expected. I nodded and didn't say anything, but Kaid kept laughing.

"By the way, they also transported a small present for you. Just a little something."

A present for me? I should have left that year without saying goodbye; I had run off instantly after reporting Amelia, so how could there possibly be a present for me?

"Your graduation diploma. Congratulations! After over two hundred years, you've finally graduated and can go look for a job now. By the way, you've also broken the records at our school for how long you've failed the same grade and for being a truant."

Fine then, that sky-blue booklet really did have my name Roland written on it, and it even had the Truth Symposium's emblem stamped on top. I didn't know whether to

be angry or to laugh, but that was when I came to a sudden realization.

"You're saying that…"

"Some things, you only need to think and not say out loud. Oh, by the way, remember to thank our teacher Aloso, as he even went through the trouble of getting you a special teaching certificate."

This seemed like an unimportant joke, but it was the recognition that the Mage Country was giving me. "A student who forgot his graduation diploma when he left" would no longer be an outsider, and now that I was officially recognized as a former student—even a teacher—I now had an identity as a member of the Mage Country. Taking command of these juniors here would be only natural with this new identity of mine.

"…Teacher Aloso? That nice fellow who's an ice magic specialist? Okay, got it, to pay him back, I'll write and give him a copy of the 'Ice Aeon' spell."

"…You really were Yongye, after all. Forget it. Everyone has their own troubles, and I won't mention it. In that case, I'll thank you on Teacher Aloso's behalf for the time being. After all, this is the only forbidden spell developed for ice magic in the past three hundred years. Even if more than ninety-nine percent of mages won't be able to learn it, it's still nice to improve the stock of our library."

After the message arrived from the Mage Country, all of Karo got busy with preparing for battle against Emordilorcan. After all, every mage was worried about their country's upcoming war against the Bardi Empire, and they all wanted to take care of the trouble before them as quickly as possible so that they could return to their homeland and protect their country.

After Karo began its preparations, some other local factions like "Shadow Tower" and "Hand of Tiso" that had good relations with Karo also accepted our invitation and joined in, making full preparations for combat. I was also patiently waiting for this destined battle.

"Emordilorcan, I still remember the death you wrought at Red Maple Castle like it was yesterday. It's time for your reckoning!"

In a way, an Elemental Plane's Elemental God counted as the plane's master. Countless elemental creatures would be under the God's management, and only incredibly

strong elemental creatures would be able to resist the God's summoning. That's why, from the very start, this was going to be an incredibly dangerous large-scale battle.

Therefore, in order deal with that nearly endless amount of elemental cannon fodder at Emordilorcan's disposal, we also needed to prepare a sufficient amount of cannon fodder, separated by type. Each member of my small team was also giving it their all.

Normal wind and water elemental creatures would essentially be useless here, which was why Camdian had been spending his time tricking the Elemental Lords here into becoming cannon fodder.

Those ambitious existences had long since been unsatisfied with Emordilorcan's rule, especially after he had been sealed for such a long time. Now, he hadn't shown up after he obviously returned, and there were even rumors that he was seriously injured to the point of death—of course he wouldn't seem as scary as he usually did.

The new generation of Earth Elemental Lords were all the ambitious type, and they had long desired to replace Emordilorcan. The older Elemental Lords didn't dare to underestimate Emordilorcan, but since they knew all the more how strong he was, it meant that they wanted all the more to seize this once-in-a-thousand years opportunity.

By the end, Camdian didn't even need to personally visit and persuade the Elemental Lords. Those Elemental Lords started creating factions of their own and kept massively adding to their numbers. The Earth Elemental God had never done anything that would cause his citizens to respect and venerate him. After being missing for thousands of years, he was now about to meet the danger of his citizens' rebellion.

Meanwhile, Reyne was working hard in her own way, gathering a larger and larger demon army, which was already turning into a 'secret' major catastrophe for this plane. If it weren't for the fact that the Elemental Lords wanted to deal with Emordilorcan first, perhaps their allied armies would immediately turn around and first fight with this demon leader who was messing around in the Earth Elemental Plane.

As for the two SemiGod mages in my little party, they didn't relax in their tasks either. In their dictionaries, there was no such thing as too much cannon fodder, as they only kept working at the tasks assigned to them. Those countless runic giants and earth element demonized plants were piling up like mountains, and when you add all that

on to the other allied reinforcements we had recruited, Emordilorcan was likely going to be in for a world of pain.

As for Emordilorcan, there was nothing but silence on his end. Although it could be felt that the mountains and cliffs were slightly trembling, as if there was some frightening existence breathing between them, apart from that there was no other movement from him. No Elemental Lords were summoned, and Emordilorcan himself hadn't shown up at all—it was as if he was still in a deep sleep.

"Ahh! That Roland, he really knows how to treat us like servants! Making us the scouts."

"Well, being able to see this is indisputably useful. It will make our chances of victory go up."

Before she even finished speaking, Margaret had taken Adam and vanished. It was no wonder they were chosen as the scouts; Adam, the strongest tank, combined with Margaret's instant teleportation and defensive capabilities would allow this duo to successfully retreat even in front of Emordilorcan himself.

It was to be expected that Emordilorcan wasn't on guard. For an Elemental God, just having his physical body be destroyed would be enough for him to go into a long hibernation. Add on the fact that in order to vent his anger on us, he even used his Divine Soul to cast two spells that were at the level of a forbidden spell.

The first one was to destroy Red Maple Castle's walls, and the other one was to give the beastmen from the plains a path to attack us. His spells indeed changed the entire combat situation; however, since he didn't even have a physical body when he cast those spells, it was no different from him self-destructing his Divine Soul, and he had paid a tremendous price. Without several hundred or even several thousand years of hibernation, he'd probably be unable to recover his power.

In his eyes, that should have been enough to secure the situation. He probably never expected the beastmen to lose in the end, and when his weakened Divine Soul returned to the Earth Elemental Plane, he didn't dare appear in front of the other Elemental Lords. He went straight into hibernation back in his old nest.

Without a doubt, this was a correct decision on his part. By simply hibernating for a while and borrowing the endless replenishment power of the Earth Elemental Plane,

he would have enough strength to protect himself, which would obviously be much better than appearing in front of everyone in a weakened state and letting the ambitious Earth Elemental Lords discover his weakened state.

He had only miscalculated the importance with which his opponents viewed him—they viewed him with such seriousness that they were all willing to stop what they were doing and spend every effort on eliminating potential problems down the road. In the end, due to his hibernation, Emordilorcan lost the chance to be proactive.

The deadline of two months had only half a month remaining. This slowly gathering anti-Emordilorcan army already had approximately half the total combat strength of this entire plane. Without even needing to mention the countless amounts of cannon fodder, we didn't lack high-level combat strength either. As I would put it, "With so many people, who needs combat strategy? All we need to do is attack."

But I was saying that mostly to raise morale, as a majority of our army was still cannon fodder. After all, even if we had about half the entire plane's combat strength, Emordilorcan had the entire plane's strength available to him.

As the master of this Elemental Plane, the Elemental God would be able to use elemental power as he pleased within his own plane. To make an analogy, the entire Earth Elemental Plane was similar to a Divine Domain, and Emordilorcan would be stronger than any Middle True God in here—much stronger than Felix who I faced a while ago.

If it weren't for the fact that Emordilorcan was so seriously injured in the mortal plane, those veteran Earth Elemental Lords wouldn't even dare to think of rebellion. They knew, however, that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for them.

Yet as for truly how strong an Elemental God was in his home turf, nobody would know unless we actually fought him. After all, the last time an Elemental God was changed out was five or six thousand years ago, so it was quite difficult to check recent history.

Ask the Water Elemental Goddess or Wind Elemental God? That would have been a nice idea but not a realistic one. To be honest, I had asked them before we split up, but they both remained abnormally silent. It was obvious that neither of them intended to reveal the full extent of their power in their home planes.

"Today's the Earth Elemental God's turn, so they're worried about the next time being

them? How… cautious."

We used to be enemies to begin with, and now we were only in a temporary alliance against a mutual enemy. I, too, didn't have the confidence if tomorrow they would turn on me, so it was more than reasonable for them to remain cautious. I also hid a large part of my abilities and powers, and it was only natural for them to hide information about themselves. I didn't even feel like I should say anything about it.

"To be honest, since all the elements have different properties, all of us have different fighting styles, and we can't provide any useful information to begin with. Besides, Emordilorcan's power and experience is far above ours, so there's even less to work with. In that case, rather than giving misleading information, it's better to not say anything at all."

Honesty? This excuse sounded quite reasonable, but I'd be a fool if I really believed these words. But, it was still a nice excuse that would save face for both sides and allow us to still act friendly.

And when the two-month deadline was almost here, I finally received a piece of excellent news.

"Harloys woke up? Wonderful!"

Oh, did I forget to mention someone? I definitely didn't! I definitely didn't, but you insist that I did? Fine then, you're the one that's going to suffer. Let us see what that existence whose name had become a forbidden term has been busy with recently…

In a distant desert, a Dracon wearing a piece of tattered cloth was currently sitting down and smiling. Around him were stone giants, sand worm kings, sphinxes, and other various earth elemental creatures.

All these elemental creature species were each other's natural enemies, but now, they were actually sitting together peacefully. The only one who could pull of such a miracle was, of course, the Dracon who was currently spreading his way of life.

"Physical appearances are all fake. Everything is empty, and emptiness is everything. All lives are created equal, and appearances of the heart are the most important. All creatures in the world can have beautiful souls. Just because of some differences in physical appearance, you all hated each other and killed each other, which is the path of becoming a demon."

"Everyone is equal, and true love is limitless. Perhaps you all have different species and genders, but as long as you have a heart that seeks true love, all of you are foundationally brothers and sisters, with no differences whatsoever."

The Legend-ranked Dracon was actually teaching his way of true love to the residents of the Earth Elemental Plane, and after hearing his way (or brainwashing), more and more elemental creatures began following him, believing in this way of mutual peace and love that didn't originate in this plane.

"I can feel how much effort you're all putting into this. I hereby solemnly swear that I shall walk to the ends of the heavens and earth to spread the way of true love, and I wish for all lives in this world to put down their biases, to ignore all species, gender, and physical appearances on their search for true love. I'm willing for nine bolts of lightning to strike me in order to test my will! Confirm that my will is sincere!"

Boom!

Right after the Dracon said that he was willing to be struck by lightning to confirm his will, lightning really did strike him. Was it really to test him, or was it that the heavens couldn't stand the sight of him anymore and wanted to strike him dead? That was unknown.

This sudden lightning caused all his new disciples to exclaim in astonishment. Lightning was extremely rare in the Earth Elemental Plane, and this energy-filled lightning element indicated that this was indisputably real lightning.

The earth elemental creatures had intended to rush forward and save him, but right then, Beifeng's blackened skin molted, and new skin was revealed beneath it. After that bastard was struck by lightning, he was actually undamaged, and he even flashed his signature faint smile.

"Just as everyone has witnessed, my sincerity has moved the heavens! The heavens sent lightning down to test my will!"

Just as Beifeng was acting all grand and roared at the sky, the dark clouds that continued gathering in the sky indicated that these "nine bolts" of lightning were just the beginning, and his trial of lightning hadn't ended yet…

His disciples were all panicking, and they tried to dodge the thunderstorm. Yet seeing how Beifeng simply pointed at the sky and smiled, seeming like he didn't mind at all,

they all calmed down.

All the creatures around Beifeng had devout expressions as they bowed towards him. But only Beifeng himself knew that it wasn't that he didn't want to run, it was that he couldn't run.

"I sat down for too long and my legs are all pins and needles. After being struck by lightning, they're now completely numb, and even the smile on my face has frozen. Um, can I retract my words from earlier?"

Boom!

Fine then, the heavens used its own method to reply to him. All the earth elemental creatures admired this mega-level thunderstorm that wouldn't be seen even once in a thousand years. According to the stories, there were over a thousand lightning flashes streaking through the sky that day, breaking the record for most lightning ever in the Earth Elemental Plane.

The part that made people feel the most speechless of all was that this scene actually became the Divine Miracle of this abnormal religion. An abnormal religion and philosophy had indeed begun taking root and growing.

Chapter 216
Stories at the Library

“…As expected of the Mage Country. Things are now even more ridiculous than before."

It was a sea of books. The countless number of ancient bookshelves were filled with books, and each magical book was priceless and contained enough magical secrets to make anyone go crazy.

After receiving a teaching certificate from the Mage Country, I acquired the right to enter this library. In this world, books were the most precious form of wealth, and reading was a luxurious form of enjoyment. Back then, it had been quite the difficult task to just obtain permission to use Tassel Kingdom's library.

Mage Country was far more generous in this aspect. Even if it was thanks to Kaid's recommendation that I was allowed to browse through these precious ancient tomes, it also, in a way, proved the foundation of what the Mage Country was built on—recording and transmitting magical knowledge, and seeking the truth and secrets of the world.

"Truth Overseer" was the glorious, highest-ranking title in the Mage Country, and was already an explanation of its goal. The mages' goal had always been to obtain more knowledge and truth, and their highest ranks simply meant that those individuals had obtained more from the endless sea of knowledge.

Of course, this was the ideal concept of a mage. In reality, there were plenty that were attracted to the mundane. After all, using the power and knowledge that they gained to exchange for the common world's authority and wealth was far too easy. There were even some mages that learned magic for the sake of obtaining authority from the very start. After cultivating to a certain extent, they would naturally leave.

Yet the current me had no time to comment on the mages as I was already spending most of my time perusing these magical books.

However, there were far more books than I expected, and many books were covered in thick layers of dust. It would seem that nobody had read through them for a long

time, and the books were obviously rather disorganized. It was exceedingly difficult to find the ones I was looking for; perhaps I would be unable to succeed in what I wanted here.

Also, the uninvited "guest" kept slowing down my progress as well.

"What a pity. Aston/Fimier/Aibott could have gone up one more rank."

When old classmates had a reunion, it was only natural to discuss about what happened to the other classmates. However, there was only one type of sentence that always ended up being the conclusion—an exclamation on how a former classmate had ended up dying—and it made me feel rather pitiful and helpless.

For high-level mages, increasing their lifespans wasn't a difficult problem. Turning into artificial life, half-elemental life, God Envoys and so on were all possible. Even if one's luck was terrible and they turned into something like an undead Lich, it was still yet another possible path.

Of course, the prerequisite was that one's power level was high enough. Those who couldn't even reach the Saint rank wouldn't have any access to such lifespan-increasing options.

What made me sigh and pity them was the fact that those mages, who should have reached such a rank to begin with, would always die off for seemingly random reasons.

"Just recently, an academic research journal did a study on the reasons for high-ranked mages' deaths, and it was astonishing. The undisputed leading cause was battle and war, which took up a whopping 71%. Natural deaths like dying of old age or disease was only number two at a mere 11%, and number three was dying accidentally during experiments. Most genius mages would get involved in some sort of conflict or battle or personal grudge over personal benefits and end up losing their lives. All those dreams and hopes of theirs would become nothing."

Kaid felt that it was both a regret for the geniuses that perished as well as a fortune, as he knew that among his classmates, his talent for magic was considered slightly below average. It was just that he was the type that disliked competing with others, and he preferred to always hole up in his home and conduct research, which imperceptibly led to him reaching the pinnacle.

The geniuses that competed with each other all ended up with nothing but death, and

the one who was below average and aware of it became a hermit and lived life peacefully. After a long time passed, it was the below average one who who received everything. In a way, this was a subtle, wondrous irony.

For most mages who abandoned the path of cultivating to become stronger, what stopped them wasn't their own weaknesses in personal strength but rather temptations and troubles from the outside world.

"By the way, are you really not making fun of me?"

I kept feeling like the meaning of these words were familiar to me. After all, I had died several times already, and I had to keep dealing with worldly affairs due to this and that, but Kaid chuckled at my question.

"You think you count as a genius? Apart from getting full points in an elective class like Mage Personal Defense, what genius would have all his grades barely above the passing mark? You even failed a basic class like Elemental Concepts three times, and if it weren't for the fact that you got cozy with some female teachers, you probably would have been expelled long ago."

When I heard this, I was instantly angered and couldn't respond. I knew it. Something that seemed cute, like childhood friends, weren't cute at all in real life, especially when the childhood friend was the same gender as you and knew about your dark history. They should all be sent to the moon tied to goblin rockets.

"I was pretty happy to have you in my classes, since that brought down the average grade of our classes significantly. I wouldn't have to worry about being the lowest scoring person in the class…"

Alright then, Roland the lowest scoring and Kaid the second-lowest scoring individual were chatting together about times long ago, sighing how time was cruel and all those geniuses had already perished. This seemed even more ironic now.

"Don't say that! You make it sound like I depended on women to support me. Hey hey hey, why are you looking at me like that with such surprise? Be careful, or I'm going to turn on you."

"You bastard! Don't you have any self-awareness? 'Roland who's good for nothing except his face,' the 'Holy Knight that entered the wrong job class' was quite famous back in the day. Don't you know that after you got with both Teacher Harloys and

Teacher Amelia that so many people purchased drawings of you and used you as a voodoo doll?"

"You seem to be quite well-informed on this topic…"

My fists were clenched tightly in an obvious warning, but this guy didn't notice it at all.

"Of course, this was one of my main sources of income back in the day. There were many methods of going about it, and just drawing a picture that resembled you wasn't good enough. Not only did it need to look like you, but it also needed to piss people off, and I needed to draw vicious smiles on your handsome face in order to satisfy my customers. Especially after the news that you abandoned Amelia spread out—my business boomed. On that very day, I received enough orders to keep me busy for the next month, and I got enough tuition money for an entire year. That's why, even if you scam some gold coins off me now, it's not a problem at all…"

Seeing this old fellow who always acted so serious but wouldn't shut up about the topics he liked, I couldn't restrain myself anymore and viciously punched him.

Clang!

This time, it was actually my hand that was hurting. The light of something metallic was actually flashing on that bastard's face.

"Stoneskin magic? No, Ironskin magic?"

Even though I didn't feel any waves of a spell being cast at all, Kaid's skin was obviously as hard as iron. It was a magic I had never seen before.

"Hehe! This is a magic I invented myself, although I got the idea from your legendary story about the 'The Forest's Nun Convention and the Eighteen Wolverine Old Ladies' that you told me in the past. I also named this spell 'Golden Bell Skin' after the same technique in that story! It's able to transform my skin and bones into metal and make me as undefeatable as the undefeatable old lady and wolverine old ladies in the story! Isn't it amazing?"

Fine then, it was a different world's magical version of the ancient Chinese martial arts technique "Golden Bell Skin." I didn't even know where to start commenting from anymore. The wolverine old ladies, the nun convention, or the undefeatable old lady?

Nonetheless, this helped me understand that the current Kaid was truly a powerful archmage, even if he still wasn't the serious type at all.

Just like how ice magic was a branch of water magic, the closest type of magic to earth magic would doubtless be metallic magic, which was renowned for high defensive power. Unlike ice magic, which could be learned as its own unique branch, the metallic elements were tightly connected to the earth element, and without cultivating earth element magic to a certain degree there wouldn't be any way to learn metallic magic. Being able to permanently maintain a metallic magic spell like this was doubtlessly a unique high-level technique.

Not only did this indirectly help me ascertain Kaid's current power level, but it also gave me a new idea.

"Kaid, come over and help me out. You should be very familiar with earth magic."

Since Karo City mainly had earth mages in it, its library was, of course, focused on information about earth magic, earth elemental creatures, and earth element magical materials. For me to be reading up on information here, it obviously wouldn't be because I wanted to learn earth magic.

Although reading about other types of magic wouldn't have any downsides—it could even be adaptable—based on my talent for magic, trying to learn an entirely new element's magic would take me at least several decades. I definitely didn't have the free time for that.

"Emordilorcan's the apex of earth elementals, and earth element magic is tightly connected to him. I don't believe he only has the power of this entire Earth Elemental Plane. His past history, any weaknesses he has, any specialties of his, what elemental magic he excels at, and what ace cards he may have—before we battle with him, we absolutely have to find out!"

Hearing this, Kaid revealed a smile that seemed to say, "I knew you would be like this."

“…If someone else picks a fight with you, you would seem like you didn't care at all, but in actuality, you would work overnight on investigating the previous eighteen generations of that person's family. You really are the same as back then."

Kaid continued to comment on my dark history and made me really want to beat him up, but he clapped his hands at this time.

Clap! *Clap!* *Clap!*

All the magical lights lit up in the library, and all the doors were opened with a large number of young acolyte magicians pouring in and working busily. Archmage Kaid's message had already ordered them to begin the task of searching for information.

They had begun with all the books on the bookshelves.

"Team A, start checking from the history section. See if there's any records of Emordilorcan personally fighting."

"We, the members of Team B, would like to investigate about similar Earth Elemental Lords and the Elemental Gods. Their powers should be a good reference."

"Team C would like to start researching about the highest levels of earth element magic. There may be powers similar to Emordilorcan's there. The most important ones are the forbidden spells that humans are unable to use. Oh, and also the elf kingdom's forbidden spells."

The acolytes began to actively research, and Kaid was unusually serious as he spoke.

"At such a time, you can stop doing everything by yourself like in the past. Besides, this is also our battle, so just trust in your companions a little bit for once."

This was the most serious that I had ever seen Kaid.

"Alright."

I was even somewhat moved, as I randomly took out a book and began reading.

“…What's this!"

The cover said, "How to Control and Construct with the Iron Element," but underneath the exquisite cover was actually a collection of pictures of naked young girls…

"…” The archmage who didn't say anything but stole the book back from me was the best explanation.

"You used the books that nobody ever borrows as covers to hide your personal treasures. Even this part about you has never changed."

When I looked around, there were quite a few acolytes furtively dashing directly towards specific bookshelves. It seemed that there were quite a few who actually did this.

"Ah, this is strange! I actually found a porn—"

Before that acolyte even finished his sentence, someone else beside him covered his mouth and dragged him away. Some things were known by everyone already, but their teacher was still here, and it wouldn't be good for it to be publicized.

As for the "treasure" this acolyte discovered, it instantly disappeared, likely to become someone else's new personal treasure.

Judging by the large scale of the acolytes' actions, this was obviously a city where there were too many males and not enough females and some job occupations were still quite undeveloped. Yet some occupations were obviously rather profitable, such as the goblin publisher's logo on all the picture books that indicated the source of all such books.

All the acolytes' items had to be teleported over by the Mage Country's officials, and the luggage they could bring was limited. Since the goblins' dimension-tearing devices had fewer restrictions on them, even if only one book was successfully teleported over out of ten, as long as that book could be sold for the price of ten books, it wouldn't be any loss at all. And from my understanding of the goblins, they would most likely ask for a price that was sufficient for a thousand such books.

"Heh heh, it really is just the same as long ago. What, you're still collecting this type of book?"

This time, it was my turn to tease this old gossip.

"The goblins gave it to me for free—the goblins gave it to me for free—and I have no idea why they would do so, so I tossed it here…"

This old gossip's face was capable of turning red? This was a real sight to see. But if what he said was real, perhaps I would have to reevaluate the goblins' capabilities. At the very least, their ability to bribe seemed ridiculous.

"…At least, before you go, make the goblins pay some money that they view as their own blood. They've been making too much profit recently; it's time they pay some of

it back."

Okay then, let us ignore that mysterious voice coming from the corner of the wall.

"Um, you won't make fun of me, will you?"

"Of course not, of course not, I can understand completely."

"How could you possibly understand? You winner in life! You were so popular back in the day, and you're still so young! You—these days, just how many girlfriends have you had? How many beautiful women have you had intimate contact with… Ahhh, don't tell me, I don't want to know, you winner in life!"

My mouth twitched, but in the end, I didn't reply with what I wanted to.

"Actually, I'm the same as you. I've been single for the past three hundred plus years. As for intimate contact with beautiful women… does having my body cut up and my heart dug out count?"

"It is better to be a naïve idiot than it is to be Emordilorcan."

When the innumerable amount of anti-Emordilorcan forces finally arrived together without even the need to summon them, this casual sentence that I said was spread everywhere by everyone. In a way, I wasn't wrong at all.

When all the anti-Emordilorcan forces gathered together, even all of us were astonished at how powerful the final group was. There was some trouble, though, due to the chaotic command system structure and completely different weapons, equipment, and logistical needs. Not to mention that there were quite a few factions that had enmity with each other, and it was impossible to organize everything.

"Impossible to command everyone under a unified command system? It doesn't matter, just have everyone attack. You don't understand? Fine, let everyone fight under their own command and do as they like."

Since this was just a temporary alliance to begin with, each faction's leader didn't think too highly of their other temporary allies. Forcefully requesting a unified system of command would probably end up with a bad result.

Instead, if I allowed them to battle freely under their own commands and just take

care of themselves, it would be much easier to receive a better combat result.

And, at the current moment, I was busily needling a certain person's head with my fists.

"Reyne, you really dared to do such a thing!"

Chapter 217
Rumors and Gossip

As the countless hordes of demon armies walked by, the earth would become scorched plains, and the air would be filled with the scent of sulfur. Rubble and dead bodies would become the mainstay of the world.

If there was one racial prejudice throughout all the lands that could be viewed as natural and correct, the only one, perhaps, that could fit the bill would be the prejudice against demons.

As the representatives of Chaos, they indeed never did anything good. They would receive joy from killing other lives, with death and pitiful screams being the marching music for their armies. Souls were their food and replenishment, and even the existence of the undead, which brought death everywhere, was the creation of an ancient demon.

Add on the fact that they always played the bad guy in every Holy War, and even if it was a bit overboard to call them the root of all evil, it wouldn't seem strange to consider the demons as the final antagonists.

In front of my eyes was such a large demon army. Their camp was filled with an aura of twistedness, and the earth itself seemed to be raging helplessly as the natural laws of the Earth Elemental Plane were being rewritten.

"Take a look! This is my army, isn't it amazing?"

Looking at how proud this idiot girl was of herself, I was angry in so many ways. She was obviously just pretending to be a fool.

The only part worthy of being happy about was that there was no twisted sensation from her that indicated she had been invaded by Chaos. That meant that either she was able to perfectly conceal her own abnormal changes and twistedness, or she had completely taken control of Chaos and hadn't had any changes to either her physical body or her soul.

Considering her bloodline's connection, the latter seemed more likely, but even so, I was furious.

"You—you really dared such a thing! And you already know what the end result of dealing with demons is. I know more than a dozen whose bodies and souls have been devoured by demons, more than enough for a book titled 'Collection of Fools Deceived by Demons,' and you still dared to…"

Reyne didn't reply, and maintained her faint smile as she looked at me. Her look was one of "I've done it already, so what can you do?" At this moment, I knew that not only did she already know the consequences, but she intended to bear them.

"Forget it! I'm not going to care anymore, just do whatever you want."

In the end, I could only angrily toss out this sentence, just like a parent who had been infuriated by a naughty kid. My sentence sounded quite serious, but it was actually a demonstration of my helplessness that couldn't be expressed in any other way.

"There's not much time left, and I don't want to only watch from the sidelines…"

Reyne's reply gave me a sudden jolt in my heart. It seemed that I had only been giving my junior the best path I believed for her, but I had been ignoring her own feelings.

The proper path was indeed wide and safe, but it was also difficult to walk down and progress would be slow. For her to be able to gain true top-level combat strength that could influence the entire situation while taking the proper path probably wouldn't be possible even by the end of this Holy War.

In the end, perhaps she was just like me from that year. Despite being the prince of a country with his citizens' trust, in front of the unchangeable situation and the unbeatable enemy, I could only watch as the knights and citizens were sacrificed and nothing could be done.

Perhaps in Reyne's eyes that was also the same fate that would befall her. In order to control her own fate, she made a choice to seek strength at any cost. Judging from her calm smile, she had already made up her mind to accept any potential consequences, including becoming my enemy.

"As a princess and the royal successor of East Mist, I can't give over my country's fate to anyone else. Even if its fate is to only be destroyed in the end, then, at the very least,

I shall give everything I have in order to twist this damned fate."

Beneath this seemingly silly smile was resolution matching that of her ancestors. Perhaps, from the very start, I had underestimated this little girl.

"Go self-reflect properly for me!"

Alright, I didn't know what else I should say to her. I tossed her this sentence, which seemed forceful on the surface but was actually meaningless, as I turned around and left—or perhaps I should use the word escaped.

After I calmed down, I hesitated for a moment, before speaking in a low voice.

"Elisa, you understand a lot about demons…"

Yet the typical instant response didn't come. It seemed that even the silver ring had lost its power to contact Elisa due to the connection between the Earth Elemental Plane and the other dimensions being cut off. Now, I didn't have a chance to gain more information on this topic.

"…It seems I need to have a really good chat with Karwenz, soon."

Perhaps some things were simply unavoidable.

[Congratulations to Host for improving your reputation in the Mage Country. You're now Respected (infamy known to all). Please continue working hard!]

A sudden system message interrupted my thoughts. Although this doubtlessly indicated that I was making progress in my Epic Quest, when I took a look at my system menu, that [67%, -33423] incredible debt was impossible for me to bear looking at.

"I owe even more now."

As for that (infamy known to all) in parentheses after my reputation level of Respected? It's actually quite easy to understand. My system had rather normal-sounding reputation levels of Neutral, Acquaintance, Friendly, Respected, Venerated, and Idolized. However, since I wanted to grind my reputation level quickly, I had taken a certain shortcut. Although this allowed my reputation level grew at a much faster pace, my earlier level of Friendly had a (villainous name known far and wide) added

behind it, and now my Respected level had (infamy known to all) tacked on, which was something I felt rather helpless about.

Shortcut? You see, this was what happened…

"Look, that's the Roland bastard who toyed with our angelic Amelia's feelings! Apparently, he was a mega-level scumbag back in the day!"

"Don't point at him! Be careful of getting pregnant. It's said that he's a huge pervert who can cause a woman to get pregnant just by looking at her."

"He's already a grandpa that's several hundred years old, and he still likes to dress so young. His intentions are inscrutable. I heard that recently, he fooled another ten young women."

"I heard that back in the day, he was dating two idol-level beautiful teachers simultaneously, and he even had an additional two girlfriends on the side. Later, he was discovered, and someone wanted to kill him, which was why he didn't even have time to get his graduation diploma and was forced to escape."

As I was walking everywhere, I heard nothing but rumors. This made me want to go into a frenzy, but I absolutely couldn't. It was like hell.

The reason? All the rumors and gossip were actually spread by me. In a way, it was also what I needed.

"This is no good! My reputation has been stuck at Friendly, 212/20000, for quite a while now. It seems I have no other method but to use this."

Right before a major battle, my ace card was currently under confiscation due to a lack of money. If I was the first person in history who lost a battle due to insufficient Fate Points, which were required to purchase back my debt, then that would be too humiliating.

This strange reputation quest that my system had given me even required that I had to get to Venerated in order to proceed with my quest. No matter how many good deeds I performed, I was still stuck at a little past Friendly, still far away from Respected. This was without even mentioning the Venerated reputation rank, which I could only look at.

This wasn't the first time that the system had given me a reputation quest. Before, the Roland Sacred Sword had a special effect, which helped its holder to greatly increase the reputation of the People of the Mist. I had investigated the strange way that my system defined reputation before. It turned out that the system wasn't all-powerful. This so-called reputation in the end was about how many people knew about you and how deep their impressions were of you. As for how many people specifically counted for one point, that was something I wasn't able to calculate.

To make an analogy, the former reputation increasing effect of the Roland Sacred Sword, basically meant that all the People of the Mist would have high expectations for the sword holder. They would voluntarily tell others about his identity and learn more about his deeds, and this so-called reputation would naturally keep increasing.

"As long as I know the rules, then I also know how to cheat…"

And so, after much deep contemplation, I thought of my previous world and how never-ending scandals about celebrities were always the news that people paid attention to the most. This allowed me to come up with my devious shortcut.

"…Good deeds are never spread, while bad deeds will travel thousands of kilometers on their own. In the end, this reputation just requires me to be famous. For someone who's known to be excellent, at most maybe some parents would say 'you should try to be more like XXX' and it wouldn't even spread to the next street over. But if it's some bad deed or scandal, it would probably travel three thousand kilometers in a single night without me even needing to spread it."

"Any societies consisting of intelligent creatures are naturally highly interested in negative gossip, especially if it's a scandal regarding several famous people at once. Who cares about my face? I stopped caring about saving face three hundred plus years ago!"

Alright, the truth was that all I had to do was toss out two slightly perverted stories, and then arrange an acolyte to ask me questions about these stories in a public place with many people around. I merely smiled and shook my head without forcefully denying it, which successfully created the gossip about my scandal.

My original story was only about the past when I had an unsuccessful romantic relationship with Amelia, but based on what I'm hearing now, the rumors had completely gone out of control after they started spreading.

"Do you really believe that he can make a woman pregnant just by looking at her? Can you still really call yourself a mage! That's completely illogical by the laws of magic!"

"No, no, just think about it. He's a senior student from archmage Kaid's generation, and he must be an incredible archmage as well. I heard that he successfully put a piece of his own soul into his own mana, and all he needs to do is stare at you to cast a mental magic that attacks your will. And that scary soul piece of his will directly use your physical body to create a new baby shard, which is what it means by 'he'll make you pregnant just by looking at you.'"

"In that case, wouldn't even men—ahhh! I just met him yesterday and even smiled at him! He looked me in the eye, could it be that I…"

"Junior, I recommend that you go get a checkup in the infirmary. There's already a line several-hundred long, and I have the paperwork indicating that I'm in the first-hundred part of the line. I can sell it to you for cheap."

To be honest, it was far out of my expectations for the rumors to spread to such a degree.

"The hell with getting pregnant just by looking at you! The hell with mental magic! The hell with a man getting pregnant! You guys actually believe such non-magical rumors and dare to call yourselves mages? Also, that one over there who's taking this chance to strike it rich, I'm going to remember you! Brat, don't let me find a chance! If I actually do get the chance, heh heh, just wait to see how I'm going to deal with you!"

The part that I was most aggrieved about was that I single-handedly created this situation. I couldn't even defend myself, as I needed these rumors to spread even wider. I even needed to inflame the rumors further, such as flirting in public with some beautiful ladies… Cough, this part wasn't because of my personal desires! Definitely not!

I did, indeed, bring it upon myself, but how could I stand to suffer alone by myself…?

"Look, that's the one who traffics underage girls, the white-robed perverted monster Kaid! I heard he's committed countless crimes, and only his high status is keeping it all hushed up."

"How is that possible? Teacher Kaid is well-loved and respected by everyone. This must be a baseless rumor."

"No, no, see how he's a good friend of that pervert king? It's said that they often discuss how to commit crimes together, and when an acolyte directly asked that Roland about it, he didn't even deny it!"

And, so, Kaid's clean reputation for the past hundreds of years was ruined. Well, he wasn't squeaky clean to begin with, and now that people had these rumors to go off of, old Kaid's reputation instantly became rather strange as well.

Oh, it's bad of me to do that to an old friend of mine? This was just a little return present. Did Kaid really think that I wouldn't find out he was the one who added the 'making people pregnant by looking at them' part to the rumor!? He even twisted it by adding some crap about mental magic as well!

Alright, let's not mention old Kaid anymore while he's trying to salvage his reputation everywhere, but he's always met by female screams and shrieks and slaps. Although this self-ruining of my own reputation was a devious shortcut that definitely hurt my ego significantly, there were also apparent benefits.

"I got to Respected in just two days. It's scary how fast my Reputation is growing now. I bet just about every faction in the Earth Elemental Plane knows about me."

Although I was making good progress on my Epic Quest, which was obviously a good thing, I was all up in tears. Why? Because I went to a noodle restaurant last night for a bowl of noodles, and even a seventy-year-old lady was so scared that she maniacally ran out of the store at the sight of me. I merely nodded at a young acolyte on the road, and that guy actually let out a death howl and then laid on the road and pretended to be dead.

Can you believe it? That acolyte was even of the brawny-muscular-huge-guy type. I was rendered speechless on the spot.

"Thanks to all these rumors, my reputation's becoming stranger and stranger. Who cares? What's reputation anyways? Can I eat it? Regardless, I've always been single even when I had a good reputation, and also single when I had a bad reputation, so isn't it all the same?"

Fine then, if it was really all the same, why were there still tears in my eyes…

Although the negative rumors increased my Reputation at an astonishing speed, there was still a bottleneck. Since there was a limited number of people in Karo City, my

Reputation stopped increasing once my Respected (infamy known to all) reached about half-step to Venerated, which was rather frustrating.

"It seems that I still need a huge scoop. Oh right, Amelia and the others are supposed to come here in two days to meet up. Perhaps… Let's go with that, then. I hope Elisa won't beat me to death when I return…"

As a veteran teacher of Cloud Tower, this wasn't the first time Amelia had been to Karo. In fact, she even stayed here for three years and made countless hidden preparations. If it wasn't for that, she wouldn't have been able to create her "plant garden" so successfully.

In order to scam and obtain more research funds, and also so that her private research wouldn't be exposed, she made quite a good effort at appearing proper on the surface. She always had a good reputation, and apart from a few ancients from the same generation that knew her for who she truly was, most mages treated her as a trustworthy elder. And thanks to her gentle appearance (fake) and ladylike behavior (fake), not to mention rumors that she had royal blood (true), and add on that she treated everyone the same (they were all experimental subjects to her), all of this further increased her popularity.

In order to maintain her own good reputation, before she entered Karo City, she hid all those unpleasant things of hers outside the city, and even especially changed her clothes, took a shower, and spent a lot of time in front of the mirror in order to conceal her maniacal aura. A perfect "angelic Amelia" appeared once again as she held a parasol and walked daintily into town.

However, she immediately discovered that something was wrong about the situation. Everyone was looking at her strangely. In the past, there was respect, veneration, adulation, and, of course, love, but now, they were looking at her with sympathy, as if something pitiful had happened to her.

"Keep at it! Work hard! Everyone will still admire you like in the past!"

"Let the past be the past! Us members of the Angel Support Club will forever support you!"

The cheers of encouragement she could vaguely hear from behind her were even more incomprehensible.

However, she soon understood what it was all about.

When she turned around a street corner, she arrived at Karo's most flourishing and busiest intersection, a road that led directly to the city center. However, the crowds of people typically here were nowhere to be seen, and luxurious fresh flowers were strewn about all over the street. There were even flags and balloons by the roadside, and in the middle of the flowers was a familiar, half-kneeling figure wearing white formal attire.

"My beloved Amelia, please forgive my past transgression. My darling Amelia, let us get back together again!"

Amelia was stunned for a moment before she squeezed a few words out between her teeth.

"Roland! You bastard!"

Chapter 218
Stealing all the Headlines

"I've become famous… as I wished, I'm now headline news!"

I abandoned all so-called sense of shame for my reputation, and now even I feared myself after I gave up all my limits.

I obtained those fresh flowers with great difficulty after I made an incredible effort to contact all the plant specialist mages I could. I stole my formal attire from some random groom, I spent a great amount of money to purchase those balloons from the goblins, and if it weren't for the fact that it was still daylight, I even prepared goblin fireworks in case Amelia arrived at nighttime.

You see, in order to steal all the headlines, I was giving it my all.

It seemed that my luck was actually pretty good. At the very least, it was better than a certain person, who had failed to steal the headlines due to an even more attention-grabbing piece of news.

One of the people involved was the famous beautiful archmage with a renowned reputation—Amelia, the former Truth Overseer, who possessed beauty, brains, and power. That was why this mega-level gossip of "kneeling at the intersection to beg to get back together again" immediately spread through the entirety of Karo City in a single day. Just about everybody was discussing this hot topic.

"Did you hear? That Roland guy actually bought all the available fresh flowers that day and spent at least several tens of thousands of gold coins, just for that one moment…"

Seeing my Reputation points increase at a furious pace, I was both delighted and frightened. I prayed that this incident wouldn't become known in the mortal plane, especially by a certain person.

And what scared me the most of all was Amelia's reaction.

If she beat me up at that time… I had expected an over 90% possibility that she would

react like that, which would actually be easy to deal with.

As long as she beat me up, this incident would end just like that, and the headline would be set. The "failed romance" would easily become a huge piece of news, and this would actually solidify my status as a scumbag even more… By the way, it wasn't easy for me to think of some way to give myself the reputation of a scumbag.

However, Amelia's reaction was far from what I expected. She neither got angry, nor did she go on a rampage right then and there.

She only ground her teeth and squeezed out the words "Roland, you bastard" in a particularly low voice. When combined with her mysteriously reddening face, it would easily make others read too much into it.

I could understand, as I knew she was just forcing down her anger in order to protect her angelic reputation and not get exposed here. But what was with her red face as she accepted my flower bouquet? Was this supposed to be accepting my request to get back together again? But the problem was that this was all just a rumor to begin with! With no romance to begin with, how could we possibly get back together!

"Congratulations, you actually got ahead of me in finding a girlfriend. And she's even Teacher Amelia. Having a student-teacher romance? You lucky bastard. Sigh, I suppose that in this entire world, only you can conquer her heart. Treat her well in the future. Stop messing around, or there'll be quite a lot of people that'll come looking for trouble against you."

Kaid! This guy's congratulations for my upcoming wedding was coming way too soon. Stop touching your beard and pretending to be giving me your blessings while acting like some saint. I still wasn't prepared yet!

Alright. Since I didn't think before I acted, perhaps I was now in deep trouble.

Now, whenever I saw Amelia, who was always so direct and unabashed in the past, she would blush to the point where even her ears would turn red, acting all shy. When the ferocious tiger suddenly turned into a cute tiger, when the maniacal witch suddenly turned into a romantic teenaged girl—this abnormal feeling made me really want to smash my head against a wall.

Smack! *Smack!* *Smack!*

Fine then, I already did smash my head into the wall to the point that I was bleeding all over, but this still hadn't been resolved. The past few days even Reyne had been looking at me with an expression that she believed I was a scumbag.

The most abnormal part of all was that after I finally got to Venerated status, there wasn't something like (villainous name known far and wide) tacked on to the end like usual, but instead…

[Venerated (playboy who has finally reformed): 20000/20000 points. System Reminder: As a playboy who's finally reformed, you need to treat Amelia well from now on. As your mother, I'm so proud of you, and I wish you the best. You absolutely have to have an active little baby that's just as mega-level mischievous as the two of you.]

Alright, at the time I truly didn't know how to respond anymore. If it was possible, I really wanted to fight my System to the death, but the other slightly more serious system notification finally allowed me to heave a sigh of relief.

[System Notification: The Mage Country Arlodante now views you as Venerated. The first stage of the Epic-ranked Quest "Battle of Two Dragons" has been completed. You have now officially chosen the Mage Country, and will be rewarded with 50,000 Fate Points.]

[For the next step, please proceed to the Mage Country's capital of Arlo to find the Truth Overseer named Oslowen. If you don't trigger the next stage of the quest within one year, 100,000 Fate Points will be deducted.]

[88%, 10243]

Perhaps this large number of Fate Points that I just received gave my System new motivation. Its comments were sharper than ever before.

As for the next stage of my quest? I didn't intend to do it for the time being, as the reward seemed so easy to come by [Easy? Are you really sure?], and the part where I would suffer would likely come later. And as for that point deduction punishment, all I'd to do was secretly run off and trigger the next stage of the quest at some point in time [Do you think your System is an idiot?]

Alright, I knew that I would likely suffer at the hands of my System in the end, but there was nothing wrong in dreaming a good dream, was there? I truly felt that my

System was preparing a deep pitfall for me, and I really didn't want to jump into it. But based on my understanding of the System, there would always be a reason for me to jump into it in the end, and I would be forced into it.

After I tossed all those annoying things to the back of my mind, there were still things that I could be happy about. At the very least, my Reputation increased at a much faster rate than I had expected, and I didn't even need to use my backup plan, which would risk Adam beating me to death—dragging the other beautiful and well-renowned mage Margaret's name through the mud in order to have a forbidden taboo love triangle scandal, or even a love square… I suddenly couldn't help but feel a strong sense of pity for myself. In such a day and age, apart from me, was there anyone else that would voluntarily make himself into a scumbag? Why was it so difficult to obtain some reputation?

Fine then, let's not talk about those heartbreaking things anymore. Let's focus on the happy things in life, instead.

At the very least, our allied armies had finished organizing. Although it was impossible to have an overall command system or anything like that, all the factions were very interested in eliminating Emordilorcan. At least before we accomplished our goal, I wouldn't have to worry about any internal conflicts causing our self-destruction.

In order to prevent a hilarious scenario like "Roland felt that he had such an advantage that Roland decided to just all-out attack without a plan! Oh, Roland is now typing gg (good game and surrender), how regrettable" appearing, I indeed made some efforts at increasing our chances of victory.

The first wave sent out would forever be cannon fodder, but this time, the cannon fodder was at quite a high level. The huge demon army became our first wave, and of course, if everything was successful, they might even become our last.

As for why I sent the demons as the first wave? It wasn't that I personally viewed them with distaste; it was that all the other species and factions viewed them with distaste. Just standing together on the same side as demons made them all feel unpleasant, and they kept worrying about the possibility of some horrific plot awaiting them at the end.

"You say that there's a top-level Demon Warlock in your army controlling these demons? Stop joking around! You think I'm a novice greenhorn? There's no way that

anyone from the mortal plane could possibly control such a large-scale demon army. How is it possible for there not to be some Demon Lord from the lower planes here?"

"Don't work hard only to have the demons reap all the benefits in the end! Before we understand what's really going on, we refuse to listen to your commands."

Well, it couldn't be helped that the demons had such a negative reputation. For our own side's morale and trust, I had Reyne send out her entire demon army for them to be the first wave of cannon fodder.

Reyne unhesitatingly and directly accepted.

She stood on her demonized dragon's back and watched her destructive demon army proceed, leaving nothing but scorched earth in their wake. I mysteriously felt as if it would be really fun, giving me the feeling of an evil boss behind the scenes.

"You finally feel the joy of it? You were a lich and then the commander of tremendous undead armies. You always used so many underhanded plots, with even the Gods falling victim to you. You were always the biggest evil antagonist of all."

Fine then, I now regretted asking Reyne. Suddenly, she smiled as slyly as a fox.

"However, there's nothing wrong with playing the role of the antagonist. At the very least, bad people live far longer than good people. If you really were as proper and had good morals like the main characters of most stories, you'd perhaps be nothing more than a rotting corpse by now."

Reyne even nudged over to my side and rubbed me with her shoulder like she was a kitten, and used a respectful tone that was incredibly rare for her. It seemed to be her own way of acting spoiled and apologizing to me.

"Hmph! Don't even dream of me forgiving you so easily about using the powers of Chaos."

Although I said so, even I myself was unable to say anything too vicious to her. Perhaps the moment I had discovered how similar Reyne was to Prince Roland from my past was when I silently admitted her independence and her right to make decisions for herself.

“…When we return to the mortal plane, arrange a time for me to have a discussion with

Karwenz."

Hearing this, Reyne instantly cheered up and was filled with a bright smile.

"Okay!"

"Hmph! You start shining as soon as I give you a little sunlight. Remember, power is only a tool, don't…"

"Don't be controlled by the power. Second Brother Karwenz also tells me this as well."

Alright, just when did Karwenz become her Second Brother? It seemed that I still underestimated this girl's basic instincts. Some things I still had to remind her about, however.

"Never trust the Chaos, Chaos…"

"…Chaos is unpredictable. If it could be predicted, it wouldn't be Chaos. You must learn how to master Chaos, and not be mastered by Chaos. Second Brother says this as well."

Fine, since I couldn't gain any verbal advantages here, I might as well just focus instead on the "army that's just attacking all-out without any plan."

Against several dozen armies' worth of demons, not a single individual would be able to retain their calm. From the very start of battle, things instantly fell into a cruel war of attrition.

Emordilorcan left methods behind to protect himself as I expected. As soon as the demons entered his territory, countless numbers of earth elementals came out from deep within the ground, and tremendous earthquakes created countless crevices. As the demons kept falling into the rifts, the shape of the land was transformed enormously. As for the demons that didn't fall to their deaths, they were now trapped in the newly divided land, facing against earth elemental creatures that were many times their number.

However, there were just too many demons.

The winged demons began organizing aerial assaults, and the earth elemental creatures mostly lacked the ability to fly. This made the combat situation quickly tilt in the demons' favor.

"This seems so easy. Rumors of that Emordilorcan's strength must have been greatly exaggerated."

I only smiled upon hearing this. If Emordilorcan was truly so easy to deal with, I would have come looking for him the moment I arrived in the Earth Elemental Plane. Why else would I spend so much effort in preparing against him beforehand?

Even a sinking warship would still have a couple of cannons. As the most ancient Elemental God of all, even if he was greatly weakened, he would surely have many trump cards up his sleeve.

The demons alone would be able to take care of him? I wasn't that optimistic at all. I only hoped that it would force out a couple of his aces, and the best result would be that Emordilorcan personally came out.

But judging from the current development, I wouldn't be able to see him with just the power of the demons.

Suddenly, the entire area began trembling violently before the ground fissured yet again. This time, several dozen tremendous Giant Sand Worms came out of the ground.

Giant Sand Worms were low-intelligence earth elemental creatures that were several hundred meters long. All they knew was to eat and sleep, but no resident of this plane ever dared to look down on them. That was because they were big—very big, ridiculously big.

Just their heads were about as large as goblin bulldozers, but their snakelike bodies were well over one hundred meters in length. Fully mature adult Giant Sand Worms could grow to three hundred meters, and their bodies were as solid as iron. Normal weapons couldn't pierce them, nor did they have the sense of pain. Even if one was unable to devour you in a single gulp, they would definitely be able to drag you into the earth and strangle you to death.

If these creatures happened to appear, any unlucky place that met them would be forced to move its settlement, even those completed for a long time.

These ferociously strong low-intelligence creatures were always treated as a natural calamity of this plane. But now, it seemed that as the oldest resident of this plane, Emordilorcan had a way to control them.

Reyne's demon army consisted entirely of earth elemental creatures that had recently been demonized. Even though they were incredibly numerous, the demon army lacked high-level demon commanders. These demons still had the same earth magic and abilities as their original forms, which were basically zero threat to the Giant Sand Worms. The Giant Sand Worms' gigantic bodies literally ignored all the demons' physical attacks, and now, the newly-born demon army had met their most difficult opponent.

"How about having the demons retreat?"

"No need, we can't take them back to the mortal plane anyways, so we might as well have them expend their passion."

Reyne's eyes were glowing with the dusky yellow of Chaos, its power under her control.

"My slaves! Show me your utmost loyalty to your master."

She cupped the flames of Chaos within her hand, which transformed into droplets in the sky. It then turned into a demonic flash, illuminating the sky with blood red.

The demon army paused for a moment, then suddenly sped up as they blindly rushed towards those Giant Sand Worms. And then…

Boom!

Self-destruction was the most common ability to all residents of the lower planes. That attack contained all their life force and power, and would at the very least be three times stronger than any of their other attacks. Moreover, these demons knew how to group together before self-destructing, which only added to the explosions' power.

Even the strong Giant Sand Worms were unable to deal with this endless number of self-destructions. They rolled and thrashed around in soundless pain, and their green blood spilled everywhere. As if they had discovered the prey before them wasn't delicious at all, the injured Giant Sand Worms kept retreating into the ground and disappearing. It seemed that Emordilorcan's control over them wasn't all that strong.

Currently, there was still a significant amount of the demon army remaining. They grouped up and rushed towards the Earth Elemental God's domain, when a sudden dragon breath sandstorm appeared behind us.

The Inferno Demon Dragon that we rode on hurriedly turned around and dodged the dragon breath sandstorm, but its movements almost caused me and Reyne to fall off in the process.

"You dare to twist the proud will of my tribe! Invaders from another plane, meet your destined doom."

That was the angry roar of a huge sand dragon. The skies were now filled with yellow-gray dragon wings. As Emordilorcan's allies, the sand dragons had arrived.

As for me, I had expected this as well, which was why I laughed.

"Amelia, the sand dragons were on Emordilorcan's side as expected. It's your turn… What? You won't do anything unless I promise to go on a date with you? My dear lady, please don't try to take advantage of the situation. Fine, fine, I'll agree to it all!"

Chapter 219
Small Forbidden Spell

The Law God was fair, but in a way, he was also strict. As the embodiment of "fairness," he always followed his Divine Obligation of Law and abandoned all sense of self in exchange for pureness. This actually allowed Wumianzhe's growth rate to surpass all other Gods.

Even the back door I left behind would only be able to temporarily influence Wumianzhe, but some troublesome matters were unavoidable. For example, as a member of the Order Gods, Wumianzhe would instinctually reject the members of Chaos, which was why Reyne, who had now accepted Chaos, was destined to lose her job class as a Law Knight.

[Reyne, level 60 Law Knight (former) / level 20 Aurora Knight / level 14 Black Hell Knight, Total Level: 94, General Level: 97, General Assessment: average Legend rank.]

I didn't know what exactly Reyne had done, nor did I want to know whether it was because she used the power of demons or did something overboard that caused her to lose her Law Knight class.

Demons typically obtained power through destruction and sacrifice, and judging from Reyne's ridiculously high speed of growth in ranks, she probably didn't do anything good.

Even if most elemental creatures were wild beasts with no will of their own other than instinct, and even if they could regather their elements after destruction, it was still no excuse to slaughter them en masse. This was the most likely the reason she lost her Law Knight job class.

I was still able to keep my Law job class probably because I was so skilled at finding the loopholes in laws. In my eyes, this invasion of another plane was nothing than a rather large-scale hunt for an escaped criminal.

Yep, an escaped criminal. Emordilorcan—crimes of murder, war, species genocide, destruction of public property and so on; he was nothing more than an unreformable

criminal.

His first action changed the shape of the earth. He was an accomplice to the beastmen as one of the perpetrators of war. His second action, taken in rage, even destroyed the defense lines at Red Maple Castle, causing countless deaths among the human warriors. The bloody battle during the snowy night afterwards could probably be attributed to him as well.

And, as for the beastmen from the plains that ambushed us in the end, if it weren't for the gray elves and distant armies from Xiluo that stopped them in their tracks, they probably would have caused the entire combat situation to turn in their favor again. In fact, the entire Northlands might have been lost and the beastmen would have become the new rulers with another round of species genocide. After all, in such a situation, even I wouldn't be able to overturn it anymore. A trump card like God's Descent wasn't something I could use against mortals.

I definitely wasn't some hot-blooded defender of justice, nor did I even agree that this cruel world still had a concept such as justice. It was just that I still remembered all those innocent citizens and warriors' unsatisfied looks in death as they died protecting their homes. If I couldn't make Emordilorcan pay the price, I probably wouldn't be able to sleep peacefully at night anymore.

"Everyone, pay attention. Focus your attacks on the Elemental Throne. I refuse to believe that that bastard will still be able to hide like a coward!"

Fight for the sake of justice for the deaths of innocents? I wasn't such a good person. I simply didn't like him.

That bastard felt like he would be fine after hiding in his own home after causing such a ruckus. He thought he would be able to sleep in peace, believing that nobody would dare do anything about him. Yet I had no intentions of letting him sleep as he pleased; I preferred to instead have this bastard die as well to accompany those innocent citizens.

Right now, the battle was at a stalemate. As expected of the most ancient Elemental God, he was now summoning all sorts of ancient contracted allies, and countless amounts of cannon fodder were forced onto the battlefield by him.

Sand dragons, single-pincer beasts, Kasla elemental knights, Giant Sand Worms,

descendants of titans, earth dwarves, mountain dwarves, mountain giants, Abarros monsters, and various ancient species that had already disappeared from history all came to this battlefield. This was basically turning into an earth elemental creature museum.

But we weren't letting them have it easy either, as we weren't exactly pushovers.

Amelia's Death Garden, Margaret's rune puppets and rune giants, and all the various Earth Elemental Lord's armies went to the battlefield in turns. It was just a cannon fodder contest, so what did we have to fear?

Both sides' elemental creatures fought just like this, and huge dragons roared in the skies as the tower giants and their inhabitants entered the battle. Everything was now in chaos, and Emordilorcan's elemental army seemed to be imperceptibly yet constantly increasing in number.

However, this was all within my expectations from the very start. As this was Emordilorcan's main home, if he was all by himself, I would have begun suspecting whether or not there was some scheme.

This endless summoning of reinforcements meant that he was obviously in a tight spot already, and as for his next step—

"If he still hasn't appeared yet, it's obvious that he's stalling for time. Emordilorcan's no coward who fears death. In that case, it means he has an ace that needs more time."

After coming to this realization, I didn't intend to wait around any longer.

"Kaid, it's up to you guys."

"Don't we need to disperse our own forces first? Even if we're just acting, we should do it as believably as possible."

"There's no need. As long as Emordilorcan isn't an idiot, he can't possibly allow us to finish casting. If he truly doesn't even have to power to stop a forbidden spell's casting anymore, then we just have to stop it ourselves mid-cast."

"Hah! You make it sound so easy, since you're not the one casting the forbidden spell."

Although Kaid was complaining, judging from the Elemental Tide's fluctuation that

suddenly magnified by several times, the forbidden spell had already started to be prepared.

Amongst all the major countries, the Mage Country had always had a relatively good reputation. But if there was anything they were unreasonable about, it was the fact that they were too obsessed about all types of magic.

As large-scale weapons, forbidden spells were treated as the ultimate weapons of magic. In the Mage Country's capital's library of forbidden books, it was said that they had collected more than half of all known forbidden spells in the world. This was doubtlessly a fearsome threat all by itself.

Actually, having the information and theories on forbidden spells didn't mean that they were usable. First of all, there would be extremely high requirements for the caster's level. The number of mages that could cast each forbidden spell would definitely be in the single digits, and the most important of all was that forbidden spells weren't easy to use.

A mage's mana was limited. In order to cast a spell of such power, the spell would naturally be connected to the natural laws of the world and the sources of the elements, which would always be a complex, difficult, and dangerous process. Basically, the moment a mage started casting a forbidden spell, he was turned useless.

The casting times for forbidden spells were typically long to begin with, and even the shortest would always take several hours. In this period of time, he wouldn't be able to move nor would he be able to stop casting. He would have to continuously mutter incantations to control the magic, and if he was attacked during the process, he would either have to forcefully stop the magic and receive a life-threatening backlash or grit his teeth and take the attack. No matter what he did, he would likely end up dead.

Once a forbidden spell was begun, the unimaginable waves sent out by the Elemental Tide was basically no different from a loudspeaker broadcasting to the entire battlefield, "Hey, I'm about to start a huge area-of-effect magic. If you don't want to die, come kill me!" Anyone who wasn't an idiot would spend all efforts on stopping this forbidden spell.

And the most pitiful part of all was that forbidden spells would use up the caster's lifespan. Something like ten years' worth of lifespan was quite common. Some top-level forbidden spells even required the caster's very life and soul as a sacrifice, and

in the end, any forbidden spell mages typically wouldn't live very long whether they used forbidden spells or not. There were far more mages that could secretly use forbidden spells than the publicly known ones.

Of course, these limitations were only for mortals. For example, in Auland's "Rain Capital," divine powered forbidden spells had both much more power and stronger effects than mortals' forbidden spells, but even so, the Storm Goddess and Water Elemental Goddess paid a tremendous price.

Forbidden spells that borrowed from divine power had a weakness that wasn't publicly known. They mostly lacked power to directly kill people. Even if they were able to kill people, it would typically be in an indirect fashion. I didn't believe at all that this was because the True Gods would take pity on the mortals. This was most likely another way of how the Gods were forbidden to directly interfere with the cycle of reincarnation.

The previous generations where forbidden spells could be casually tossed out on battlefields with ancient Gods and magic everywhere was long past already. In modern battles, even with forbidden spell mages, that was only a type of threat that wouldn't be used unless it absolutely came to it. After all, forbidden spell mages would want to have longer lives as well.

But there were always exceptions to everything. In the modern era, there was a certain mage who didn't follow any of the rules at all, tossing out forbidden spells like common vegetables and causing a series of incidents.

Fine, that was me, Lord Yongye from before.

As for why I dared to run rampant like that, it was mainly because I had endless undead armies acting as my shield. Even if some strong ones managed to break through all the way to face me, my loyal Red Hunting Hounds would teach them the price of using their ultimate abilities too early just to get to me. And as for any magical backlash and cost to my lifespan, since I had a Lich's body, I stopped caring about those things long ago. If any serious aftereffects ever happened, I still had my System to clean things up for me.

The current me no longer had the power to cast forbidden spells, but Kaid did. With Amelia and Margaret's assistance as two top-level mages from the Truth Symposium, the earth element specialist Kaid would be able to borrow the endless elemental

power of the Earth Elemental Plane to use the forbidden spell Continental Sinking (incomplete edition.)

Yep, it was indeed incomplete. Kaid's power level was insufficient to cast the true version of Continental Sinking, which ranked near the top even amongst all forbidden spells. Continental Sinking's complete version would be able to cut off an entire continent and sink it into the sea or even bury it into the ground. It was something incredibly fearsome.

As for Kaid's version of the Continental Sinking forbidden spell (incomplete edition)—

"It's probably just an earthquake at the level where it could make people hide under tables, but wouldn't be able to harm a single person."

The fact that the attack power of Kaid's spell was so insignificant aside, this was actually a complete forbidden spell of its own, and as long as Kaid's power level was sufficient and he didn't fail in the casting, it would definitely seem exactly like a real top-level forbidden spell.

At the moment, countless numbers of rocks started floating in midair, and "floating islands" suddenly increased in number by several thousand. The never-ending sandstorms in this plane fell abnormally silent, and only the scary-seeming increase in the Elemental Tide was evidence of the calm before the storm.

"Target, Elemental Throne."

Elemental Thrones were basically the equivalent of the Elemental Gods' home in this plane, as well as the connection between an Elemental God and the Elemental Plane. It was definitely their greatest weakness. Of course, in normal situations, the Elemental God would die first, and the Elemental Throne would simply have a new owner afterwards.

But if this "top-level forbidden spell" destroyed everything around here and cut of the Elemental Throne's connection to the Earth Elemental Plane, perhaps the next new Earth Elemental God's birth would have to wait first for the birth of a new Elemental Throne, which would take thousands of years rather than hundreds.

We knew that this was nothing more than a fake forbidden spell, so that couldn't possibly happen, but Emordilorcan would believe that we were going all-out. As long as he was still alive, it would be impossible for him to watch and let us cast this

forbidden spell.

This was the strategy of attacking the enemy at his greatest weak spot, which he would be forced to defend. It was a vicious strategy that would give us the advantage of proactiveness. Or, to put it simply, it was just bait.

And things developed as I expected. Not even two minutes after the forbidden spell started casting, a white shadow appeared on the battlefield, rushing at high speed towards Kaid.

"Emordilorcan has finally appeared. He's taken the bait hook, line and sinker, and now it's time to reel in the net."

Chapter 220
Busy People

A six-hour-long marathon-like discussion was just about to finish in Diffindor's royal palace.

"Then, the next meeting will most likely be in six months' time. Please prepare the mine production samples and tax-free item lists by that time. In the next meeting, we shall try to finish all business-related agreements that apply to the entire Mist Alliance."

"In order to show the important of the next meeting, Queen Glina will personally come to sign off on the contract at that time. We hope that your side will be able to give us equal treatment. Of course, the publicity work will also be left to your side since you're all the same species with the same culture and language, and this is an excellent chance to greatly improve the relationship between our kingdoms. This chance for publicity shouldn't be wasted."

"Equal treatment? I understand. I shall inform Princess Reyne. But by six months' time, she might very well be Queen Reyne."

"Haha! That's even better. It's getting late, so I shall take my leave first."

Elisa, who seemed so energetic, just earlier sighed with a face filled with worry. She watched the horse-drawn carriage fade into the distance with the young diplomat Wende from Sleuweir Kingdom who she just sent off.

"It's been so long since I've been able to make contact; I hope that nothing bad has happened to him. No, since the entire Earth Elemental Plane has been cut off, then there must be some big incident going on over there. I can only hope that he returns safely."

"Relax, I watched those two mischievous bratty twins grow up. Neither of them seemed like they would be the short-lived type." Kelly smiled and there was pride in her tone, but was it really alright for her to be calling Roland a brat?

"Perhaps you shouldn't be worrying about Roland; instead, worry about that Emordi-something. Don't judge Roland by how calm he seemed on the surface when he left. Actually, the angrier he is, the calmer he'll appear to be. He's definitely bearing a grudge right now. Based on my understanding of him, if he's in a bad mood, he'll plot on how he can make someone else even worse off than he is. So, you should be worried right now about his enemy, not Roland."

In a way, this wood elf was the one who watched Prince Roland grow up, and she made this deduction using her instincts, which was actually quite close to the mark.

"They have their battlefield, and we have ours. We can't have them looking down on us when they return, so let's work hard, young Elisa."

They were actually busy with official work as the background scenery for their chat. Just leaving for a little while caused the documents and letters that needed their attention to pile up like mountains.

"Of course. I still need much assistance from Sister Kelly, and there's still so many things I would like to learn from you."

Elisa smiled and nodded. Kelly, who had assisted over ten generations of Mist Royalty, was basically unbeatable when it came to any political matters. Kelly's hundreds of years of political experience was astonishing, and Elisa had learned a lot.

When Roland became the absentee leader and even Reyne followed after him, all the political and military affairs of the Eastern Mist Communal Country were left to Elisa and the others who had stayed behind.

Military affairs were quite easy. With the Red Hunting Hounds and their knights staying behind, the creation and training of various military squads went quite well. There was also no need to change the overall military organization significantly.

But, on the other hand, the political matters regarding the citizens were rather critical. These issues were ones that couldn't wait for even a single day.

Although East Mist didn't have the serious problems of Sleuweir Kingdom like reconstruction after battle, just the large numbers of gray elves moving to East Mist and how to accommodate them had all the local officials busy thinking up plans. Increasing the number of living facilities and new cities as well as redesigning old cities all became number one in priority.

Apart from all this, there was also the scheduled expansion of Diffindor's city limits for the upcoming spring, the planting of new crops, and various annual tasks at hand. The first task would affect nearly 30% of the citizens' living area, and the second had to do with the upcoming year's food production. Both were critical tasks that they couldn't afford to have any problems appearing with.

And, recently, something even more important was adding to everyone's burden, making the East Mist officials overloaded when they were already at their limits. In just one short week, the number of governmental officials that had been sent to the hospital for overwork had reached double digits.

This headache of an issue that everyone had to deal with using all their energy was the setup of the Mist Alliance.

This was doubtlessly a good thing. Just the news of such an issue would cause the entire country to celebrate. After all, after the Mist Alliance's flag was finally flown, it would mean that the People of the Mist had finally gathered together again. In a way, this would mean the reconstruction of the already destroyed Mist Kingdom.

But some things were just too sudden. According to traditions, even trade discussions would typically take several months to complete, and it would usually take a military alliance one or two years to finish the negotiations. For something as huge as a mutual alliance, economics, military affairs, politics, agriculture, diplomacy and so on all needed to become unified and reach an outcome that every single country could accept. This definitely wasn't a task that could be completed with ease.

Ten or twenty years? Perhaps ten years would be realistic, but the time limit that Roland had given them was a mere two years. As the core countries of the Mist Alliance, the Eastern Mist Communal Country and Sleuweir Kingdom were required to finish all the foundational work for unification within a single year. The heavy workload required for this was likely sufficient to send several hundred more governmental officials to mental hospitals in the near future. To be honest, in just this short time, several more patients were registered due to overwork.

As the highest-level female official as well as private tutor in the royal palace, even if she didn't have an official governmental position, Kelly was indeed the core of the newly-born Eastern Mist Communal Country. But even the wood elf with extremely high stamina was also quite fatigued by the recent heavy workload.

Clap! *Clap!* *Clap!*

Kelly lightly clapped her hands to attract the attention of all the busy officials. As she looked at everyone's tired faces, she came to a decision.

"It's almost dinnertime; everyone should rest up early tonight. No working overtime—we'll just continue tomorrow."

"But we haven't finished our work yet, and the Shawen tribes are coming tomorrow. We still haven't prepared the new contracts, and the report from the intelligence department hasn't even arrived yet."

"Only by pacing yourselves will you be able to go farther. I don't wish to see everyone here in the hospital. No matter what work remains, do it tomorrow! This is an order. Could it be that when Reyne and Roland aren't here, none of you will listen to me?"

In everyone's eyes, Kelly, who seemed to be smiling ever so cutely, was actually rather scary. But, her seemingly forceful order was also filled with concern that warmed their hearts.

"Heh heh, even if Reyne and Roland were here, they probably wouldn't be of any help, and would only add to the mess."

Elisa's words, however, caused everyone to start laughing uncontrollably, but this was indeed the truth. If Reyne had been present, she would be nothing more than a rubber stamper, and someone would even need to be sent out to find her as she would always skip out on work. It was pretty much the same if Roland was present, with the only difference being that there was no need to send anyone to look for him. That was because as long as Roland himself didn't show up, nobody else would ever be able to find him.

"Why are they both so similarly skilled at giving other people trouble?"

"Hmph! When he comes back, he really needs to pay us well for doing all this."

While complaining, the two of them began working on various tasks. Neither of them was an ordinary person, and both of them had excellent bodies, so it seemed that they wouldn't be able to escape from overtime.

As for me, I was far off in another plane, and I couldn't possibly know about the things

happening in my homeland. Nor did I have any time to think about them, as the powerful Earth Elemental God was the only thing on my mind, giving me enormous pressure.

Even though a major battle was clearly about to occur soon, I spent much of my precious time before the battle in the library. Of course, there was a good reason for that.

Information was key to winning one hundred percent of battles. If I couldn't even find out what aces Emordilorcan had up his proverbial sleeve, of course I wouldn't be able to prepare for combat against him. If I had to use human lives to block him in the end, that would make me lose the advantage of proactiveness.

As the most ancient of the Elemental Gods, even if there were records of him personally fighting before, they would likely be from several thousand years ago. Although the two Elemental Gods on my side provided a little information, not even mentioning the fact that it was likely outdated, the fact of the matter was that Emordilorcan had never been truly forced to the brink before. It was only natural that the other two Elemental Gods didn't know if he still hid any aces.

However, with the assistance of several top-level archmages and hundreds of acolytes, we checked a countless number of books and discussed all our combat experiences. Anything related to earth magic was counted, and we summarized hundreds of rules and common methods by which earth elementals used earth magic along with their highest-level magic.

Our final anti-Emordilorcan plan contained a full 30 volumes and filled up an entire bookshelf. Not only did it involve plans against Emordilorcan, it was also a foundational summary of earth magic, which would be incredibly useful in earth magic cultivation and research in the future. At the time, Kaid was incredibly overjoyed and said that the result of this time's research meant that he wouldn't have to worry about research funds for at least the next ten years, which made Amelia rather jealous.

There was an old phrase in the magic society: "How much power a mage has depends on how long he has prepared for. If the mage has prepared for long enough and has a sufficient amount of backup plans and resources, it is possible to even slay a God."

"If someone simply goes up to his enemy with caring about anything at all, wouldn't

he be no different from a musclehead?" If it weren't for the fact that Margaret kept glancing in my direction out of the corner of her eyes as she said this, I would have readily agreed.

After confirming my enemy, I would observe my target and collect information before formulating a plan. Apart from an incredibly few, most of those of a job class such as a mage were extremely inept at melee combat. Never facing someone from the front was the most natural thing of all. In many previous situations, we had been forced to battle so there wasn't enough prior preparation. This time, however, we had plenty of time, and all our combat extrapolations and preparations were more than plenty. Otherwise, we wouldn't have come to attack Emordilorcan in his own home.

"He really is just a turtle hiding in his shell. This shell of his is so hard. Tsk. Tsk. Tsk."

Similar to what we had seen in the mortal plane, Emordilorcan finally came out to greet us in the basic form of a stone giant. In the mortal plane, his form had made people feel somewhat internally conflicted upon viewing him, but the current Emordilorcan's appearance made everyone feel helpless on how to comment.

Unlike his pitch-black outer shell in the mortal plane, Emordilorcan's stone giant body seemed to be constructed out of precious white jade, which seemed exquisite yet frail to the point that just a casual touch would shatter it. However, the fact that just his very steps were causing the ground to sink doubtlessly proved that his extravagantly beautiful heavy armor of white jade was of a scarily high quality.

The forbidden spell was still sending out waves in the Elemental Tide, and he rushed furiously in our direction. All the obstacles along his way were viciously sent flying; he ignored all spells and projectiles. With at a preliminary glance, anyone would know that the stone giant before us was definitely a tough one who would be difficult to even scratch.

But this was also within my expectations.

Once his direct route of charging towards us was basically confirmed, of course we would activate the trap we had long since prepared for him.

"Realm of Flowing Water."

The plentiful preparations beforehand reached the conditions necessary to bring enough water element here for the Water Elemental Goddess to activate her own

Divine Domain. A river suddenly descended from the sky, causing a mud-filled flood to cover this entire land.

The sand and water created a muddy flow that seemed solid but was actually flexible. The moving sand and rocks were far more difficult to deal with than the flood itself; sinking into it would mean that even thousands of kilograms of strength wouldn't be sufficient to pull yourself free.

This was a trap created by nature, and had absolutely nothing to do with magical resistance. This was a death trap created just for Emordilorcan who had peerless physical strength. When Emordilorcan got trapped in the mud flow, he struggled fiercely at first, but when he discovered that everything beneath his feet had turned into muddy water where he couldn't use his strength, he gave up resisting and allowed the muddy river to carry him with its course.

Although he was now stuck, the fact that his eyes were still filled with the intention to fight us seemed to be telling me something.

"Even if you can trap me temporarily for the time being, so what?"

That was the self-confidence in his body's defense power. And he had every right to have such self-confidence. In all our combat extrapolations, that Elemental God body of his built up over thousands of years had basically unbeatable defense. It had given us so many headaches.

The Water Elemental Goddess's Divine Domain was extremely limited here, and the mud river would quickly lose its momentum. But for us, this was sufficient.

"Frigid Ice River!"

The descent of ice caused the river to instantly transform into a frozen river as the newly-formed ice solidly trapped Emordilorcan within. Right after this, the remaining demons were already beginning to attack him. At this moment, Emordilorcan's reinforcements as well as those looking to cheaply gain the accomplishment of slaying a God all descended upon him.

"Die, Emordilorcan!"

The furiously roaring Wind Elemental God Camdian transformed himself into a Storm Giant and was intending to engage in melee combat with Emordilorcan in a repeat

performance of the combat situation from the underground labyrinth.

Roar!

Before he even reached Emordilorcan, the frozen Emordilorcan broke free from his bonds and sent a white jade-like huge fist that was even faster than Camdian's roar.

Boom!

There was no magic involved at all; it was merely a full-force blow. Yet Camdian's body was already shattered! When he reformed his physical body from mist at a nearby location, he was noticeably smaller than earlier, evidence that he was definitely injured.

The Wind Elemental God had overestimated himself. In the mortal plane, he was still able to exchange a few blows with Emordilorcan, but in this Earth Elemental Plane, Camdian was the one who was weakened while the Earth Elemental God was now using his true body. Plus, Emordilorcan's power was multiplied even further in his home plane. The power gap between the two was massive.

Another reason that Camdian's body was shattered in a single blow was that as a mage class, he actually went out and tried to engage Emordilorcan, the pure warrior, in melee combat. In the end, it was still him underestimating his opponent; he used his past experience to measure Emordilorcan's true strength and ended up suffering mightily with just a single exchange of blows.

But to me, none of this was that important. From the very start, I didn't consider the possibility of killing Emordilorcan using any sort of frontal attack. Getting him stuck here was enough for me.

"Beifeng, you're up. Do a good job for me in digging up his ancestors' graves, and don't leave behind even a single stone."

Just as I finished speaking, Beifeng's reply caused me to feel uncomfortable all over.

"Relax, with me going out there, I promise I won't leave even a single mouse or cockroach behind!"

I had always wondered about a certain question. Why was it that such normal-sounding words would always make people feel uncomfortable when he was the one

saying them?

And, right now, on the outskirts of the battlefield, the escaping Giant Sand Worms were blocked by a certain smiling Dracon Legend-ranked hunter, who was already beginning to use his super charisma against certain targets.

Soon, those restless huge beasts actually began listening to Beifeng's command, for only the reason that he told them there was one thing that could help them gain freedom and become even stronger.

"Our target is—"

"To not have any cavities in our teeth!" Adam was joking and messing around even at such a time.

"No! The Elemental Throne, dig it up for me! There's going to be no more Earth Elemental God for at least the next two thousand years! We're going to make this bastard lose his foundation and become homeless." I angrily shouted and pulled out my longsword as I watched the combat situation unfold in front of me.

Chapter 221
Ultimate Weapon

The scene of the battlefield was akin to fire mixed with water, but an existence that couldn't bear being lonely suddenly reminded me of its presence.

[If you're going to dig an underground tunnel to the Elemental Throne that's deep underground, then here's the question: Which method of bulldozing is the strongest…]

"The hell with the strongest! Always going on about digging and bulldozing, aren't you tired of overusing this joke yet?"

Fine then, ever since I reincarnated yet again, my System had been rather overactive. I was already getting tired of this same joke over and over again.

[Learn how to cook at New East Cuisine! Apart from not teaching how to cook using bulldozers, we have every cooking subject you can think of.]

"In the end, you're still going with bulldozers! Do you really like this joke that much?"

[Learn IT, it'll be easy to find a job if you go to Aptech; specialists here will teach the newest electronic bulldozing techniques!]

"Forget it, it's still bulldozing. There's going to be no end to this if I pay attention to you. Ignoring you, ignoring you."

I decisively ended commenting to that mysterious voice (fine, my System) as I made an effort on focusing on the problem at hand.

"Cough, we should all get serious. We're currently in a battle."

"Aren't you the only one not being serious?"

Indeed, everyone else's dissatisfaction showed on their faces. Even Margaret had a complaining expression as it was difficult for even her to control such a large-scale

magic array here. This magic array was all thanks to her, and she even had to focus on controlling her cannon fodder and placing traps, dividing her attention through multitasking.

I suppose that everyone else was busy fighting but I was lazing around and talking to myself really seemed bad, but right now there was no helping it even if I wanted to do anything about it.

Emordilorcan was now stuck and surrounded heavily by too many people that wanted him gone. The moment he had gotten stuck, both sides of the battlefield had rushed over to him.

"As long as I get rid of him, I'll be the next Earth Elemental God!" This was the direct type.

"Emordilorcan, it's time for my revenge for my grandfather/father/brother's death!" This was the revenge type, but weren't they a bit too many? Was Emordilorcan so evil? If they wanted to rebel against him, couldn't they come up with any other excuses?

"Gulugulu." Fine, this one couldn't even speak the common language of this world.

The ones who gave it their all were most likely all the Earth Elemental Lords. Although it was quite obvious that they were saving their true power and armies just earlier, they had now sent in all their forces to rush their mutual enemy, competing to be the first to steal away Emordilorcan's Divine Soul and divine power. All the venerated Elemental Lords had basically gone into combat personally.

Various gargoyles and SemiDragons clashed against each other in the skies, and huge creatures such as giants and earth elemental warlords were everywhere. Earth elemental creatures were typically on the large and strong side, so this was a battle that belonged to the giants.

The entire continent trembled and the mountains shivered as they fought with each other. However, the Earth Elemental God was never one who had the habit of hiding and running off.

Boom!

Another heavy punch from Emordilorcan sent a tower giant flying and viciously crashing into a distant mountainside cliff, causing a large portion of the cliff to

collapse.

One punch from Emordilorcan sent everything to their deaths, with Camdian as the only exception. Emordilorcan used his own combat strength to show us his astonishing power. At the very least, this old dog was still filled with a mouthful of sharp teeth.

Even in a heavily injured state, Emordilorcan was still ridiculously strong. His punch that defeated Camdian in a single blow had even slightly ripped a tear between dimensions. He had used pure physical might to break the space between dimensions. The moment I saw this scene, I unhesitatingly abandoned any thoughts of engaging him in melee combat.

"He used pure physical might and reached the dimensional level by breaking through between dimensions, is this the legendary "martial arts surpassing the void?" If he wasn't injured, would he literally be able to "battle through the heavens?" Yes, this is a reference to BTTH, another Qidian novel. [1] 1

"Young ones, taste my dimension-tearing fist!"

Fine then, I won't comment on his strange naming sense, nor will I use science to analyze just how much power is required to break through dimensions with physical force alone. This clearly unreasonable fact was indisputably shown right before my eyes.

Emordilorcan was currently using his true body, and the Elemental Throne was increasing his power to the point that it was nearly limitless. He was on a completely different scale here compared to his incarnation in the mortal plane.

Even if Poison God Felix appeared in front of him here, I felt that Felix would die in just two punches.

Yet no matter how strong Emordilorcan was, or how much the difference in power was between them, Camdian, who was also an Elemental God, couldn't possibly admit defeat so easily in front of everyone watching.

"Camdian is so useless. He was beaten half to death by a single punch from Emordilorcan, and then ran off just like a coward."

If such a news ended up being spread around, Camdian would be basically finished as

the Wind Elemental God. Not a single Wind Elemental Lord under his command would ever follow such a leader.

"Taste the fury of thunderstorms!"

Countless amounts of thunder were summoned, transforming into arrow bolts that continuously crashed into Emordilorcan's head. It forcefully caused cracks to appear.

It was evident that Camdian had learned from his earlier mistake and abandoned his foolish idea of engaging in melee combat with the Earth Elemental God. Instead, he decided to use long-range magic to bombard his ancient enemy.

Endless amounts of rebellious earth elemental creatures surrounded Emordilorcan and kept him busy, while Camdian was in a safe faraway location summoning all sorts of thunder, which was both safe and attention-grabbing. If this allied army defeated Emordilorcan, Camdian could even earn a nice reputation from this little show.

However, it was evident that he had still underestimated his opponent.

With just an instantaneous flash movement and a slam with the force of a mountain, Emordilorcan actually broke the laws of physics and landed directly on top of Camdian's head. He then pounded Camdian with an extravagant series of techniques.

"Mount Tai pressing on top, chopping through Hua Mountain, shoulder throw, chest throw, back pin, rabbit stomping the eagle, waist throw, iron bridge, deep water explosion… I never expected that Emordilorcan had been a member of the Wrestling League as well."

"You even have the spare time for running commentary? Hurry up and help out! Emordilorcan will be even more difficult to deal with once he breaks free. Damn it, he actually even had an instant movement ability." Amelia was in a very bad mood. When she heard that Emordilorcan was an expert in melee combat, she had intended to face him head on as she was also similarly skilled in this aspect, but now that she had seen his expert martial arts skills, she knew that she had no chance of victory.

"Relax, the larger the mass, the more energy it takes to make it move instantaneously. If he could use his instant movement ability as he pleased, he would have long since gotten rid of Kaid who's casting that forbidden spell. And since he's heavily injured, at least he won't have the energy to sustain his maximum output for very long."

"You think I'm worried? None of this matters to me whether this is a win or a loss. I'm just curious how he reached this level of physical power. When we defeat him, I'm going to take part of his muscle structure as my research material. Give me at least an arm or a leg. If you don't agree, I'm going to go on strike right here and now."

Fine then, I was incredibly mistaken to even think that Amelia could have been worried about me and the combat situation. This was the witch's true nature.

"Eh? Your assumption was correct. Emordilorcan indeed became weaker after using instant movement."

As I expected, even if Camdian was getting beaten up, he actually wasn't injured as heavily as the one punch from earlier. He wasn't even defeated yet; he even had the spare time to occasionally counterattack.

However, watching my ally get beaten up was no winning method, which was why I activated the next step of my plan earlier than originally planned.

"Beifeng, are you not ready yet?"

What I heard through my gnome-provided communication device was a certain individual's advertisement.

"…Bullbullbullbullbullbulldozing! Who's the best? Who's—who's—who's the best? Find Beifeng of the Gentleman Alliance, and you can also fulfill your dream of immigrating to East Mist for the low price of 998! That's right, 998! You didn't hear wrong! It's not 8888 or 88888, for merely 998, you can learn Beifeng's secret techniques of bulldozing beast taming!"

"Do you all love bulldozers that much? Will this joke ever end!?"

After my angry roaring, he finally quieted down, with only the sounds of digging to be heard.

"Um, Your Highness, it's rather dark underground. I was just singing to keep my morale up." Only a while later did I hear the sound of Beifeng attempting to explain to me.

"Hmph! I thought that you were having too much fun with those Giant Sand Worms and forgot your task. Did you invent some new method to have fun? Were you too busy

having fun? Should I apologize for interrupting your fun?"

"…"

"Hey, hey, don't fall silent at this time! Could it be that I was actually right about my guess! Hey, say something! This is making me really uncomfortable!"

Fine then, let's not care too much about the little details as long as it involves Beifeng; otherwise, this book will get banned sooner or later for indecency…

But, Beifeng quickly gave me a report. Emordilorcan's old nest was being protected by his divine power. Incredibly hard stone layers caused the Sand Worms' digging to progress rather slowly, and time would be necessary. The only part to celebrate about was that since we didn't take the underground labyrinth this time, instead digging straight to our goal, we already avoided many traps and obstacles. The only obstacle remaining was the ridiculously tough stone layers.

In fact, I had used this distraction tactic against Emordilorcan before already, but who cared? A strategy was fine as long as it worked.

"I now know the approximate location of the Elemental Throne; it's about three hundred meters underground. But the closer we get, the denser the earth element becomes. It's going to take some time to reach it by digging.

"Three hundred meters? It's about what we expected. How long will it take you to reach there?"

"Probably about two or so hours."

I took a glance at Emordilorcan who was currently giving us a show of fighting a "tiger" while empty-handed and helplessly shook my head. If I really waited for two hours, perhaps all of our allies would be dead.

"There's not enough time; activate Plan B."

"Are we really going to activate Plan B? That Plan B is a little too risky."

"I'm certain about it! Hurry up and activate it."

"Are you sure? Can't you reconsider? It's too dangerous!"

"We must use it. It's the best method for us currently, not to mention this plan isn't dangerous at all. At such a critical moment, time is of the essence, so why are you just hemming and hawing here?"

After a moment of silence, I thought that he was beginning to put my plan into action, but I didn't expect that he spoke up again in a sheepish tone.

"…Just what exactly is Plan B? There were too many words so I didn't read it earlier, and it is too dark underground so I didn't read it now. I just turned on a light but now I can't find it. I probably accidentally fed the plan to one of my little cuties."

I almost smashed the gnome communication device to pieces right then and there.

"You said all that just in order to cover up the fact that you forgot what Plan B was!? You fed it to your little cutie? Why don't you feed yourself? It was an incredible mistake on my part to even think that you were thinking about any potential consequences of Plan B! Just you wait, when you come out, @$Y%…"

Never has anyone in history ever been able to so easily incite my anger. No wonder Town Security treated "eating, sleeping, and beating up Beifeng" as their daily schedule, as this bastard was just too skilled at making others angry.

Fine, no matter how angry I was, it was impossible for me to beat that guy up through the communication device, and I still needed him in the future. Since that bastard forgot what the plan was, then I would just have to explain it to him.

"Move in an arc and ascertain the Elemental Throne's coordinates for me…"

I gave a huge sigh after telling him my plan.

"After we return to the mortal plane, I'm going to lock Beifeng into an exotic creatures' zoo as an exhibit! That bastard definitely meets the standard for being an exotic creature."

"Are you sure that it won't be a reward instead of a punishment…"

Amelia's reminder caused me to fall silent. A moment later, I came to a decision.

"In that case, I'll send him over to the gray elves to help them in their reconstruction. There's plenty of elven beauties there, and so many people want to go, but I feel that

with only elven beauties next to him but the land there being so barren that not even a rabbit can be found, only that will be the most fearsome punishment of all for that bastard."

"Your Highness! Please don't! I'll immediately carry out Plan B! I promise that I'll carry out your request with high quality and efficiency. Please don't send me to hell. If you truly insist, I prefer to remain in the Earth Elemental Plane."

The communication device was still turned on, and Beifeng was already begging for mercy. This man who took the path never traveled actually had something he feared after all. A wonderful job that countless youngsters in the prime of youth would dream for was actually a nightmare in his eyes, and he was even willing to stay behind in this hellish Earth Elemental Plane.

"Didn't you say that this world was hell to you?"

Before I even finished my sentence, I instantly recalled how, when I saw him last, there were so many strange-shaped creatures following him that he could open up an earth elemental creature museum. Just inferring a little at what he intended to do caused me to want to stop inferring entirely about this matter.

"Shut up and work hard. Otherwise, I'll send you to a heaven where there's only female elven beauties—why does this sound so wrong?"

And, currently, above our heads, a shadow had covered the battlefield below us, as a gigantic object was slowly moving.

"Is that a bird? A gnomish helicopter? It's Superman—no—it's a huge duck."

Yep, this was the core of my Plan B. The Ultimate Yellow Duck.

The creation of the moving fortress Ultimate Yellow Duck was personally led by the Great Sculptor Ainslo; countless tower giants had worked on it. It was tremendous to the point that those gazing upon it from the ground could mistake it for a huge floating island.

Although there hadn't been enough time for it to be equipped with weapons, just the characteristic of its tremendous size made it impossible to block. No matter what obstacles were in the way, it would reach its destination.

And, for it to be used directly like this, it was waiting in midair, awaiting my orders.

Boom!

The gigantic moving fortress's appearance changed the combat situation entirely. Its ferocious appearance shocked every single eyewitness, and even Emordilorcan was rather shocked to see it. And when he noticed just where that duck had landed, he used his instant movement ability again to attempt to stop it.

And, just as I expected, the Ultimate Yellow Duck landed and stuck its legs into the ground as it spread its wings. It suddenly opened its huge mouth and let out an angry roar.

Woof!

At that moment, everyone on the battlefield paused for a moment. Perhaps it should be said that nobody expected a duck to make such a sound.

Amelia kept shaking her head.

"What amazing and astonishing design! Did you think I would say something like that? Roland! This must be your terrible interests at work again. Are you intending to embarrass yourself in multiple planes now?"

"Hmph! Foolish mortals shall never understand the marvelous designs of geniuses. Watch, this is only the beginning."

The Ultimate Yellow Duck's tremendous feet were solidly planted into the ground as support, and its spread wings meant they would help shift its center of gravity. Its upper half, which was beginning to tilt, was actually the best balancing mechanism. Suddenly, it bent over and mightily chucked the ground.

Smash!

The Ultimate Yellow Duck ate some dirt, then spat out the dirt, then ate some more dirt, and spat the dirt out again.

"You bastard! Acting so pretentious, it was just a bulldozer again! Ah, why did I say again?" Adam's comment said what everyone was obviously thinking. They were all nodding.

[Learn bulldozing, which school is the best?] At this moment, the System couldn't help but pop out again. Ever since I made this Plan B, it wouldn't stop with the bulldozer jokes.

"That's enough! This is the Ultimate Yellow Duck, an ultimate weapon and moving fortress, not some bulldozer!"

Note:

1. Yes, this is a reference to BTTH, another Qidian novel.

Chapter 222
Ace

Although it seemed like I was just messing around, this was actually the cruelest plan to kill Emordilorcan. He was already stuck between a rock and a hard place.

The waves from the forbidden spell in front of him kept increasing in magnitude, while the yellow giant strange monster was digging into his old nest. It seemed that going forward or backward would be nothing but death for him.

And as for his allies… they were unreliable.

Not even the strongest of contracts could stand up to the test of time.

Die for the sake of an ancestor's contract? Nobody was so foolish; the Giant Sand Worms ran off after just a few minutes of fighting, while the Sand Dragons and Stone Giants also noticed that their opponents were difficult to deal with, and they began simply watching the battlefield. Very few of them were giving it their all.

Emordilorcan had left for far too long, and thousands of years had passed. His most trusted followers were long gone. If he had enough time—three hundred years, no, even thirty years, he had full confidence that he would be able to create a faction that was truly his own again here to act as his subordinates. Unfortunately…

"How could I possibly give you time? Am I foolish enough to raise a tiger that will eat me?"

Of course, I knew what Emordilorcan was thinking about. In a way, we were the same type—those who weren't exactly magnanimous, who absolutely had to repay a grudge or else we wouldn't be able to sleep well at night unless we got rid of our enemies completely.

[Why don't you just say that you're a small-hearted person who'll bear a grudge until the end of the world? By the way, is it really alright for the main character to be someone as unrighteous as you? You're even an epic hero; were the historians blind? You should be the antagonist.]

Shut up!

I forced myself to suppress my anger. My System was definitely being too overactive recently, especially right after it rebooted. It kept finding opportunities to tick me off. If I kept commenting, that would make me fall right into my System's trap.

From a certain standpoint, my System wasn't wrong. I was indeed the small-hearted type who would bear a grudge forever. I still remembered the fresh blood on the snowy white battlefield along with all the dying words of the Mist warriors as if it were yesterday. How could I possibly relax until Emordilorcan was dead for real?

"Checkmate! I'm attacking your weakness, the Elemental Throne, from two sides. Let me see just which side you choose to defend. Do you think you're Sun Wukong, with the ability to split yourself?" [1] 1

And when I witnessed what happened next, I spat out a mouthful of blood. I had actually jinxed myself.

The huge stone giant twisted himself and actually sent out three smaller stone giants that started running in two different directions. And, as they ran, those stone giants absorbed the earth element in order to strengthen themselves, enlarge, and split again… after just a short ten seconds, thirty-something more Emordilorcans had appeared!

"Impossible! How are we supposed to deal with so many Earth Elemental Gods?"

Someone was panicking now.

"It's definitely not impossible. If each clone had power equaling Emordilorcan's, he would have used this technique long ago. No, even if each clone had only half his power, we would have lost long ago. It's nothing more than a wild fantasy to think that he could win."

This person was slightly calmer, but his continually trembling legs betrayed his inner fear.

"Humans are born from humans, beasts are born from beasts, and even elemental creatures have elemental creature parents, but I just want to ask, Emordilorcan, what's your mother's name?"

I was viciously insulting him now. Although I seemed to be prattling on about nothing, my question was actually the most painful insult to elemental creatures of all. I asked this due to my understanding of what had happened in front of me, and it was also my way of showing my condescension towards Emordilorcan.

Apart from the top-level elemental creatures that could transform into humanoid forms, normal elemental creatures didn't have genders at all. It was natural that they also didn't have reproduction methods similar to species with genders.

Their reproduction was just like lower-level lifeforms, with copying and division as their main methods. That was why it was quite common for earth elemental creatures to split off part of their bodies to create clones of themselves—it was a common ability.

However, these simple clones wouldn't have wills of their own and would be nothing more than manipulated puppets. In order to create a new life and new will, which would be true reproduction, the earth elemental creature would need to split its soul and also give up approximately half of its power.

Of course, places with high elemental density could produce low-level elemental creatures naturally as well. More than 90% of the elemental lifeforms in the Elemental Planes were just low-level elemental creatures that followed their instincts. They lacked knowledge and wisdom. They would naturally split off once in a while and replenish their strength again by absorbing the earth element. Meanwhile, things would be a little more difficult for high-level elemental creatures.

Every time it was time to naturally split off, that would be when the elemental lifeform was at its weakest. High-level elemental creatures also had their own instincts to split off and reproduce, which were quite difficult to control. If the timing to split themselves was a bad one, and an enemy just happened to come looking…

This was why the older Elemental Lords would always suppress their basic instincts to split and reproduce as much as they possibly could. If they failed to suppress their instincts and ended up producing a younger clone, they were highly likely to be attacked by their enemies and die right then and there.

In order to prevent their enemies from finding out about their weak periods, some Elemental Lords with no moral limitations whatsoever would unhesitatingly devour their younger clones that just split off from them. This would result in not only replenishing their power loss that just occurred, but it would even greatly increase

their overall strength.

From a certain standpoint, every single high-level elemental creature that was born with intelligence was highly likely to face their own "parent" as its first enemy.

Back when there were only elemental creatures, all of them viewed this type of action as a normal course of survival. But after coming into contact with the outside world and obtaining an understanding of the morality of the outside world, high-level elemental creatures started treating "devouring their own children" as a taboo. Asking who an elemental creature's parent was was no different from asking how he managed to kill his parent and survive.

We investigated a tremendous amount of information in the library. Every one of us was certain that Emordilorcan would have the basic elemental ability to send out clones of himself. This was a basic instinct of all elemental creatures, and moreover, there were even records of Emordilorcan appearing in different places at the same time.

"The most I've ever seen was three Emordilorcans at the same time. Every one of them had incredible strength. And the strange part was, even destroying one of them didn't seem to have any effect on his main body at all—it was as if there was no connection between them."

Those were Camdian's words. Based on this, we made many inferences. We speculated whether Emordilorcan was actually a triplet, if he had several sons that worked together with him as a father and son team, or if his natural talent was in creating clones. There were several hundred such inferences.

However, all of them were shattered by the truth before us. Every "Emordilorcan" had very similar but different wavelengths from the original and had their own sources of magic power. It was obvious that they weren't his clones. It was as if…

"…As if they are his own children. Those wavelengths are basically just like a clone's; there's only one possible explanation of this. He devoured his own split-off children, transformed them into his own clones, and has been carrying them on him all along, intending to use them as consumable items at a critical moment. What difference is this from the foolish ogres? No, not even the ogres eat their own species, especially their own children!"

The Water Elemental Goddess Aylos had a face filled with fatigue after finishing her magical traps. Now, however, her face was filled with condescension for Emordilorcan. Not every elemental creature lacked morality, and as Sidunwar's wife, Aylos had many children of her own. Although most of her children had already passed on, she also experienced emotions and a life similar to most living creatures. She was filled with distaste for Emordilorcan's actions.

Even if we all looked down on and were filled with distaste for Emordilorcan, there was a cruel fact in front of us. Our opponent was even stronger than we anticipated.

Due to the difference in age, there were gigantic differences in the power levels of these thirty-something younger Emordilorcans. The strongest one was only about one-third of Emordilorcan's power level, while the weakest was probably only at the level of a slightly strong Elemental Lord. However, when Emordilorcan's power level was being used as the basis of comparison, this was already a significant number, especially since they were all clones of a Master Monk martial expert. They all had nigh indestructible bodies, akin to unstoppable freight trains.

Although they possessed their own bodies, they were all under the control of Emordilorcan's will. They split into two groups consisting of approximately seventeen or eighteen each as they broke free from the surrounding armies. They displayed their well-practiced combat cooperation techniques, with some of them performing flying kicks, punches, and body slams; each had their own role and complemented each other, which instantly helped them break free from the heavy numbers around them.

"The Eighteen Monks Formation? Does he intend to shoot a kung-fu movie? Just how old is this strategy supposed to be?"

Some tried to stop these Emordilorcans that were breaking free, but they would always mysteriously die off. We, however, were at a height to watch over the entire battlefield, and it was only us who could see the shadow of an instant flash behind those people.

"How shameless! Forget about hiding among his own clones, he's even ambushing those much weaker than he is."

Should I say that being shameless was the way to true strength? That "Eighteen Monks Formation" seemed strong already, but the worst part of it was that Emordilorcan himself was now hiding his true strength and acting as if he had strength equal to that

of his clones. Anyone who fought with him would instantly get pulverized before he would somehow manage to hide among his clones again.

"It's indeed quite strong, but it's still meaningless to us."

Clap!

With my indication, the pre-prepared trap was activated. Numerous catapults were brought out, but they were tossing out green barrels rather than stones.

Crack! *Crack!*

All these barrels exploded, causing pitch-black oil to be spread everywhere before being lit up.

This was alchemic oil that I had gotten from the goblins. The roaring flames transformed into a furious mountain of fire and swallowed up the surroundings. Thanks to the oil, the endless seas of fire devoured everything.

Soon, with some angry shouting, the flames were put out. What appeared amongst the flames were numerous pitch-black figures, and when I counted them, there wasn't even a single less Emordilorcan than before.

A fire like this would definitely be fatal to any mortal, and it would even be slightly bothersome to an Elemental Lord, but for Emordilorcan and his clones, this type of low-strength non-magical fire could be directly ignored. The only result that came of it was that their body's surface temperatures increased slightly and their faces were blackened by the smoke.

However, I laughed at this, because them ignoring it was the best result for me.

Clap! I gave another indication for the next step of the plan.

How could it be possible for the Water Elemental Goddess to be so fatigued from just a single trap? Another flood fell upon the battlefield again, and a mudflow caught all the Emordilorcans within it. This was indeed a trap that had nothing new about it whatsoever, but you know, it was fine as long as it was useful. This specially-made trap I designed for Emordilorcan who had ridiculous physical strength was indeed highly effective against him.

"Ice!"

I added my ice magic to the trap again and directly froze them in the ice.

Roar!

The angrily roaring Emordilorcan instantly broke free from the ice. This type of attack had basically zero attack power against him, and he felt like all it did was help him cool off. However, it angered him quite greatly. In his mind, these attacks were no different from pranks and were basically an insult to him.

Clap!

I responded by having several hundred green barrels of oil sent over to Emordilorcan and his clones once more, and soon a roaring fire covered them again.

Once again, there was no difference in the oil I used this time and last time. The result was also similar to last time, as soon, a bunch of stone giants with angry faces emerged from the flames. However, after this, there was something slightly different.

Crack!

The sound of rocks shattering on this battlefield didn't mean much, but for me, who had long been waiting for this moment, it was a heaven-sent sound.

Clap!

I had Aylos send yet another flood.

"Ice!"

I froze them yet again.

Clap!

Yet another sea of fire engulfed them.

Crack! *Crack!*

This time, the sounds of stones cracking were obvious for all to hear. Many of the stone

giants were already cracked all over.

One of the youngest Emordilorcans collapsed at this point. He immediately shattered and turned into white broken rocks, ending his long life as a puppet.

"Impossible!! This type of attack couldn't possibly pierce through our magical defense!"

Seeing my old opponent angrily roar in such astonishment greatly uplifted my mood.

"Hmph! Does this have anything to do with magical defense? This is just the expansion of objects that are heated and the contraction of objects that are frozen during sudden temperature differences. Stones will easily become fragile and shatter under repeated temperature changes between extreme heat and cold, which is one of the basic laws of physics. If you have the ability, then why don't you try changing this natural law as well?"

Clap!

Well, although Emordilorcan was asking, I wasn't as stupid as to explain it to my enemy on the battlefield. Since this was an effective method, I just thought the above to myself, continued to profit at his expense and decided to continue with this strategy.

After another round of ice and fire, five more Emordilorcans collapsed.

Clap!

After several repetitions of this process, there were only less than half of the Emordilorcans remaining, and Emordilorcan himself had long since abandoned trying to conceal himself among his clones and was trying to break free at all costs. Yet Thunder Eagles, formed from thunder, blocked him as the furious Camdian tossed thunderbolts at Emordilorcan from behind, suppressing him. The meat shield known as Adam was also deployed at this critical junction to control the situation.

Clap!

With this round, about ten more Emordilorcans perished.

*Clap… *

After three more rounds, only Emordilorcan himself was still standing. All the clones he had been saving up for the past several tens of thousands of years had been destroyed in an instant, and his white jade-like body was now cracked all over. The powerful Emordilorcan seemed like he was forced to the brink, but his eyes glared viciously at us and showed that he was still far from giving up.

“…Although pulling all the grunts together for an AOE attack was quite nice, the AOE still lacked effective power against the boss. It seems that he won't be so easily dealt with after all."

Boom!

Still, the continuously digging Ultimate Yellow Duck meant that time was on our side, as it would force Emordilorcan to use everything against us, no matter what aces they were.

"Come, come, I shall allow you to witness just what is a mage's deceit and shamelessness… cough—cough—I made a mistake! I meant to say a mage's knowledge and wisdom!" Seeing Margaret and Amelia suddenly glare angrily in my direction, I managed to change my words in time.

[Well, you finally managed to use modern knowledge from your world to your advantage against one of this world's residents. You're doing something that a transmigrator should…]

"Is there a reward? A title or Fate Points? Wonderful, you're finally doing something that a system should. I believe that in just a short amount of time, I'll level up, be fully outfitted with God Equipment, become the biggest boss of all, marry someone beautiful and rich, and reach the peak of my life. It's exciting to just think about it!"

[…Let me sing this song for you. Actually, I've prepared this song many years ago already. Time for the transmigrator trumpets to sound! We transmigrators have our strength, this strength is iron, this strength is steel…]

Fine then, it was too silly of me to have any expectations of the system.

"Shut up! Your singing is even worse than Gria's!"

[…For insulting the system, 100 Fate Points have been deducted.]

"This is the first time you've deducted points from me! You actually had such an ability!? Are you that pissed off at hearing me say your singing sucks?"

Note:

1. According to Wikipedia, Sun Wukong, also known as the Monkey King, is a mythological figure who features in a body of legends, which can be traced back to the period of the Song dynasty. He appears as the main character in the 16th-century Chinese classical novel *Journey to the West* (西游记).

Chapter 223
The Earth Elemental God's Rebellious Children

During the time we had to prepare before combat, we had countless discussions.

"Elemental clones from splitting? Destroy them with temperature differences between hot and cold."

"Diamond-like impenetrable body? That's possible. Adjusting his own elemental structure and transforming into a harder substance seems likelier and likelier the more I think about it. What should we do in that case?"

"Diamond-like structures are actually easy to deal with. Their solid structures also mean that they're more afraid of structural change. Temperature differences will change the structure, as it typically won't be able to stand up to high heat. We'll just have to bake the entire battlefield. I'll go find the goblins and prepare some extra top-level oil."

"Is transforming into a tremendous giant possible? Don't the final bosses in stories always suddenly have a bigger form at the end…"

"Reyne, you should really read less of those unreliable books about Legends and knights. Although larger bodies can increase physical power, speed and reaction time will definitely be decreased. Suddenly enlarging himself on the battlefield will only make him into a bigger target, and if the total physical mass doesn't change, it will take a huge amount of energy to recreate and reshape the body. Just how foolish would someone have to be to do this… but just for insurance, let's install a self-destruct mechanism on the Ultimate Yellow Duck. Let's leave the self-destruct mechanism up to the goblins as well."

"…I feel that he might have the ability to move at high speed within the ground. There are spells that resemble Dimension Doors in intermediate earth magic."

"Okay, then let's prepare some extra goblins mines, as well as inject large amounts of lead bromide and mercurous sulfide into the ground where the Earth Elemental God will move within."

"Is that useful?"

"Extremely useful. Anything that comes into contact with lead bromide will be unable to use any type of dimensional magic. As for mercurous sulfide, it has the nickname of 'Poison of the Earth.' Just a single gram can decompose an earth elemental. If Emordilorcan really intends to move through an area of ground that's filled with mercurous sulfide, heh heh."

"What other abilities could he possibly have? Let's consider it some more…"

"…Oh right, can we prepare an anti-gravity trap? We have tons of earth mages anyways, and as long as we can reduce gravity to zero, with Emordilorcan's huge mass, I refuse to believe that he'll be able to stand anymore."

If it was a warriors' discussion, it probably wouldn't take even ten minutes before the discussion devolved into "Go slice that bastard up," "Let's go over there to slice that bastard up," and "After killing him, where should we all go to celebrate—a bar or a barbeque?" They wouldn't even consider what to do in case they lost: "What, you're asking what to do in case we lose? You dare to shake our morale? Execute him!"

"Strength and glory, blood and thunder! By the way, is this slogan really fine? It sounds like the slogan for feeding. [1] [1] At the very least, add in something strategic that uses brains."

And if it was a group of mages having a discussion instead, then the discussion would actually take far longer than the actual length of the battle they were planning for. It was very common to prepare for at least two weeks for a single battle, and while the endless discussions were rather boring, they were typically quite effective.

As long as the enemy was confirmed and there was plenty of time available, they would research everything about their enemy's weaknesses and strengths, making several or even dozens of plans against their enemy. If they met the enemy as planned at the location and time that they wanted, then the result was usually a foregone conclusion.

Before us, currently, was such a typical battle of mages abusing a melee warrior.

"Ah, that guy really did go underground!"

"He ran into all the goblin mines—look—he came out! Haha! He's green and black all

over from the lead bromide and mercurous sulfide, so pitiful."

“…He changed his form! His white jade transformed into diamond. What a pity, why is it black diamond? As expected, all those that act like rich pay-to-win players will turn into poor free-to-play players in the next second, those rich pay-to-win players should all go die… You don't understand? There's no need to understand, it's professional vocabulary."

"The anti-gravity trap has been activated! Wow! He actually flew up into the sky like a balloon."

"He's dropping, he's dropping, hurry up and have the cannon fodder escape!"

"That bastard's about to use instant movement again! Use the 200 dimensional anchors on him, fire!"

"Haha! That guy only managed to teleport his upper half, he's now in two pieces!"

"Oh, he actually managed to put himself together again. He's as disgusting to deal with as a lizard."

Reyne was breaking out into a cold sweat all over as she listened to these mages joyously discussing the calamities that befell Emordilorcan. For the first time, she wondered if she had chosen the wrong job class. Emordilorcan, who was basically undefeatable in melee combat, was actually being toyed with like this. At this moment, she couldn't help but think of some classical phrases in this world.

"In mages' eyes, there are only two job classes in the world. Mages, and cannon fodders A, B, C, and D."

"Never ever fight a mage in a battlefield where he's had sufficient time to prepare beforehand. Otherwise, you won't even know how you died. Pay special attention to this part—never attack a mage's personal mage tower. With all his resources available and dozens of years of preparation, he'll easily be able to have over ten times his normal combat strength at his fingertips!"

"As a pure warrior, the first reaction you should have upon seeing an enemy mage is to rush him and slice him to death. Either cut him down instantly or be toyed by him to death after he recovers from the attack—it's your choice."

"Mages are just like firstborn sons. It's unfair? I'm sorry, there has never been anything such as fairness in this world. Why don't you consider how it's many times, even dozens of times tougher for mages to level up compared to other job classes? And do you think that obtaining knowledge in order to level up is the same difficulty as wielding your fists to level up? Do you know how many mages get stuck at Silver rank? Over 99%!"

"You want to defeat a high-ranked mage? Change the combat situation to an ambush or guerilla warfare. You want to rush him from the front? What's your name? Why am I asking your name? Well, I was considering what to write on your tombstone—how about 'The one thousand and eighth idiot who rushed to his death?'"

In fact, at this moment, Reyne even wanted to ask Roland to help her change her job class. After all, Roland had succeeded before in cultivating across both these job classes.

After some hesitation, she finally recalled another incident where she asked Harloys to teach her magic in the past, but helplessly gave up almost immediately.

"You want to learn magic from me? Okay, as long as you pass this test, I'll teach you. Try some high-level math with this calculus and derivatives. If you don't understand, you'll understand as you look through it. Relax, it's not that difficult. Roland was the one who invented it, and he often uses this to train his logical thinking ability. We also intend to spread this through the entire magical world, and it's being received quite well. As long as you can understand calculus and derivatives, it's evidence that you have the necessary talent, and I'll teach you real magic."

At first, Reyne was filled with hope as she took two classes which filled her head with numbers and symbols, and the more she listened the dizzier her head got. In the end, she even fainted in class, right in the middle!

"…What a waste of my time. To use that bastard Roland's quote, 'Idiots who don't even have 9 Intelligence should have some self-awareness and just go serve as cannon fodder.'"

Harloys' assessment of Reyne had made her quite displeased at the time, but she felt that she would rather continue practicing the sword than start learning magic with that ridiculous math. Besides, the power of Chaos wouldn't be weaker than the power of mages. It was, actually, the opposite; the power of Chaos came straight from the

source and was maybe even stronger.

However, right now, as Reyne watched Roland, Amelia, and the other mages having fun with their discussion, she felt an inexplicable pang of displeasure. Her heart suddenly trembled as the tremendous power of Chaos ran through her bloodstream.

"Indeed, I have no need to be jealous of them. I have my own path as well. Demons look down on using traps and investigations, and they are still undefeatable, anyways."

Karwenz's teachings suddenly rang in her ears.

"From the very moment that logic was used to explain elemental power, elemental magic was destined to have nothing to do with Chaos. Controlling Chaos never required logic to begin with. Willpower is the important part. Er, you can think of its power as your citizen, and all you need to do is utilize your will as a Chaos Lord. Who cares what the citizen thinks. I can observe it, so it exists. I want this to happen, so it did. As for why? It was never important to begin with. The more stubborn and resolute someone's personality is about this, the more suitable they are to control Chaos, which is why Roland is no good. He's too logical; he has to research everything about everything, but you're similar to me. You seem to be the logical type, but you're actually incredibly selfish and willful, the perfect natural-born type to become a Chaos Lord, the perfect natural-born type to control Chaos!"

Reyne clutched her hands as the Prince of Chaos gave her the special ability to control Chaos, and the endless void furnished her with limitless power. Pitch-black corruption seeped out through a dimensional tear—that was the most basic source of power for all the planes. The original power of Chaos began distorting this space.

Under the mysterious guidance of her willpower, Reyne began muttering an incantation in a low voice as she glanced over at Emordilorcan's children that had already perished.

“…Pitiful children, I can feel your rage and helplessness. You were stripped of your right to survival right as you were born; could there be anything crueler in this world? Getting devoured instantly by your father after being born in this beautiful world, could there be anything reviled more in this world? I, Reyne Qin Mist, representative of Chaos, shall give you all one more chance. Become my slaves for a chance at revenge! Come, children! If you're unwilling to remain like this, give over your souls filled with rage and unwillingness to me. Let Chaos build new bodies for you."

Reyne's hands descended; not a single speck of light surrounded them.

At this moment, some certain natural laws had begun to be distorted. The SemiGod mages instantly looked at her in astonishment. Since they were abnormally sensitive to the Elemental Tide to begin with, how could they possibly not notice this obvious power of Chaos?

Reyne finally regained her senses and rubbed the back of her head, not knowing what to do or what an incredible thing she had accomplished.

"Ah, what did I just do?"

Nevertheless, the power of Chaos had twisted the natural laws of life and death. These elemental children should have turned into elemental shards and returned to the Earth Elemental Plane, but instead, they now gathered together again. Their tattered bodies began piecing themselves together with each other, and those souls, which filled with hatred, combined with the power of Chaos and revived those souls that had already perished. The distorted, rebellious children of the Earth Elemental God managed to stand up again.

Judging by their physical appearances, they seemed to be stone giants that were haphazardly pieced together. Their bodies were filled with triangular snow-white crystals, and each of them had been pieced together using at least two or three of Emordilorcan's children's bodies. Having a distorted shape, like six hands or eight legs, was common for them, and all the numerous elemental eyes on their bodies were wide open. Deep hatred shone from within their dusky yellow eyes, as if they couldn't accept their deaths.

Reyne's pure power of Chaos had only acted as the glue and catalyst. What helped these un-existable existences return to this world were these "children's" hatred and rage at Emordilorcan and by extension, this world.

"I hate you! I hate my father! I hate everything in this world! I curse this world that gave me my life!"

Just looking at them would cause words of hate to furiously roar in one's mind, and mortals with weaker willpower would instantly become insane. These seven pieced-together, mixed giants were now living embodiments of hatred.

The entire continent was shaking as if it was making sounds of grief and pain. Thunder

gathered in the clouds as the furious Earth Elemental Plane began cursing what had just happened. Pitch-black clouds covered the lands—it was as if it couldn't bear to witness this; it was unable to tolerate its own favored child transforming into an existence that was cursed by all the Gods.

"This is the reaction of distorted divine power, which, according to the dimensional encyclopedia, is known as negative divine power. This power can only exist in one type of life form." Margaret adjusted her eyeglasses, but her expression was filled with astonishment, which was incredibly rare for her. She immediately sent Adam a message to immediately retreat back to us. If her expectations were correct, the upcoming battle was going to be far more dangerous, even more so than facing Emordilorcan head on!

Actually, Adam didn't need her command; he had always possessed sharp combat senses. When he saw Emordilorcan turn around and run off like a frightened rabbit, Adam instantly ran away at a speed faster than even the Wind Elemental God.

"Amazing! I'm actually able to meet such a rare species! Where's my notebook, I need to record this!" Amelia's reaction made everyone feel as helpless as usual. "This is wonderful! I'm having so many ideas now for the birth of my new Seven Virtues!"

Fine then, let us ignore this maniacal witch who had exposed her true form and couldn't stop herself from cackling.

"…No matter what, Emordilorcan counts as a God, and these children are divine children that did not want to be born. Under the influence of the power of Chaos, their divine power has become negative, and all the conditions have been met. There's no mistaking it. Just like 'Shadow,' they are a new species of creature cursed by all the Gods—Divine Sins!"

Divine Sins were mistakes that shouldn't exist and were created from unexpected side effects of divine power. As souls that had already perished, Divine Sins continued to live. They absorbed nutrition using their negative divine power empowered by pure hatred for their God ancestors and everything natural. The uncontrollable Divine Sins were cursed and hated by the Gods… as well as feared!

Yes, they had power that even their ancestors, the Gods, feared, and in fact, they even had powers that countered the Gods they came from. When facing a True Divine Sin, please treat it as an existence on par with a True Evil God; otherwise, one would be

certain to die.

As the result of Emordilorcan's self-deserving actions and the guidance of the will of Chaos, these so-called "rebellious children of the Earth Elemental God" Divine Sins came into this world. All of their gazes locked on to their own "father," eyes filled with hatred. Their wide-open mouths were evidence of their desire for "delicious food."

"Divine Sins are mistaken existences that shouldn't exist. All mages not at the SemiGod level retreat right away. If any of them see you, it'll be too late already. Luckily, there is an almost zero chance to meet one, and if you really do, well, that's just too bad for you… I finally understand why the monster compendium said that about them. This species is just too dangerous!"

Unlike normal elemental creatures, which received support and replenishment from the Earth Elemental Plane, the Divine Sins obtained elemental power through heartless robbery. All the earth elemental creatures in their surroundings were beginning to naturally disappear, with the tall tower giants instantly becoming shattered heaps of rubble. Even the powerful Sand Dragons became nothing more than dried salamanders. Who knew what other powers these Divine Sins possessed, but just their very existences had the side effect of becoming the natural enemy of all earth elemental creatures.

They were born due to their hatred for Emordilorcan, and had the same source of power as Emordilorcan. As the Divine Sins born from him, they were doubtlessly Emordilorcan's greatest natural enemy.

The instant they appeared on the battlefield, all the Earth Elemental Lords began to escape at top speed. That was the fear that frogs would instinctively have for snakes. In front of their natural enemy, they were nothing more than potential food.

The next moment, those raging seven Divine Sin brothers began a life-and-death battle with their father.

"Hey, Roland, even such a thing has come out. How do you intend to clean up afterwards? These things are even more dangerous than Emordilorcan. Shall we escape together back to the mortal plane as soon as we finish this battle?"

"Don't interrupt my thinking. I'm considering something really important right now."

"Hmm? Do you have a way to control Divine Sins? This is a new topic that nobody has

ever succeeded in before. Should I apply for research funds and a class on this topic from the Truth Symposium?"

"…No! Who could possibly control those things? I was just thinking about what name to give them. What do you all think of the 'Seven Brothers of the Gourd?' The one with eight eyes will be the big brother, the one with the shiniest eyes will be the second brother, the one that seems incredibly hard will be the third brother, the one that's been roasted red will be the fourth brother, the one with traces of water still on him will be the fifth brother, the smallest one that seems to lack presence will be the sixth bother, and the one with a gourd-like rock on its back will be the seventh brother—hey, why are you all leaving? You don't like these names?"

[I won't even bother making fun of you here. Do you really think that the residents of this world can understand your jokes from China of your original world? These jokes are too old, anyways. You're exposing your true age with how ancient they are.] [2] 2

"I wasn't joking around! I was being serious."

[…Then that's even more pitiful—no—even scarier. Your talent for naming is just as garbage as it's always been.]

"Shut up! Someone who can't carry a tone doesn't have the right to hog the microphone!"

[…*Brothers of the gourd, brothers of the gourd! Seven flowers growing on the same vine! Whether the wind blows or the rain falls, they fear nothing, lalalala…]*

"Ahhhh! You're completely off tune! Are you trying to force me to death due to obsessive-compulsive disorder? Just kill me already!"

Note:

1. Game vocabulary that means to give the enemy many kills due to a lack of skill.

2. *The Seven Brothers of the Gourd* is a several-decades-old Chinese children's story.

Chapter 224
Challenge

"Everything is the result of karma. Even simple acts, such as eating and drinking, are predetermined, and one's actions will be one's downfall…"

"Roland, talk so that we can understand."

"No zuo no die! [1] 1… Fine, don't look at me like that. I'll be more direct. It means that you won't die if you don't deserve to die! If you deserve to die, then you'll die!"

The scene before us caused countless exclamations, as the undying Emordilorcan met his scariest opponent ever. When the Brothers of the Gourd [System: Are you sure that you're going to call them by this name?]… Fine, when the unnamed Divine Sins locked on to their father, the destined battle began explosively.

Or should I say that it was a suppression rather than a battle…

If Emordilorcan had been in his top, uninjured condition, perhaps this battle would have been more equally matched. However, he had been heavily injured in the mortal plane, and he had just gone through the baptism of ice and fire. The destruction of his clone children had also given him quite a bit of damage. Just maintaining his physical body and preventing it from collapse was already getting difficult for him, not to mention he had to deal with the incredibly dangerous Divine Sins.

On the other side, the seven rebellious children had just been revived, and their powerful hatred gave them limitless motivation. Their natural talent to absorb the earth element was the natural counter to all earth elemental creatures, and since they were Emordilorcan's cloned children, they also had Emordilorcan's battle experience and techniques!

These souls had been within Emordilorcan's body just earlier, but they now began fighting with him. This time, even the strong Emordilorcan had a look of despair flash in his eyes when he discovered that his heavy punch, which could tear even the dimensional fabric, now became his opponent's technique.

"Ahhh! If you want my head, you'll have to take it with your lives!"

Still, Emordilorcan raised his head and shouted angrily to the skies before exploding with the viciousness of a warrior.

But, no matter what he did, it was still meaningless. What happened next showed that this battle had a foregone conclusion from the very start, or perhaps I should call this a dinner rather than a battle.

Emordilorcan's attacks had all become ineffective, and any contact caused his body parts to be stolen through earth element absorption. What could he do? With just a single exchange, Emordilorcan was pressed down onto the ground, which was followed by an early Armageddon, just for him.

"Ahhh!"

The seven Divine Sins opened their mouths wide and began chowing down on their father's flesh and bones. They instinctively began completing their incomplete selves, weakening Emordilorcan by stealing away his earth element. Emordilorcan could only pitifully scream as he watched his own demise. After Emordilorcan devoured more than thirty of his own children, it was time for his children to devour him.

[Divine Sins: Unnamed. The Divine Sins were created from the Earth Elemental God Emordilorcan. Currently undergoing evolution. Already known abilities: earth element absorption, negative divine power. System Assessment: If you can't find any method to deal with them, then just run away. This isn't shameful as well. I'm being serious. In the Earth Elemental Plane, most likely not even a True God will be their match!]

The system's assessment was very appropriate. Even the forbidden spell's casting behind me had ended. Kaid had preferred to take the elemental backlash and escape with his team.

Seeing the Earth Elemental God receive the punishment he deserved, I hesitated for a moment before coming to a decision.

"We'll retreat as well…"

"Um, everyone wait a moment…"

Just as I made the decision to retreat, Reyne suddenly spoke up with an awkward expression on her face. She never expected things to end up like this.

“…I think I can control them."

"What!"

"What!?’

Everyone’s faces were filled with shock. Controlling Divine Sins? This was unheard of. If Divine Sins could be controlled so easily, they wouldn’t be existences that gave even True Gods headaches. The only way to deal with them was to repeatedly seal them.

Seeing our expressions of shock, Reyne started panicking as well. Everything she did just now was when she was in a daze, and even she was unsure of what it was.

"When I was making a connection with them earlier, there was a line like ‘I, Reyne Qin Mist, representative of Chaos, shall give you all one more chance. Become my slaves for a chance at revenge’ in the incantation. They answered my summons, so a contract should have been formed. I should be able to control them, I think."

"Can you control them now? Make them listen to your commands? You’re certain?"

Although there may have been a contract, Divine Sins were far too dangerous—it was to the extent that even demons wouldn’t dare to deal with one, which was unbelievable. Even when I possessed "Shadow," it was the same for me—I barely dared to use him. Apart from fearing that the Gods would notice and simply kill me with a flick of their fingers, I also feared the possible backlash from him.

"I’ve researched Divine Sins as well before. They’re basically impossible to communicate with. Are you certain that they even understand what a contract between master and servant is? When you approach one, just see if they’ll treat you as a passing snack."

Reyne sunk into meditation as she closed her eyes and lowered her head. She was inspecting the contract connection she had with them and was trying to see if she could control them.

But she quickly opened her eyes with an expression filled with fear.

“…These creatures have no sense of reason at all. They instinctively hate everything, and they want to tear everything apart. At most, I can control them to have them destroy someone, but I can’t control them to not destroy someone."

Whelp! That was the result, after all. But it was already much better than what I expected.

"Can you order them to hibernate?"

Judging from my experience in controlling Shadow, Divine Sins all acted based on instinct. Commands that were similar to instincts such as eat, sleep, and attack were all commands that they could understand.

"Let me try."

Reyne closed her eyes again, and this time she revealed a jubilant expression.

“…Not currently, but it should work once they’ve eaten their full."

Hearing this, everyone finally heaved breaths of relief. For Emordilorcan, who was so strong, to turn into food for these Divine Sins so easily gave us a huge amount of pressure.

"We’re still going to retreat. Hurry up! We can’t guarantee that after they’re done with the main course they won’t treat us as a side dish. Reyne, when they’re done snacking, immediately order them to sink into eternal hibernation. Camdian, if the hibernation succeeds, immediately notify all the Earth Elemental Lords to not enter this area. It would be best to construct a forbidden zone here so that they can truly sleep for eternity."

Hearing this, Reyne began to pout. It would seem that she had some objections to my plan.

“…Um, can we take one to the mortal plane? With how strong each one of them is, it could be a help to us."

"Don’t even think about it. There’s only one possible result if we take a Divine Sin with us to the mortal plane—the True Gods descending upon us in a horde, immediately killing the Divine Sin and swatting you to death like a fly along the way. Even if you managed to hide one successfully, this type of lifeform, which only knows how to

destroy, would cause a catastrophe either sooner or later."

Reyne instantly went into a depression, with an expression just like a kid who had her candy stolen from her.

“…But just borrowing part of its power is alright. I remember that Karo has spells on partial dimensional summoning, but that will take time to research and learn as well. Right now, let’s not waste any more time and retreat immediately. Reyne, you first."

Reyne nodded when I said this and turned around to leave, but everyone else paused in surprise, as they understood what I implied by my words.

"Roland, you’re not intending to retreat with us?"

Amelia was rather hesitant.

"I still need to go over to the Elemental Throne and gather some materials; you know about this already…”

"Let’s go together. That’s Emordilorcan’s old nest, after all. Better to be on the safe side."

"No need! It’s just material gathering, such a small matter. You guys should leave first. Your power wavelengths are too obvious, and those Seven Brothers of the Gourd will notice you."

Margaret stepped forth and seemed to want to say something when Adam pulled her and stopped her. He walked in front of Amelia and took charge.

"Alright, we’ll leave first. You should finish up on your end as quickly as possible as well."

I nodded and stomped as a pitch-black shadow surrounded me, and I transformed into shadows and went ahead at high speed, no longer able to hear the argument behind me.

"Why did you let him go? It was obvious that he was lying. Roland has the habit of touching his nose whenever he lies, and you know about it as well. With his current power rank, if he meets some tough opponent…”

Margaret was filled with dissatisfaction as she questioned Adam.

"Of course I know that he was lying, but he wasn't entirely being dishonest either. It's true that he's going to gather materials, but getting revenge is probably the main topic he has in mind."

"Revenge against who? Is there some enemy of his at the Elemental Throne?"

"Of course—Emordilorcan. Didn't we come all the way here just for him?"

Adam's face was filled with astonishment, with an expression like "how could Margaret ask such an idiotic question?" However, Margaret was currently now glancing at the battlefield close by where Emordilorcan had been over half devoured and was deader than dead.

"You're saying that Emordilorcan's not dead yet?"

"Of course not. There's no way that he's so easy to deal with. For such a sly old fox, faking his death couldn't be any more normal. Didn't we meet someone who faked his death that one year, and you were even the one who saw through it."

Margaret was instantly rendered speechless. The sly old fox that she uncovered back in the day had been Roland himself.

"Do you have any proof?"

"My instinct. As for evidence or whatever, you'll have to ask Roland. He's more suitable at being a brainy detective."

At hearing this, Margaret's icy expression started defrosting, but she was still filled with dissatisfaction. She had now deduced that these two old friends had played a trick on her again, while Amelia even directly headed towards the Elemental Throne's direction. However, Adam blocked her in a flash.

"Get out of the way. I'm going to go help him."

"…Don't think that Roland's the type to not mind anything. Actually, he really cares about the People of the Mist that had died."

Amelia was somewhat confused to hear this, as she didn't think it had anything to do

with the current situation.

“…Since the People of the Mist suffered such great losses, and Emordilorcan is the only remaining perpetrator that’s still having such a carefree time outside, how could Roland possibly let this stand? Now, do you understand why he went by himself?"

"Revenge by single combat? That’s just too foolish."

Adam shrugged rather helplessly.

"I apologize. Sometimes, men are such foolish creatures. Without being able to personally slay the perpetrator and serve justice for the dead, he probably won’t be able to sleep well at night."

Amelia reflexively chewed on her fingers and showed her obvious worry, but Margaret suddenly consoled her.

"Have you ever seen Roland be on the losing end in a battle of wits? He’s such a sly one; how could he possibly go to his death so easily? Since this is a battle that Roland’s prepared for so long already, you should be worried about his enemy!"

And, right now, just as Adam surmised, I was heading for the target coordinates that Beifeng had provided me. My angry shouting reverberated through the underground labyrinth.

"Coward! I’m by myself, and you still don’t dare to show yourself? If you don’t come out, I’ll attract those Divine Sins to this location, and watch how you die!"

It seemed that my threat achieved its purpose, as a familiar voice finally sounded behind me, but it was filled with bone-piercing hatred!

"Damned Roland! It’s all because of you I lost everything! Today, it’ll be either your death or mine!"

Note:

1. According to Wikipedia, *No* zuo *no die* (Chinese: 不作死就不会死 or 不作不死) is a Chinese internet meme. The original wording of the Chinese phrase means "one would not be in trouble had one not asked for it." The "zuo" here means asking for unnecessary trouble.

Chapter 225
Brink

This was a giants' temple. Massive purple gemstone-embedded doors towered at the entrance, and were large enough for multiple titans to enter together. The tall ceiling seemed as distant as the clouds, and the interior was wide enough for multiple gigantic dragons to fly around as they pleased. Even the ground was paved with rare and valuable types of jade.

The drawings on the walls of the temple were countless fairy tale-like stories, with various epic battlefields, including enemies that were incredibly strong. There were True Gods from the ancient past, Legend-ranked demons, and countless extinct creatures that were unidentifiable. The giant in the drawings, who stepped on dragons and slew Gods as the main character, was the master of this temple—the Earth Elemental God Emordilorcan.

In the past, the Earth Elemental God had been the most ancient God at the very top. For all the undying, this legendary title represented countless years of history and epics and legends.

Generations of True Gods had perished and risen up, while Emordilorcan had existed throughout all these years. He had left his own mark upon history, which was plenty of proof for his strength.

The countless ages had allowed Emordilorcan to arrange his old nest into a glorious divine temple just for himself. In the past, this place had been filled with his loyal servants and worshipers that would come from thousands of kilometers away just to see him. Emordilorcan would sit high on his throne and observe the teeming lifeforms below.

However, right now, this place was entirely empty. The only guest standing in the plaza seemed like an ant compared to the temple's size. But, he was an unmistakable uninvited guest, as well as the most dangerous challenger.

"Emordilorcan, come out here! I know that you're hiding in here! If you don't come out, I'm going to smash the Elemental Throne to pieces!"

“…How did you know that I wasn’t dead?"

Emordilorcan’s familiar voice echoed throughout the temple, and I could hear the suppressed rage contained within his words. For him to have been forced down from his glorious throne all the way to hiding in a corner was completely the fault of this "ant" before him. Of course he would hate me.

His angry question was as loud as a thunderclap, but I ignored him. I had no intention of giving a long speech, which would give my enemy enough time to prepare and overturn the situation.

Actually, I knew from the very start that he couldn’t possibly have been defeated just like that. The title of the oldest and strongest Elemental God couldn’t have possibly been for show. I had guessed, from the very start, what Emordilorcan would do when our forces gained an overwhelming advantage early in the battle, and he had refused to show himself no matter what.

"Emordilorcan’s pretending not to notice me while secretly making his own preparations? He must be planning on winning without even taking part in battle himself. You want to know how I came to this conclusion? Because if I was in his situation, I would do the same thing!"

If I was in the situation where my power level was at an all-time low, and I was facing an enemy where I had a less than 20% chance of victory, then I would naturally also want to think of ways to avoid this battle.

From his viewpoint, as an Elemental God, this place would be my home field. Fleeing without battling was rather impossible to think of. Even if I ran away, my enemy would surely chase me wherever I fled, and I might very well be discovered by my enemies while in my seriously injured state. And if I was to fight a battle where I was certain to lose, that would be even more foolish.

Using oneself as the standard to measure the enemy was an iron maxim that guided countless undying individuals past numerous calamities. In a way, Emordilorcan was no honest and direct good person, so his choices were incredibly similar to what I would have chosen.

"Is he going to fake his death or escape? He’s the Earth Elemental God, after all, and he’ll be greatly weakened if he leaves this plane. In that case, that only leaves faking

his death."

Tossing out some bait and having the bait die off in his own place so that all his enemies believed he was dead was one of the most common and effective tactics that old sly foxes like him preferred to use in order to continue surviving.

In order to make things realistic enough to where all the Elemental Lords believed that he was dead, Emordilorcan would have to pay a heavy price. He was even willing to sacrifice the majority of his power for this, as just surviving was enough for him. As long as he survived, he had the hope of becoming stronger again and regaining everything he had lost.

And what absolutely confirmed for me that the Emordilorcan up above had only been yet another clone of his which contained the majority of his true power was the scene where he was devoured. As the Earth Elemental God, even if some of his earth element power was absorbed by the Divine Sins, he could have just replenished his power again using the Elemental Throne. However, I didn't see any signs of him gathering the earth element again to reform himself. He died too quickly—it was almost as if he was trying to die as fast as he could.

And since he already made such a large sacrifice, I supposed that even having the Elemental Throne be destroyed, which would cause him to lose his identity as the Earth Elemental God, was within his limits. He would definitely hide in silence until the very end unless I managed to threaten his life like with the Divine Sins.

"…Even if I lose everything, it's fine as long as I'm still alive! I shall pay back my losses today tenfold tomorrow!"

I could even imagine the way he looked, grinding his teeth in the shadows. After all, I did the same thing in the past, but I definitely didn't want his idea of surviving and taking revenge in the future to come to fruition.

The stubbornness of the undying helped him to decide, from the very beginning, to sacrifice almost everything in order to live. If it was someone else, perhaps I would even praise him a little, but since this was that bastard Emordilorcan, I only had one comment.

"You want to live? Dream on! Why didn't you ask those who you killed, all those innocents that died because of war, whether they wanted to live or not!?"

I have many personality defects. Probably the ones at the forefront are stinginess and always bearing a grudge. I probably wasn't going to be able to change them ever in my lifetime, nor did I intend to change them.

For the true secret perpetrators that destroyed the Mist Kingdom back in the day, I spent hundreds of years to find them all and kill them. In this battle, all the beastmen tribe leaders had died off, and we were still finishing up the post-combat dealings with them. But if the only "escapee," Emordilorcan, didn't die, I wouldn't be able to sleep well at night!

"The Earth Elemental God? Heh heh, no wonder you have the nickname of a cowardly turtle. You don't even dare to come out when I'm by myself; are you that afraid of me? Ha! For an Elemental God to actually fear a newbie who just entered the Gold rank, if everybody knew about this, your reputation would be ruined. Oh, my apologies, I forgot that you didn't have much of a reputation to begin with."

"Roland! You're courting death!"

Emordilorcan's angry roars kept echoing within the empty temple, but I still had no way of knowing just where he was hiding. None my detection magic worked in finding him, so it seemed that he was hidden quite well.

After paying such a price, it was almost impossible for Emordilorcan to be willing to show himself. He would almost certainly hide like a cowardly turtle till the end. When an existence like Emordilorcan abandoned everything and focused only on hiding his presence, it would be exceedingly difficult to find him. So, that was why I kept taunting him to try and get him to come out. I needed to make him think that he could take me on one hundred percent, as well as inflame the deep grudge he had for me, so that he could no longer calmly tolerate his most hated enemy parading about in front of him.

With all the above factors completed, I would also give Emordilorcan hope that he could protect the Elemental Throne and his Godhood status, as I personally went about destroying the Elemental Throne, which only his interference would be able to stop me from doing. With all these factors added up, I felt that he would never be able to resist coming out.

"Come! As long as you kill me, you can have your revenge, as well as keep your divinity."

Yep, I was using myself as the bait to reel in a big fish. Although I might be reeling a whale, only by showing him that I had truly come by myself and making him think like he could win would Emordilorcan be willing to appear. This would be my only chance at personally taking revenge!

And the moment he appeared, it would definitely be a battle to the death. The fact that he still hadn't appeared using his true body meant that he was still testing to see if I had some type of ambush waiting for him.

"Alright then. If you won't come out, I'll just destroy this Elemental Throne, and you can sleep for eternity!"

I walked forward casually like I was taking a leisurely walk, but the air within the temple suddenly changed pressure to the point that it was slightly suffocating. This caused me to smile.

"An ambush? He's finally fallen for the bait!"

I suddenly stabbed my pale white sacred sword of justice into the ground. Ice instantly covered this area, and the sound of pain that came from underground was incredibly pleasing to my ears. That bastard had finally taken the bait.

"Roland, we found him. Not only is he underground, he's all over. In a way, we're inside his stomach."

Harloys' notification astonished me. Whatever was beneath me still wasn't his true body? But soon, I received a more detailed explanation.

"He probably separated the concept of his very existence and placed them within the different drawings on the wall. Only by putting them all together will it become a complete Elemental God. This basically means that he forcefully separated his power and soul. Not only will this greatly weaken his power, it's more painful than you can imagine. It's far worse than dying over and over again, so this guy is definitely quite vicious even to himself! Only by treating oneself viciously will one be able to treat others even more viciously. Be careful! This time, you've hooked a brutal, man-eating shark!"

At this moment, all those truly realistic-seeming drawings flashed through my mind. Now I understood how he had hidden himself so well.

After I blocked his underground ambush and glanced over at the drawings on the walls, Emordilorcan knew that he had been exposed.

The next second, all those drawings came to life, as all the Emordilorcans depicted within them started materializing into ethereal flashing figures. The next moment, the figures combined together and a familiar figure was once again in front of me.

"Emordilorcan!"

Just like that day, when I had met him in the underground labyrinth at Antuen, a pitch-black stone giant was viciously glaring at me with hatred in his eyes.

Meanwhile, I started laughing out loudly.

"Ha! I can finally have my revenge! Beifeng! Now!"

After I shouted out in anger, the entire earth started trembling. Behind us, the Giant Sand Worms now under the command of the Dracon hunter were beginning to enjoy the finest meal they had ever tasted, the symbol of authority that countless high-level earth elemental creatures dreamed about—the Earth Elemental Throne.

The pitch-black giant looked at me in astonishment. He probably never imagined that his well-defended treasure trove had been dug through to by an underground tunnel.

"Hah! Why are you looking at me like that? Did you really think that I would leave the Elemental Throne alone for you? The Elemental Throne was my main target from the very start!"

Yep, coming here to the Earth Elemental Throne and finding Emordilorcan was for my personal grudge, but destroying the Elemental Throne was my main strategic objective here. As long as I achieved this goal, I would definitely have profited by coming here.

The revival of the Elemental Gods caused an increase in the Elemental Tide. This would then lead to a closer connection between all the planes with the mortal plane. Soon, a new battle and unwelcome invaders would be appearing.

And unlike "history," the Elemental Gods were being far more active than usual, and the speed of increase for the Elemental Tide had far surpassed "history." Unless I took action, there would probably be very little time to prepare for the major upcoming

battles in the mortal plane. The premature arrival of the Undead Calamity would be the most obvious example.

"The Elemental Throne creates Elemental Gods. If any of the Elemental Planes have their Elemental Throne destroyed, that means that no new Elemental God will be able to be born. The Elemental Tide will flow back just like how water always flows to lower places, as the Elemental Plane will absorb additional amounts of its own element to create a new Elemental Throne. In that case, the increase in the Elemental Tide for the mortal plane should stop for the time being."

From a certain standpoint, every active Elemental God in the mortal plane was my enemy.

That was why I made Camdian take the blame for me on a certain matter. I definitely didn't promise a single thing to any Earth Elemental Lord. I only hinted to Camdian that "only by eliminating Emordilorcan can a new Earth Elemental God be born, and this is how we can lure the Earth Elemental Lords into fighting for our cause."

I didn't say a single lie. I simply didn't mention the time it would take for the next Earth Elemental God to be born. Anything "extra" was imagined solely by Camdian himself, and I didn't even show my face around, so the Earth Elemental Lords would only be able to blame Camdian for not being able to become the Earth Elemental God.

Yep, I had dug a trap that he had kindly fallen into for me. The best result would be that the Earth Elemental Lords were so furious that they ganged up against Camdian and managed to kill him for me, which would definitely save me a lot of trouble.

At this time, all the seeds I had planted were finally sprouting, and it was time for me to claim my rewards from my traps. The Elemental Throne was currently being devoured by the Giant Sand Worms that lacked intelligence, and every bite felt to Emordilorcan as if they were biting into his heart. His diminishing divine power had been gathered by him over the countless years, and he was weakening with every moment.

This scene was basically a reenactment of what happened at Antuen. Only this time, I didn't leave even a single chance for him to break past any obstacle, setting traps for him every step of the way.

If he had stayed within the walls of his temple, even if he lost his Elemental Throne,

nobody would have been able to find him. But now, he had come out already, and the Elemental Throne was destroyed. It would be nearly impossible for him to escape now.

"There's only battling to the death."

At this very moment, a sliver of fear shot through Emordilorcan's eyes. He truly felt that his life was now being threatened, but at the very next moment, his fear transformed into viciousness.

Some people would become cowardly when it came to a junction of life or death, while some people would explosively erupt and go all-out against their enemy, at the very least trying to take their enemy with them in death. It was obvious that Emordilorcan, who had reigned for over tens of thousands of years, was of the second type.

"Rahhh!"

Together with his angry roaring was the collapse of his glorious temple. Emordilorcan had now taken back all of his power as he strengthened his body while the earth shook around us.

His pitch-black stone armor was growing spikes, and his eyes under that armor were filled with maniacal, bone-piercing hatred.

"Roland, he's coming! You've forced this vicious wolf to the brink. This will be the final, most furious attack of all; you can't be too cautious."

Before Harloys' reminder even faded from my ears, I already started laughing out loudly.

"Hah! Isn't this exactly what I wanted? Come, Emordilorcan! Don't you hate me, and want to tear me to pieces? It's the exact same for me. I've long since wanted to slice and dice you into little pieces. In that case, let us have an all-out battle to the death, right here, you and me. Let us battle until one of us is deader than dead! Only the side with the deeper hatred that wants to kill the other more will be able to survive!"

My injured vicious opponent used his angry roaring and rushing over to me in lieu of his answer.

As for me, I tossed away the pale white sacred sword in my hands. The upcoming battle wasn't one that an Epic-level weapon like it would be able to participate in. Once

Harloys returned to me, I would have an even better sword, a magical sword that would be able to destroy anything.

"Awaken, Yin's Extreme—Ice Calamity!"

Chapter 226
Icy Flames

The entire temple was collapsing. Due to its height, the broken stones that fell from the ceiling hit with the force of meteors, smashing large holes into the ground. However, the two that were facing off against each other ignored this nearby threat.

With a flash, that gigantic black stone giant vanished completely. In the very next instant, I swung my sword.

Clang!

In the midst of falling stones, the sword slice met Emordilorcan's heavy fist, sending sparks flying everywhere. The impact forced me into the ground, and my right arm, which held my sword, ached with pain. My purlicue [1] [1] also started bleeding. However, I revealed a delighted expression.

"I'm able to block his attack!"

Yep, facing off against Emordilorcan and being able to block his heavy fist was already beyond my expectations.

"You really think you can win just by being able to block me!?"

A thunderous roar echoed throughout the temple as the raging Earth Elemental God vented his anger and laughed tauntingly at my delight. "Then let me inform you! That punch just now was only one percent of my strength! Doesn't that make you despair?!"

Hearing this, I laughed out even louder than he did. Was he just testing the waters? It was the same for both of us; my sword slice just now hadn't used any of my trump cards. Even though I was actually somewhat disappointed inside, I definitely wouldn't let it show or lose in a war of words.

"I know how to talk a good fight, too. My attack just now was also only one percent of my strength. Were you trying to give me a massage?"

The power of frigid ice was gradually spreading down my sword, and everything was within my expectations. Before I could even stand back up, Emordilorcan's furious barrage of attacks arrived again.

Whoosh!

Emordilorcan didn't respond to me this time as he took a deep breath, shook his body, stomped, and instantly vanished again.

His gigantic body had inconceivable agility. The afterimages he left behind were actually beyond the ability of my eyes to perceive. I only saw a blur before the giant arrived before me. The only thing I could do was follow my combat instincts and wield my silver longsword in defense.

A force that was too strong to resist against was transmitted to me through my sword. The scenery around me changed at a rapid pace; with just a single blow, I was sent crashing into the incredibly high ceiling.

Cough!

The impact from my back hitting the ceiling caused me to cough out a large amount of blood. This blow heavily injured my internal organs. It would seem that there was still a large difference between our strengths. My physical body's strength was akin to a titan's but was nothing before him at all. No wonder all those tower giants were also destroyed by Emordilorcan in a single blow.

My right arm was beginning to ice over, and my ice crystal sword was frozen to my hand, which was the only reason I hadn't dropped it. With this exchange of blows, I had lost again, but I still laughed.

The force of gravity caused me to fall from the ceiling, but a pair of crystal ice wings suddenly opened up behind my back.

"The preparations are complete, and he shouldn't be as on guard anymore. In that case, you should allow him to have a taste of your world."

The female loli's voice that sounded in my ears seemed to remind me that I wasn't alone in facing off against my mortal enemy. Meanwhile, Emordilorcan was tossing rocks at me from below; they flew at me with the force of a meteor shower.

Boom! *Boom!* *Boom!* Colossal holes were created in the ceiling from the force of Emordilorcan's thrown rocks; however, I was gliding through this meteor shower…

With darting, rolling, and gliding movements, Emordilorcan's rocks had zero percent chance of hitting me thanks to Harloys, who was controlling my flight. With her assistance, I was able to concentrate on my next attack.

"Emordilorcan!"

Together with my angry roar was the icy sword energy coming from a furious attack. It was the most direct type of challenge invitation possible.

When Emordilorcan saw that I was actually gliding right towards him with an obvious intention to clash with him head-on, he remained unafraid. For someone like him who specialized in melee battles, there was no way that he would be afraid of such an ambush.

However, some type of natural instinct seemed to remind him of something. He had an ominous premonition, so he imperceptibly focused on the sword that I was holding, the preternaturally beautiful sword of ice.

My sword was far longer than most, at nearly 1.6 meters. Its entire body was made of ice crystals, and there was a pair of Goddesses embracing on the hilt of my sword. The blade was actually two ice blades that twisted around each other. The sword was as transparent as glass and seemed to be sparkling like the stars.

It was obviously an exquisite sword that seemed like a work of art, but Emordilorcan instinctively felt afraid as he looked at the sword. Fear was an emotion that he was supposed to have abandoned long ago.

Right after, he stomped and took a deep breath, causing that inexplicable sense of fear to disappear.

"A magic sword that can affect emotions? So what!?"

This unusual Elemental God, who had even managed to become a Master Monk, was able to ignore all negative emotions due to the countless battles he had been through. They had tempered his heart and soul; in combat, he was always able to fight at one hundred percent. What he perceived to be a mere magic sword able to influence emotions was nothing more than scrap metal to him.

This time, he didn't intend to dodge. Emordilorcan was intending to teach me just what true strength was.

As I descended using my wings of ice, Emordilorcan suddenly jumped up into the air and my icy sword once again clashed against his heavy fist. We both fought using our basic instincts.

There was no difference from last time. I was thrown upwards again, and the ceiling was so hard that I wanted to cry. But, as I wiped away the blood I coughed up with my sleeve, I started smiling in delight as I looked at my opponent.

Emordilorcan was uninjured, but there was now something blue flashing on his right arm. Suddenly, that speck of blue started expanding.

The black stone giant glanced at it and saw the spreading ice, so he gritted his teeth and sliced down on his right arm with his left arm.

Snap!

Emordilorcan's entire right arm and right elbow were cut off, and it transformed into a block of ice which shattered on the ground. Nothing happened at all besides that.

Emordilorcan didn't care about something like losing an arm. This had become a common thing for him way long ago when he was dealing with powerful enemies, and all he had to do was gather the earth element and create a new arm. It didn't hurt one bit.

It was just that being tricked like this made him quite angry, which was why he glared at me.

"Fool, all you know is how to play useless tricks. I…"

Before he even finished speaking, his angry glare changed into shock and disbelief.

"…You—what have you done! Why can't I regrow my limb! Why? Impossible!"

"What did I do? I didn't do anything. It's just that this ice sword of mine isn't so easy to deal with. This is my strongest sword of all!"

What was strength, and did this world have the so-called strongest power rank of all?

For every living being who sought to become stronger, they would all wonder about this. And based on their different understandings of the concept of strength, they would walk different paths.

On the path to becoming stronger, the natural course of evolution and the cultivation that powerful individuals undertook were actually the same things. Some would believe that a solid defense was the best, so either they would put on heavy armor or maybe grow a solid outer shell. Some would believe that high speed to the point where others couldn't see them clearly was the strongest; perhaps they would become an agile assassin or even grow wings and speedy legs.

True top-level existences were impossible to copy. They had their own personal understandings about strength.

Emordilorcan was incredibly strong. He abandoned the fancy-seeming elemental magic and wholeheartedly threw himself into controlling the power of physical might. His elemental composition was the most practical muscular structure of all, which further increased his physical power that was already at the top of the world. Then, he even learned the "weakling mortals'" fighting techniques and used the most practical of his talents to evolve his physical combat ability to the utmost.

To be honest, the moment I saw Emordilorcan rip through dimensional fabric with just pure physical power earlier, I knew that there wouldn't be a single person alive who could confidently say that he or she could defeat Emordilorcan solely in physical combat. This was already taking into consideration that the current Emordilorcan was injured all over and that his power wasn't even one-tenth of his maximum power level at his strongest.

Sword Saints? Emordilorcan's fighting experience and techniques were far above the level of the so-called human Sword Saints. His over ten thousand years of fighting experience helped him to understand countless schools of martial arts techniques. Perhaps he lacked humans' creativity and innovation and was unable to come up with his own school of martial arts, and perhaps he might have lost in martial arts techniques to some genius in the past. But when you add on the fact that Emordilorcan possessed a physical body of unmatched might, he remained unbeatable in physical combat.

However, no matter how strong Emordilorcan was, it was all meaningless to me.

I wasn’t being arrogant. It was due to our different interpretations of what strength was.

"So-called strength is undoubtedly an unblockable sword (attack power that can’t be defended against), an impenetrable shield (a solid defense that can block all attacks), and an abnormal attacking method that’s difficult to dodge (a surprise attack method that’s too hard to conceive of and be on guard against)."

Perhaps this was due to my way of thinking as a transmigrator. My understanding of strength was completely different from the mainstream understanding of strength in this world, which was why I never hesitated to use small tricks or underhanded techniques. As long as they could be of use to me, I would attempt to learn anything and everything, and make it my own strategy.

If Emordilorcan was the representative of the "specialist" school of thought, where he continued to improve upon his greatest strength, then my path could perhaps be described as the "generalist" school of thought.

"Perhaps I’m not my opponent’s match in certain areas, but I can find a method to counter my opponent’s strengths. I’ll always use my strengths to attack my opponent’s weaknesses. Emordilorcan’s very strong? Indeed, but his attacking method is obviously too simplistic. All I need is a shield that can counter him and seal off his advantage, as well as a sword that can slice through his rock-solid defense, and that’ll be enough. I don’t need to be better than him in his strongest area. I simply need to win. So-called strength is the power to defeat your enemy; that’s all."

And right now, I just happened to possess a magic sword in my hands that was easily able to slice through Emordilorcan’s defenses.

"Ice Calamity!"

This was an incredibly dangerous magic sword, dangerous to the point that I didn’t even dare to use it in the mortal plane.

The reason? Just like those Seven Brothers of the Gourd, its power came from "Shadow," an incredibly dangerous Divine Sin. I had no intentions of having fun by being ganged up upon by all the True Gods.

When Shadow combined with Harloys, I was finally able to control his powers, which were a double-edged sword. His "Cold Flames of Despair" finally became my power.

"Come, Emordilorcan! When temperatures reach absolute zero, what will happen?"

My ice crystal sword emitted blinding silver flashes, and the arcs of my sword swings sent blue flames into the air.

This was no combination magic of any sort; it was the pure gathering of coldness. It was ice magic with the power of a Divine Sin, which even the Gods would fear.

Things always develop in the opposite direction when they become extreme. When coldness reached an extreme point, the extreme cold air actually gathered into the shape of flames.

Just looking at the slowly burning flames of ice made Emordilorcan feel suffocated, as if those icy flames were spreading on his arm and death was waiting for him right behind his back.

If he hadn't been willing to slice off his right arm earlier, he was well aware that perhaps he would be entirely frozen solid right now.

This was a Divine Sin's curse against the world and Shadow's natural talent ability. It was to make everything reach the absolute limit of low temperature—absolute zero.

At this abnormally low temperature, physical matter wouldn't be in liquid, solid, or gas state anymore. Instead, they would become "superatoms," the most basic state of all.

These atoms would stop moving, stop acting, freeze over, and merely exist.

At absolute zero, any power would vanish, and any consciousness would enter hibernation. They could only exist, as if time itself had been frozen.

It was only natural that Emordilorcan's arm was unable to be regrown. The concept of his arm still existed, but it was simply frozen solid. Just like how humans were unable to grow three arms, as long as he didn't destroy the concept of his arm that I had frozen, he would never be able to regrow it!

This was a type of toxic poison, a poison of the world that could freeze everything—a time poison that could freeze even the most basic fundamental natural laws of space and time.

This was also why I feared "Shadow" so much. If he had ever spat a mouthful of icy flames at me, it probably wouldn't be any different from me sleeping all the way until the end of the world.

There was nothing in this world that could possibly be immune to these icy flames. The only reason I was able to use them was that I possessed an even stronger shield, strong enough to block this poison of the world.

Since these icy flames were able to even freeze time itself, then how could this world possibly possess something that could defend against it? Indeed, while *this* world may not possess anything, that wasn't true of my new world.

"Whew! This really is the coldest ice. My hands are already numb to the point that I can't feel them anymore. Yikes—yikes!"

Even though I was obviously in the scorching hot Earth Elemental Plane, I kept saying how cold it was as if it were the middle of winter. My arms were currently covered with the [Coldest Ice] that came from my new world.

Although I called it the coldest, it didn't actually have much of a difference from the ice in this world. However, when I gave it the Concept of [Coldest Ice in the World], then even the Divine Sin's icy flames were no longer able to make this [Coldest Ice]'s temperature go any lower, which was how I was able to protect myself.

Of course, I couldn't do anything about the fact that I would have frostbite afterwards…

This was a special right of the creator of a new world, and also the impenetrable armor that I prepared for myself.

What? You're saying that I used the wrong word? I should be using the word indestructible rather than impenetrable? Heh heh, you'll soon find out why I used the word impenetrable.

As I forcefully stuck my calamity-bringing ice crystal sword into the ground, the familiar frigid earth of my world appeared around us.

"Emordilorcan, welcome to my world—Frigidwinter Earth!"

"You… you dare to challenge the Divine Authority of the creator? You're insane!"

His angry questioning suddenly stopped. The frigid ice covered me and transformed into a heavy armor of frozen ice, while that dangerous two-handed longsword suddenly started burning with blue flames and transformed me into a person on fire.

"This is a nightmarish opponent! He actually dares to wear such a thing? Using the power of a Divine Sin and challenging the Divine Authority of the Creator Eich herself, you're a heretic far crazier than I am! You're challenging all the True Gods! You're challenging the very basic order and natural law of the world!"

Emordilorcan's evaluation of his enemy Roland kept continuously increasing, but upon seeing this sight, he knew that he had still underestimated me. I was completely illogical to him.

After the first time, Emordilorcan had already lost the confidence to defeat me. For a mortal that seemed so insignificant to him, I actually became a threatening opponent, and now that he had witnessed me challenging the Creator herself, he probably felt that I had gone completely insane. For the first time, Emordilorcan was seeing himself meet his own end, as well as regretting—for the first time—that he had gained such a dangerous mortal enemy, all for the sake of some mortal beastmen.

How could I possibly let the signs of fear and regret in his eyes slip past me? I laughed in satisfaction.

Frigid, frozen ice now covered this entire area. Since the long preparation time required for it had already completed, my wintry world had now descended upon this place, and I had instantly pulled Emordilorcan into this frozen plain as well. This time, there would be no escaping for him.

Ding! Ding! Ding!

Clear sounds resounded and the countless amount of frozen ice crystallized into numerous huge ice swords. This icy plains had now transformed into a corridor of innumerable swords. After that, when I stuck my Ice Calamity Sword into the mountain, those fatal blue flames appeared on every single ice sword's blade.

I randomly picked up an ice sword. The flames upon it were burning vigorously, just like torches, and caused me to smile in satisfaction. This time, it was my turn to be rushing Emordilorcan head-on.

"Emordilorcan, there are no more chances for you to repent. Now then, let us begin

our second round in our duel to the death! I said before that it’s time to settle everything between us! You’re a God that’s high up above? Taste the revenge of a mortal that you view as nothing more than an ant!"

Note:

1. The space between one's forefinger and thumb.

Chapter 227
Decision

The frozen earth replaced the collapsing temple. As an enemy of this world— *my* world—Emordilorcan was currently being attacked by the entire world.

Ice pillars would suddenly appear out of the ground, and blizzards would descend upon him without any warning. Even the rocks he accidentally kicked away would come back and land on his head. This entire world viewed him as an enemy and was acting upon it.

This wasn't even something intentional. It was simply because, as the creator of this world, I viewed him as an enemy; this world was venting its own rage upon him as well. Although nothing it did was life-threatening for Emordilorcan, being in this world, where even the very environment was literally hostile to him, was inhibiting; he would have to worry about tripping every time he took a step.

My world wasn't complete yet, and the only elements I could control within it were the ice and snow. Perhaps these attacks were unable to even damage Emordilorcan who was in a class of his own, but the enmity and attacks from my world were sufficient to at least distract his attention.

"Damn it! If you aren't a coward, then come out of your turtle shell!"

The angry Emordilorcan, who was so famous for having nigh-impenetrable defenses, never imagined that he would one day have to taunt someone else for taking advantage of a high defense. Yet, sometimes, fate was just that ironic. Now, it was time for Emordilorcan, who possessed one of the strongest defenses of all time, to be helpless about his enemy's defense.

The ice armor that seemed so fragile was covered with that fatal blue flame, which was obviously untouchable. No matter how strong his fists were, Emordilorcan didn't even know how to go about attacking me.

"Hmph! If you're not a coward, then come hit me!" I even began to taunt him.

Only now did he begin regretting the fact that he hadn't worked harder at mastering high-level earth elemental magic. In this abnormal world, he was unable to gather any earth element at all for strong attack spells. Even though he wanted to dig up some earth to toss at me like projectile weapons, he discovered that the ground was nothing but ice, and when he forcefully dug some up, it would strangely instantly melt into water.

Emordilorcan was having a difficult time in this world filled with enmity against him. He had to be careful about every little step, as he could trip over at any instant. The sudden sinking and shaking of the ground was also a bother that kept distracting him.

In this world, I suddenly revealed a strange transformation with angel wings and demon feet and scales. This transformation combined the traits of creatures from both Order and Chaos and was abnormal enough, but my combat strength also multiplied by several folds.

The ice and snow in my hands transformed into stakes of ice, and with just the wave of my hands, the hundreds of ice stakes shot out at Emordilorcan in artillery fashion. This entire world of ice and snow became an icy cannon formation under my control.

However, in Emordilorcan's eyes, the most dangerous thing of all was still the blinding icy flames that shone with a demonic blue.

Just touching it even a little would require him to dig off another piece of flesh. Meanwhile, I unhesitatingly tossed the random ice sword I had, which was covered in icy flames, at him. It was basically an insult to him who was a Master Monk and an expert in martial arts.

As a veteran Master Monk, knocking away projectiles was the basics of the basics to him. As for Emordilorcan, even if there were several hundred top-level elven archers shooting arrows at him simultaneously, he could confidently knock away every single arrow effortlessly without having a single one land on him. This weapon throwing, which was obviously from a novice, was something he could dodge even with his eyes closed.

"Even if those icy flames are life-threatening, it's fine as long as I don't touch them!"

The strange part was that the weapon throw, which shouldn't have been a threat at all, suddenly seemed to increase its speed when it approached him.

"Damn it! What did you do!?"

There was obviously no outside force affecting the weapon throw, but my thrown swords of ice seemed to sometimes appear slow while at other times appear quick. Just as he felt he was able to dodge one, it would suddenly increase its speed and flick him.

Without even waiting for the ice flames to spread, the furious Emordilorcan would tear off another piece of his flesh and continue to roar angrily at me. But, my only response was to throw even more ice swords. enveloped in icy flames, at him.

In Emordilorcan's eyes, those swords increased their speeds by several times again. Those increases in speed caused him to lose the confidence to knock the swords away, so he attempted to dodge with a leap. Unfortunately for him, those swords still managed to make contact with him!

"An error in judgement? Every possible increase in speed will always have some type of indication, and I can't make such an error in judgement. In that case, it isn't that the projectiles that became faster; I'm the one who became slower! Just what did you do?!"

The angrily roaring Emordilorcan actually seemed rather hilarious to me at the moment. By the time his angry shouts reached my ears, it sounded like "I'm… the… one… who… became… slower! Just… what… did… you… do!"

It wasn't only his voice; his movements were also like what you would see in an old movie shown by an almost broken-down projector. They were sometimes quick and sometimes slow, always jerky. At this time, he was already "poisoned" quite deeply, as part of his very Concept and existence had been "zeroed."

Absolute zero. From a certain standpoint, this was a concept that was only in my original world. At this temperature, even the atoms that made up matter would stop their movements, and every form of energy or power would be "zeroed," which was why it was called absolute zero.

But in this world, the basic particles of matter weren't atoms, protons, electrons, and so on, but rather elemental particles. As for that so-called -273 degrees Celsius which was supposed to be absolute zero, it wasn't a difficult task for any high-level ice mage, and there were even some creatures that lived just fine in environments of under -500 degrees Celsius.

But Divine Sins were simply abnormal. This power wasn't merely creating a low temperature—it had the ability to zero the basic elemental particles of an individual's body and reach the theoretical state that shouldn't have been possible—the state where everything would "stop." In this world of Eich were there wasn't even a concept of "absolute zero," this type of power should never have been born in the first place.

"…Frigid Nightmares live symbiotically with their hosts' souls, so did he obtain this concept from me?"

Every Divine Sin could be considered an error of the world. If any such "error" spread out and caused chain reactions, they would likely cause the entire system of the world to die and collapse. This was why Divine Sins were viewed as the greatest enemy and threat of the Gods.

Obviously, directly using these icy flames in the mortal plane was nothing more than suicidal as it would attract the attention of the True Gods. Yet I found another method to use this type of power.

"Less, even less—so little that it's undetectable, and envelop it in normal ice to dilute it. Afterwards, slowly have it pour out, just like milk that's been added to coffee."

After my ability evolved into "Death Chill," with this additional modification, it further evolved into its apex.

[Hibernation Chill: This effect is added to all of your ice attribute attacks and spells. Every single attack or spell will decrease your opponent's speed by 1%. This effect is stackable, and can't be resisted. This effect will automatically disappear if not stacked for ten minutes.]

It seemed like a useless ability that was at the bottom of the barrel, but only by actually trying it out did I discover its true fearsomeness.

This slowing effect was actually the method for leading my enemy to the state of "absolute zero." My enemy wouldn't notice this effect one bit, but it would already take place and begin to slow my opponent. It would decrease their speed more and more imperceptibly, thrusting them outside the axis of time.

"Senses and reactions will all be slowed. For a warrior, a slowed reaction of 0.1 seconds is already fatal; misjudging a blade by 0.1 seconds is plenty for death. Not to mention that stacking it as much as you have already, you've probably lost over 50%

of your speed. Right now, you're probably feeling like time is passing by in alternating bursts of quickness and slowness, which means that your body's sensory mechanisms for time have all been completely messed up—no—I should say that you're now living in your own time."

Although I said this out loud, Emordilorcan still had a confused look. This final test of mine confirmed that he was poisoned quite deeply. Perhaps my words sounded like only a rapid-fire incomprehensible chatter to him now.

"What… did… you… do? What… are… you… saying?!"

I laughed at this. If it could be said that the explosive power of "Ice Calamity" was a vicious poison that would instantly kill someone, then this "Hibernation Chill" was a slow, toxic poison that would make people imperceptibly fall into a hibernation state and was usable in the mortal plane.

As long as my enemy was hit even one time by any of my ice attacks, his senses would be affected. For a Master Monk like Emordilorcan who definitely had a strong sense of the flow of battle, one second slower or quicker was definitely fatal. He was even foolish enough to try to knock away my projectiles with his empty hands, which was a type of action where even a single misstep wasn't allowed.

One attempt, two attempts, several dozen attempts later, and Emordilorcan was now a pincushion. It was somewhat impressive how vicious he was even towards himself, as he dug out every afflicted piece of flesh. He no longer had a single even patch on him all over.

However, although he protected himself this way against the Ice Calamity's instant-death effect, the Hibernation Chill effect had stacked even more upon him.

By now, his time perception was probably slower than a normal person's by at least three times or more. Basically, three seconds for me was one second for him.

This was already thanks to his astonishingly high magic resistance. However, since he had already reached this state, the rest would be simple.

I spread my wings. I had prepared this transformation for so long; it gave me the power to face him. Now that the vicious tiger had entered the cage, what remained was to execute him.

Snap With a snap of my fingers, the icy flames on my ice armor disappeared, gathering instead on my magic Ice Calamity Sword.

While this ice armor made Emordilorcan utterly unable to attack me, it also gave me an enormous amount of pressure. With the [Coldest Ice] covering my body, I had lost a lot of blood, plus I had a weakened body from my injuries while fighting him. My body temperature was dropping precipitously, and I could no longer feel any of my limbs. The loss of temperature and energy caused me to be dizzy and have a major headache, and perhaps having frostbite all over would be the best possible result if I canceled the ice armor right now.

What gave me the biggest pressure wasn't even that—it was the icy flames on my ice armor.

After all, it was only the [Coldest Ice], not the [Hardest Ice], as I was unable to create such a hard ice. If Emordilorcan had been willing to sacrifice everything and risk his own life to take me down with him, the ice would have definitely shattered with a single blow.

It still would have been fine if it just shattered, but if some of the icy flames touched my body after my ice armor shattered… probably nothing in the world could have cured me.

This seeming total suppression was actually nothing more than a gamble. I gambled that Emordilorcan's mastery of elemental magic wasn't high enough to forcefully control the earth element in my world that lacked elemental power. I gambled that Emordilorcan's personality was cautious to the point that he would never risk his very life unless he was forced to the utter brink, and I gambled that the power I displayed to him scared him to the point that he no longer had the confidence to be able to kill me in a single blow.

I couldn't help but gamble. The difference in our powers was just too massive. Even if I used every single plot I could think of, with such a large difference in power, I still had to gamble to fill in the last piece of the puzzle.

"It seems that I won my gamble."

Emordilorcan hesitated, attempted to dodge and find some way to strike back, but that was what I hoped for. In order for the Hibernation Chill to stack up, I needed time. It

was just like how fires were obviously dangerous but rarely killed people, while water, which seemed so gentle, contained the countless bones of people who knew how to swim.

The moment he decided against risking his own life to kill me at all costs, he had already lost his only chance at winning. Now that it had arrived at this, I wouldn't possibly give him any chance where he could risk his own life to take my own.

I took a deep breath and shattered my ice armor into water droplets. It would otherwise interfere with the next stage of the battle I had planned.

I spread my wings, approached him, and wielded my sword. There was no clash of sword and fist this time. He was definitely not one who would wait around and let me kill him freely, and his reactions from predicting my movements were actually quicker than my movements by two seconds. Yet being too quick had the same result as being too slow. His fists met nothing but air, while my Ice Calamity longsword viciously sliced into his only remaining left arm, causing the familiar blue color to spread on his arm again.

Snap!

Despair flashed in Emordilorcan's eyes. That guy sure was tough and vicious; he actually bit off his own left arm. But now that it had come to this, when I placed my blue sword of ice against his neck, he knew that it was all over for him.

And just as I was about to execute him, that "brave and fearless" Emordilorcan suddenly spoke up.

"Don't… kill… me. (the rest has been sped up for convenience) I'm willing to serve you as my master. I can become your most loyal servant. My accumulated wealth can make even the richest human emperor seem like a pauper. I know countless secrets and knowledge about the world, and even the greatest grandmasters of magic don't know as much as I do. And even if I lose my position as the Earth Elemental God, I'm still the strongest Earth Elemental Lord, as my power is definitely significant. As long as you give me time, I can become even stronger. There are no benefits in killing me while accepting me as your servant can bring you endless wealth!"

It was quite a test of my patience to finish listening to him beg for his life because of the slow speed of his words, but I finished listening to it all, and even laughed out loud

at the end.

Conquering an Elemental God? That sounded rather majestic.

Obtaining an Elemental God's endless amounts of treasure hoarded over the years? That sounded like a good deal.

Having an Elemental God as a personal servant and fighter? That sounded great and beneficial.

Killing him was only to vent my grudge while making him into my slave would give me endless benefits. This seemed like an incredible deal, so it seemed that I, who was well known for calculating benefits, had already made my decision.

I laughed, and when he saw that I laughed, he also smiled.

"No."

This caused him to instantly become pale.

"You want to live? Everybody wants to live, but do you know how many people died because of that one earthquake of yours? Or just how many people died in the end because of the war you started?"

Emordilorcan's eyes showed that he was rather confused, as if he didn't understand why I was suddenly bringing up this topic.

"That earthquake killed 376,452 people, and this war killed well over 2 million, so, I understand that you want to live, but right now I want to ask you a question. Did you ever ask them if they wanted to live or not?!"

"How can ants be compared with me…"

Emordilorcan still wanted to defend himself, but I had lost my patience. Just cleaning up the rubble left behind from the battle as well as all the corpses had taken an entire month. I could still hear all those unearthly wails of the relatives that were left alive as if it was yesterday, and right now, the main perpetrator was right at the mercy of my sword and still dared to view my People of the Mist as ants. How could I possibly control my emotions?

"Ants? Ha! Indeed, we may not be as strong as you Gods. You are strong because you are undying, while we are weak due to our short lives. Why—why is it that you damned bastards can't just let us be in peace? Why is it that even though you're all so strong, your battles among Gods always have to drag us mortals into your affairs as the cannon fodder?"

"We People of the Mist only want to live in peace, so why do you Gods always have to repeatedly destroy our homes? Three hundred years ago, two hundred years ago, and this year as well, forcing our country to the brink and disrupting our citizens' lives. Did we People of the Mist offend you Gods in any way? You so-called venerated existences, why not just do some good deeds and go fight your own wars if you want to fight? Can't you stop dragging us into things and bringing catastrophes upon us?"

"Why can't you just give us a break!"

"Why don't you Gods go fight that damned Holy War by yourselves!"

"Why do you foolish existences even have the right to be called Gods!"

"Why is it that even now, you don't have a speck of regret? Are mortals truly just a bunch of ants that you can step on as you please? Let me tell you—we are humans, not ants!"

My angry roaring kept echoing within this space and got louder and louder with each echo. Blizzards blew and the icy mountains seemed to roar, with the icy plains following suit as well. Their anger represented the will of my world, and all the sounds angrily questioned Emordilorcan, but he still didn't have one shred of regret in him.

"As long as you let me live, I will compensate you. I can understand your anger at the loss of your property, but as long as you let me live, I shall compensate you ten times for what you lost. And, besides, mortals have high rates of reproduction, they'll soon…"

Yep, in their eyes, mortal humans were just a bunch of ants that could speedily reproduce. Dying for the sake of a God's war was supposed to be the highest form of glory, so what did it matter to them if some mortals died?

And, so, I laughed, out of extreme anger.

And, so, I swung down my sword. With a flash of light, that venerated head of a God flew through the air.

Emordilorcan’s eyes were still filled with disbelief by the time it hit the ground. I lifted up his head that was currently transforming into nothing but a rock and made a declaration to the entire world. I had fulfilled my own oath.

"I, Roland Mist, swear that no matter who you are or how venerated your status is, as long as you dare to enter my tribe’s land and kill my people, no matter where you hide, I shall find you and kill you!"

"Forgive? Never!"

Chapter 228
Afterword

Emordilorcan's slain head transformed into a pitch-black rock and had started to decay. The other portions encased in eternal ice were too dangerous to even me, so I could only leave his body here.

The nightmarish stone giant finally collapsed, and what came along after was a furious wave of the Elemental Tide; it was wailing, it was singing.

"Emordilorcan has died; this elemental plane has lost its master." The Elemental Tide was furiously transmitting this message everywhere.

Now that the Earth Elemental Plane had lost both its Elemental Throne and Elemental God, it was basically like its door had become completely broken. The Earth Elemental Tide, which always transmitted the earth element to the other plans, now had the earth element begin pouring back inside it, and immense sandstorms began whipping up over the entire plan. This was the final insanity.

At the moment that Emordilorcan died, every living creature that was SemiGod level or above instantly discovered the explosive news that the Earth Elemental God had died. They also became aware of the fact that this Elemental Plane was currently searching for a new master.

"Emordilorcan is truly dead? Completely dead?"

No Elemental God had died for far too long. It was impossible to even know who had been the Earth Elemental God before Emordilorcan. All the Earth Elemental Lords that had retreated when the Divine Sins appeared had been anxiously waiting back at their own bases for news from the battlefield, but they now had blank looks as they accepted the message from their own Earth Elemental Plane. Right after they understood, they were all overjoyed.

"This enormous mountain on top of my head for tens of thousands of years has finally fallen. It's finally my turn to become the Earth Elemental God."

However, the next news that came right after made all these Earth Elemental Lords not know whether to laugh or cry.

The Earth Elemental Throne had been completely destroyed, and the earth element was now pouring in from all the other planes in order to create a new Elemental Throne. In that case, the new Earth Elemental God would likely have to wait until the new Elemental Throne was finished reviving.

Let us stop talking about the Earth Elemental Lords that had complex emotions right now. The ones who were the most unable to accept what happened were probably the Wind Elemental God Camdian and the Water Elemental Goddess Aylos.

Mortal enemies always knew each other the best. They knew just how strong Emordilorcan was, and when they discovered that Roland, who was only currently a Gold rank, actually dared to go engage in single combat against Emordilorcan, they inwardly treated Roland as a cocky, overconfident person heading to his death even though they didn't say anything out loud.

In their eyes, no matter what achievements I had achieved in the past, they were all mere mortal achievements that would be gone in a flash. The achievements were only temporary glories in the past, nothing but smoke and mirrors to them.

While new talents were always eye-catching, only those who remained at the top for the longest were the most respected. In their long lifespans, they had witnessed countless numbers of heroes with astonishing ability and geniuses that could achieve anything, but those that were undying and could actually survive for thousands and tens of thousands of years were actually quite few. To Camdian and Aylos, only those who could live to the end were truly worthy of their respect.

"The Eagle of Glaso? I've heard of him; I think he was famous about three thousand years ago. What a pity; I think he died of a sudden plague. Sigh, mortals are just too fragile. Whenever I take a nap, several hundred years will have gone by and so many of them will have perished."

Camdian and Aylos did have their right to be proud of themselves. So many famous heroes and geniuses would die at an even quicker rate than they had become famous. For these ancient Elemental Gods that were like artifacts, only one type of existence was truly worthy of their respect—those that had also passed the test of time, as well as the strong ones that were able to defeat them.

Emordilorcan was no piece of cake to deal with. The countless lives that had died to him were the best evidence of this, and both these Elemental Gods were well aware that any Elemental God was basically an unbeatable existence within his or her own Elemental Plane. They would be able to casually use elemental power as they pleased to endlessly replenish their life power and magic power. Perhaps it was possible to defeat an Elemental God in his own plane, but killing one in his home plane was practically impossible.

But, the Elemental Tide that brought the news of Emordilorcan's death couldn't possibly be wrong or faked. Emordilorcan had not only been defeated, but he had truly died as well. This was far out of their expectations, which made them not know what to do anymore.

Although their goal had been to eliminate this bothersome stone giant that was their mortal enemy, no matter how many preparations they made, they still had a tiny voice in their hearts that kept whispering to them, telling them that killing Emordilorcan in the Earth Elemental Plane was impossible and that it was fine as long as they didn't lose.

"…As long as we can seal him—no—as long as we heavily injure him and force him to add a few decades to the length of time that he needs to recuperate, that will be enough."

From a certain standpoint, Emordilorcan, who was able to dominate the other three Elemental Gods for innumerable years, was indeed incredible. Perhaps, after all their clashes, the other three Elemental Gods retained fear in their hearts.

It was obvious that this was also the source of why they would never give their fullest when fighting against him. Even though they hated him so much, they would never be willing to be on the frontlines and truly fight while risking their lives.

To be honest, their fear was no mistake. The fact that I succeeded in killing Emordilorcan could not only be attributed to the fact that he just happened to be at his weakest in tens of thousands of years, but the biggest factor of all wasn't even the Divine Sin Shadow's "Ice Calamity"—it was my personal world of "Frigidwinter Earth."

The Earth Elemental Plane's Earth Elemental God was truly impossible to kill in his own plane. But when he was isolated in another world and was unable to absorb even

a single speck of the earth element, he was in a more pitiful state than even while on the mortal plane. Plus, his greatest support, the Earth Elemental Throne, had already been destroyed. Only with all these factors combined was I able to slay him in my "Frigidwinter Earth."

I definitely wasn't the only one who noticed that Emordilorcan had faked his death. But, I was definitely the only person who intended to truly kill him, and I had prepared so many absolute traps just for that purpose.

"How did Emordilorcan die?! How is it possible that he died? Isn't he supposed to be immortal as long as he's within the Earth Elemental Plane?"

But, the indisputable facts were right in front of them. They had to believe it.

After their mortal enemy died, the two Elemental Gods and the numerous Earth Elemental Lords had only a brief period of joy before a deep feeling of fear seized them.

"He even has the ability to kill Emordilorcan. If he was my enemy…"

From a certain standpoint, there wasn't anything wrong with their fear. This was only a temporary alliance against a mutual enemy to begin with, and now that the mutual enemy had died, of course the alliance would be over. The relationship between us was rather subtle to begin with. Camdian at least had fought together with us in the past, while Aylos had a history of conflict against us back at Auland, and both sides were currently just pretending to be friends now without bringing their enmity out into the open.

But, right now, the two Elemental Gods' reactions were opposite from expected. Camdian's expression was filled with caution, and it was obvious that he was deeply contemplating something anxiously. Meanwhile, Aylos was hesitant for only a short while before she became joyous again.

Reyne noticed both the Elemental Gods' reactions. While she didn't allow her expression to reveal anything, she mentally figured everything out.

"Camdian has large elemental armies and Winged Tribes under his command. It's highly likely that he has ambitions about the Northlands, and perhaps he's even made some preparations for attacking us already. Meanwhile, Aylos probably thinks that we're sufficiently strong enough, and now has more confidence in us being able to

revive her husband Sidunwar. It seems that Brother Roland was correct. The Wind Elemental God is an ambitious one with a Luck stat of E, with his ambition far surpassing his actual power. Although Camdian's plan will probably fail in the end, we still need to make extra preparations and be on guard. Rather than Camdian, since we have Sidunwar as a sort of hostage, we can try to get Aylos truly on our side."

Reyne was smiling sweetly while secretly plotting. A certain princess must have been with two certain black-bellied princes for too long; she was becoming more and more black-bellied herself…

Suddenly, a small earthquake interrupted everyone's secret thoughts. A Giant Sand Worm crawled out from underground, and before anyone could attack it, it spat out a Dracon colored in green sticky goo all over. Various other chaotic things could also be seen stuck all over the Dracon's body…

Er—that scene was too beautiful, so in order to prevent anyone from going blind or losing their appetites for dinner, let's just add some mosaics to this scene and press fast-forward.

Cough! *Cough!* The moment the Dracon landed on the ground, he spat out a bunch of disgusting things… *Cough!* *Cough!* I should continue adding mosaics here for all his disgusting vomit as well.

"Beifeng Herault, it would seem that you've found an even higher level of how to play around. Give us one reason why we shouldn't destroy you right here for unhumanness."

Beifeng lifted his head up proudly even though everyone was surrounding him with obvious hostile intentions.

"What are you talking about? I'm the biggest contributor of all in this battle, even Lord Roland is very grateful to me. If it wasn't for me destroying the Elemental Throne, who knows who might have won in the end!?"

At hearing this, everyone from the mortal plane was appeased while the two Elemental Gods also had looks of sudden realization, but…

"What did you guys do!"

Alright then, in a way, the Earth Elemental Lords were still furious that the Elemental

Throne had been destroyed as none of them could ascend to the position of Earth Elemental God. Now, Beifeng was loudly shouting that we were the ones who destroyed the Elemental Throne—Beifeng's ability to taunt others was probably now at the point of being able to attract aggro with simply his face.

Luckily, there weren't that many Earth Elemental Lords present, and they didn't dare to turn on the strong individuals present here. And, at the same time, Camdian's face reddened completely. All those Earth Elemental Lords were glaring at him with expressions filled with rage and anger that they dared not verbalize. No matter how stupid he may have been, Camdian knew that he had fallen for Roland's plot, but it just happened to be that the situation wasn't in his favor. Just like the Earth Elemental Lords, he didn't dare to start a fight right here and now.

While the Earth Elemental Lords were now looking at Camdian in an unfriendly light, they weren't able to take care of the main culprit, Roland, behind this, nor did they dare to turn on the Wind Elemental God. They figured they would at least beat up the direct destroyer of the Elemental Throne in order to vent their anger.

"Wait!"

Just as the Earth Elemental Lords were intending to "have a heart-to-heart talk" with Beifeng, Reyne suddenly spoke up and blocked them.

"Your Highness Reyne, you're truly a good person. I apologize for misunderstanding who you really were in the past; I promise that my subordinates will stop spreading scandals about incest between you and Lord Roland."

A certain Dracon probably had too much fun playing with the Giant Sand Worms earlier and his brain wasn't working properly yet. He still managed to continue digging his own grave.

"Oh, it's fine to keep spreading rumors about that. No, in fact, it's better to spread even more rumors about it. If everyone thinks it's true and can accept it, that'll be for the best… Cough, it's just a joke. Apart from Beifeng, nobody here needs to take it seriously."

This time, a certain princess's image was completely shattered, but Roland wasn't here right now, so there was obviously nobody present who could lecture and control her.

Reyne cleared her throat and asked the most critical point of all.

"Cough! Cough! I just want to ask, why hasn't Brother Roland come out yet? Could it be that something's happened to him?"

"He said that he still has something else to do, and is also going to spend some time cultivating in this plane. He said not to mind him and return home first."

Reyne nodded as she glanced at the collapsing temple. Due to Karwenz's method of sensing Roland, she knew that Roland was fine and that it was a good time to leave the Earth Elemental Plane. So, she then immediately retreated on the topic of Beifeng.

"Everyone, do as you like. Back where we come from, beating up Beifeng is a daily occurrence that happens three times a day just like eating meals. He has really thick skin, so don't worry that you'll accidentally beat him to death."

Alright then, a certain Dracon was instantly astounded to hear this and crouched while clutching his head to protect his face.

"Don't hit my face! I still need to return to my 'lover!'"

Alright, let's not inquire into how he managed to find a "lover" in the Earth Elemental Plane, nor shall I comment upon just what type of existence he hooked up with. At any rate, this common daily life occurrence of "eating, sleeping, and beating up Beifeng" was now being reenacted in the Earth Elemental Plane.

To be honest, while the allied armies outside were indeed ending their temporary friendship just as expected, I actually did have some bothersome things to take care of. It would seem that I would be unable to return to the mortal plane for a while yet.

In order to construct a better, more perfected version of "Frigidwinter Earth," I needed a higher-quality divine source of earth element power. Originally, I had planned on using Emordilorcan as this excellent source, but now I had an even better one.

"This is the Earth Elemental Throne?"

The white crystal seemed plain on the surface, but it emanated continuous waves of mana. However, it was already shattered into pieces.

"It should be a shard of the Earth Elemental Throne… Your Highness, your frostbite is too serious; please don't move about too much. This spell array should be able to help with the first step of curing your injuries, but I still recommend that you wait for your

injuries to be completely recovered before you continue combining this Earth Elemental Throne shard with your world."

I had used too much of my power, which caused Harloys to fall into a deep sleep again. The task that I had originally planned for Harloys could only now be given to my backup candidate.

The hermit Eaglestorm had been secretly preparing the most top-notch of healing spell arrays. As a final insurance, I hadn't sent him to the frontlines of battle, but now he became the doctor and supporter for me that I really needed.

As an Arch Druid, controlling the forces of nature and healing were both foundational aspects of his job class. With his presence, I was somewhat able to relax.

As for his attempt to convince me to rest, I smiled without answering him. Some things were unable to be said out loud. Was I supposed to tell him that I just received a message from Ayer saying, "Hey, I can only maintain the barrier for one more week. If you have anything important left to do, do it fast?"

I watched the magic power rapidly diminish from this Elemental Throne shard and knew that the new Elemental Throne was definitely absorbing power for its revival. So, I grit my teeth and immediately placed the shard within my world.

"Now then, let's bring true earth to this frigid soil and help my world evolve."

Chapter 229
Abundant Harvest

The empty air and wide-open seas were the cradle of life, and in the midst of thunder and gales, the original seeds of life were tossed into the sea. After these young lives matured and evolved to a certain extent, they began going ashore to search for new homes.

Of course, that was just the scientific explanation for the origin of the world in my past life. It was the most popular and accepted of all the scientific explanations, but as for whether that was truly the case, nobody knew.

As for creationism stories that were fantastical or magical in nature, there were many similarities among them.

Every creationism story was largely similar. Among them all, "creating humans from dirt" was probably the most common factor. In New Zealand's creationism tales, the native tribes believed that a God created humans with the mix of his own blood and red soil. In the Bible, God created the first man Adam using the dirt from the ground, and then created the first woman Eve using Adam's rib. Noah had tossed a stone behind himself after the great flood and his son had appeared. But, the most famous creationism story of all in my former country of China was the Asian tale of Nuwa creating humans by mixing mud and water.

In this world, I didn't know if Eich used a similar method to create life, but since the entire world was crafted using the four elements as the foundation, the lives here were doubtlessly created from the gathering of the elements.

And, right now, in my world, that mythical event of creation was being reenacted.

The ice mountains and icy plains began to melt, and the thick layers of ice transformed into water. The endless amounts of water transformed into rivers, the rivers gathered into lakes, and the lakes eventually formed into oceans.

This was to be a world with water as its foundation, copying the prehistoric version of my past world.

Sidunwar's ancient God Equipment, the Ocean Bottle, provided the source for the ocean. Blue could be seen everywhere, just like the torrential flood from numerous creation myths.

There was no wind, no waves, and not even any sound. Everything was silent, or perhaps I could even describe it as dead silent. No matter which direction I looked in, there was nothing but the ocean. It seemed to be too peaceful.

But when the white crystal shard of the Elemental Throne was added to and combined with my world, the entire ocean started frothing, with countless bubbles arising. Next, tan stone plates started slowly rising from the water, and continental lands that split the oceans finally appeared.

Everything was being created in Chaos that lacked all Order. With evolution and destruction, this land was newly covered in ice and snow again, and this fantastical world of mine was now much closer to reality.

The Earth Elemental Throne's shard was just like the mythical dirt in creation tales that could grow by itself with only the nourishment of the wind. It transformed into the foundation to control the seas. As the core of my world, it was continuously creating new continents.

Time passed and eons cycled by. The second Ice Age had now descended upon my world.

This time, there were no longer countless layers of ice underneath the endless icy plains. The distant ice mountains and ice rivers also had true earth underneath them now. Since two out of four pillars necessary for constructing a world had been completed, this world of mine was now moving towards reality from just being an isolated dimension.

Previously, I could even see dimensional tears at the edges of my world, but now that the earth element, which was the foundational underlying element of the world, had arrived, the space had finally stabilized.

However, I was shocked by this scene.

"…I just wanted to create a small world, so what's with this scene that seems like it's on such a grand scale? Did I unknowingly do something incredible?"

I could sense that this entire world was related to me. My will could reach anywhere here. It could cause ice rivers to melt, reverse the flow of rivers, or split apart continents, but I instinctively rejected all of this.

"Don't interfere with this and allow things to evolve naturally." A mysterious will suddenly sounded in my mind, and I felt as if some presence was watching me.

I was rather confused and surprised… and then I was actually kicked out! I was actually kicked out of my own world!

[System Notification: You didn't listen when I asked nicely. You forced me to be rough with you. The server is currently under maintenance, and remember to read all patch notes while it's undergoing maintenance. Right now, just go where you're supposed to go. Make sure to get plenty of sunshine, or you're going to have to be careful of growing mushrooms on your head.]

Alright, I knew that it had to be the work of my shameless System. It was basically calling me a hermit otaku who would die if I saw sunlight, even though I was obviously supposed to be a direct, sunny, exercise-loving boy who all the neighbors praised for being a good man at home and a good employee at work, with friendly relationships with everyone.

"…You actually dare to say that? There are enough people that have suffered because of you to make two entire armies. Just now, you were fighting with Emordilorcan and deceiving him so that he could fall into your trap; no matter how you look at it, you're the real antagonist."

The black cat on my shoulder had woken up from her long sleep, but what was with her commenting on me the instant she woke up? Teacher Harloys, is your value in life to only comment on others' situations now?

[The server is currently undergoing maintenance. Estimated Reopening Time: 1.5 months later. System Reminder: Don't take the server opening time seriously, I'm just saying it casually. Do you know any game's server that actually opened up on time? As a longtime gamer who's already become numb from this, you should learn how to optimistically accept a continuous wave of announcements regarding the server opening up later than expected. What? You don't want to accept it? Alright, you can go try playing real-life PK against the employees of that game company.]

As always, I instantly decided to ignore my system. What attracted my attention was instead the numbers that were of the same format as before.

[Completion rate: ?%. Fate Points: 43201]

The completion rate was actually a question mark. It seemed that even my system didn't know when this would be completed, but judging from the much slower rate at which my Fate Points vanished compared to last time, I wouldn't be needing to hurry and finish as many quests as I could for points this time.

"It seems that allowing my world to change itself without forceful interference from me like last time will use fewer Fate Points. Hmm? Where did I get all these Fate Points from?"

Only now did I finally have some free time to inspect the system notifications that had been piling up, gathering dust in the corner.

[Congratulations to Host for single-handedly slaying Emordilorcan. You have obtained the SemiGod Equipment "Roaring Armlet of the Earth," SemiGod Equipment "Emordilorcan's Wall of Sighs" (Epic-level shield), as well as the God-level material "Shard from the Earth Elemental Throne." Since this slaying wasn't a specific quest from the system, no Fate Points shall be rewarded as per the System's rules.]

[Congratulations to Host for single-handedly slaying a True God level existence. You have now activated the "Enemy of the Gods" series of achievements. You have now obtained the glorious title of "One Who Loathes the Gods," and 50,000 Fate Points have been rewarded. If you equip this title, you will become a beginner-level enemy of the Gods and will receive a 5% damage bonus against all Gods. The next step of this series of achievements is to single-handedly slay three True Gods, which will award you the title "Slaughterer of Gods" and make you into a mid-level enemy of the Gods. You will also receive a 15% damage bonus against all Gods.]

[After you single-handedly slay ten True Gods (including one Main God), you can reach the peak of this series of achievement, "Enemy of all Gods." You'll also receive the title "Kratos Isn't Food For the Gods, He's The Daddy of the Gods!" as well as a 50% damage bonus against all Gods. However, after you equip this title, all Gods will have their friendship levels with you set to zero, and you can't hide this title. You won't be able to stop slaying Gods even if you don't want to.] [1] 1

Alright then, let us ignore these random comments. It seemed that I did a fairly good job this time. The System indeed rewarded me handsomely this time and was quite helpful as well. Not only did I obtain two excellent pieces of equipment, I obtained Fate Points from slaying Emordilorcan in a circuitous fashion. And as for those "Enemy of the Gods" achievements, they were the rarest of the rare, titles that seemed incredibly useful… speaking of usefulness, I suddenly recalled the damned achievements "Jinxed" and "King of all Gentlemen" that I couldn't even turn off. The number of gentlemen had been increasing more and more these days, and they were also increasing in shamelessness. Perhaps, this suffering was all the result of my System.

But, right now, another trouble was before me.

[Warning: Sidunwar's Ocean Bottle's power level is unstable. Please hurry and complete the quest to hunt down the Sea Gods and collect sea-related divine power from the Sea Gods and sea beasts as quickly as possible. This will both complete this God Equipment's form for the revival God Quest and help fully construct your world.]

It seemed that after the Earth Elemental God's body and the Earth Elemental Throne's shard were both absorbed into my "Frigidwinter Earth," the already fragile balance between elements there was once again shattered. Although this was a good thing for my "Frigidwinter Earth" world, hunting down the sea beasts and Sea Gods was probably going to be another bothersome task.

What attracted me the most were the two equipment that I received. Real life was no game, and not every boss would carry around a large sack of weapons and equipment that he couldn't even use, not to mention dropping a few of the equipment randomly out of a list. For a rather long time now, no matter who I defeated, I hadn't received any equipment.

You want equipment from your enemy? Just take it off your enemy's corpse. There was no Blackhand in real life… what the system could give me was a mess of materials; it merely helped me save time in gathering them.

But just glancing at the two equipment, I knew what was going on.

[Roaring Armlet of the Earth. SemiGod Equipment.]

[Effect 1: Power of the Earth: Absorb the power of the earth element and increase the Strength of the wearer by 10. However, the wearer must be standing on the ground.

The Strength increase effect will disappear while the wearer is jumping or flying.]

[Effect 2: Indestructible Stone: This Armlet is indestructible, and can even block God Equipment's attacks. If this Armlet is significantly damaged, it can even repair itself.]

[Effect 3: Dimensional Flash: A short, precise instantaneous transportation. (3 minutes cooldown and the maximum distance is one hundred meters). System Notification: Using this ability will use up a large amount of stamina. Please use this ability with care.]

[Divine Curse: Petrify. Emordilorcan is cursing his enemy that stole his power. Every second, the wearer of this Armlet will receive one earth damage. If the damage taken from this effect surpasses 70% of the wearer's maximum HP, the wearer will be turned to stone by the endless absorption of the earth element.]

[There is a row of yellow words carved into this armlet: "This Armlet contains the Divine Spirit of an undying God. Just touching it can make one sense this God's past strength and unwillingness to die.]

This gray-black armlet appeared quite ordinary, and the scaly pieces on it resembled Emordilorcan's skin. There were also two black stones that resembled eyes on top of the armlet. While these "eyes" seemed to be made of stone, when I touched them, I discovered that they were actually warm and as soft as skin, as if they were living.

As a SemiGod Equipment, its abilities weren't that numerous, but its effects were incredibly useful. All of Emordilorcan's strongest abilities were contained within it. Significantly increasing strength was excellent for any melee warrior; its indestructible quality could overturn a situation at a critical point by blocking one attack, and that flash ability was already proven quite powerful by Emordilorcan himself.

While that Divine Curse on it was indeed troublesome as it limited the time that this Equipment could be used for, since I had a titan's body and was immune to the damage, I could simply ignore it.

"It seems that just like that God Equipment dagger from before, my System can create strong equipment out of God-level existences using their divine power and Divine Spirits. Looking at these stats, it's almost as if it was custom-made just for me."

I joyfully put on the armlet and felt a noticeable increase in my strength, which caused

me to laugh out loud in satisfaction. Strength was forever the foundation of any melee combat class, and I've never even heard before of such an equipment that could increase physical power by so much.

"Perhaps I can finally compare my Strength to Amelia's."

As for the other Epic-level shield, it was a tower shield which could cover most of my body. Its shape resembled Emordilorcan's face, and there were also stones resembling eyes on it which seemed to be staring at me. It was somewhat pitiful to look at.

When I checked out the shield's stats, they were similarly practical. Mega-high defense combined with the most practical ability of damage reduction, and even an attacking ability that could surprise an opponent.

After some consideration, I decided to personally use this shield as well. After all, while fighting with Emordilorcan, every time I exchanged blows with him, I was injured to the point of spitting blood. This made me feel like my defense was indeed rather weak if I had to face another opponent on his level.

"This was such a rare abundant harvest. Did my system change its personality, and it's now going to help me become the main character of a harem story?"

[System Reminder: With great power comes great responsibility. The greater your power, the stronger your opponents. The System shall never make any traps for you; you're the one who's digging pits and jumping into them by yourself. Is it the System's fault that you're forever shooting yourself in the foot?]

Fine then, my expression instantly darkened. This bastard system was making it obvious that it still intended to make me suffer. It couldn't even let me be happy for two days.

"Indeed, it was an abundant harvest."

The black cat crouching on my shoulder was laughing in even greater delight than I was, and the next moment, I understood what she meant by that.

The black cat reached out her claw and vanished in a spatial distortion. What appeared before me was an incredibly beautiful blonde high elf.

Her silky blonde hair was lifted by the wind, and her lightly smiling pretty face seemed

to be as pure as snow. Her snow-white skin seemed to have a faint golden glow, and those innocent eyes seemed pure enough to make anyone's heart ache and believe that she was as pure as unblemished snow.

She was wearing ancient traditional white ceremonial clothing with a long scarf that reached the ground. Her extravagant robes seemed so beautiful that they were holy, and they indisputably added to Harloys' aura of unearthliness. At this moment, the person before me wasn't that banshee who was absolutely shameless and lacked any limits, but rather the last princess of the ancient high elf empire.

"This is a golden high elf? This is the allure of utmost pureness?"

As expected of the most beautiful of all elven tribes. At this moment, even my heart skipped a beat. Although I had seen the most seductive succubi before, I'd never witnessed this type of alluring pureness that would make any person easily succumb.

It was just like how I had been forcefully sent back to my body where I had died in combat. When Harloys obtained life again, the magic of time helped return her to her past, to that generation where this young female elf had the power of obtaining everything through her charisma alone.

When I recalled that inside her was the thousand-year-old banshee Harloys, I managed to calm down.

She smiled ever so sweetly at me, seemingly filled with sincerity.

"Thank you so much. I shall remember this debt I owe you."

That, however, made me feel dazed and angered. I furiously pointed and shouted at the elven beauty!

"You fake! Who the hell are you! Old witch Harloys would never thank anyone! Nor could she possibly smile so sweetly. Ahhh! I'm getting goosebumps all over. What manner of demon are you?! Hurry up and show your true form!"

Right then and there, Harloys was so enraged that her eyebrows twitched, but she managed to suppress her anger somehow by taking two deep breaths. She forced another smile.

"Ha ha, you're such a jokester. Who could I be if not Harloys? You forgot already that I

was the last gold elf? This form is how I looked like before I died."

Were the ancient gold elves supposed to all be an average of over two meters tall? Harloys appeared to have the perfect golden ratio, beautiful and lively with wonderful curves, yet she seemingly didn't lose her elegance. She also possessed an unscientifically large chest, completely different from any other elf, which far surpassed that of any supermodel's. The most ridiculous of all was Harloys' height, however. She had to look down in order to meet my eyes when I was already 1.8 meters tall!

"Objection! If you didn't mention it, I would have forgotten it. Weren't you still quite young when you died? Who do you think you're fooling!? Order for my magical pet: strip off your disguise!"

I instantly realized it when she reminded me of her death. She was definitely making this appearance up. She most likely crafted this appearance using her transformation ability.

Her magical pet contract with me wasn't canceled with Harloys' return to life, but it was rather the opposite. Since she had now combined with Shadow, the singular contract now became a dual contract, which actually solidified her connection to me. If I gave her any order at all, she would be forced to carry it out.

"Roland, you bastard! This is my expected mature form, don't…"

The order had already been given to my magical pet, and so, a sudden flash occurred as she was forced to return to her true form. After the light dissipated, the great beauty disappeared to reveal a blonde child elf before me, whose long hair was all tangled on the floor. Her overly large ceremonial clothing was falling off, and her exquisitely small face was filled with anger and was as red as an apple. Even her elf ears that were a symbol of her race were completely red. It was quite interesting. Yep, at least to me, it was very amusing.

"Alright, you're flat, flat, and flat. Only this is believable. This is the Harloys that I know."

I made comparisons in satisfaction as I walked around her while nodding. I forced her to perform various exercises like lifting her hands up to the sky and windmills to turn around and around, making her furious and embarrassed.

When Harloys was dizzy to the point that she laid down listlessly, I lowered my head and looked her in the eyes at ground level, before finishing by patting her head.

"Yep, the tall adult Harloys is too unscientific. The short one looks much better. My little friend Harloys, can I interest you in some candy?"

Kacha!

“…Don’t bite me! Hey hey, let go! It hurts, it hurts! Let go! Are you supposed to be a dog!"

"You bastard lolicon! You’re a bastard who deserves to be single forever!" A grim voice escaped from her tiny mouth, and she actually managed to even transform her teeth into tiger fangs!

Fine then, let me put everything else aside for the moment, as I first needed to put some effort into removing the "gloves" on my hand.

Note:

1. Kratos appears to be a God of War reference.

Chapter 230
Change

Ever since I started becoming slightly famous, people would always put some descriptions in front of my name when mentioning me, such as "damned Roland," "bastard Roland," "why-isn't-he-dead-yet Roland," and so on.

It seemed that the closer someone was to me, the more they liked to use these types of nicknames. I figured that this was their way of showing their affection for me.

I understood that this was a friendly way of showing their closeness to me in an attempt to improve our relationship. After all, calling me "lovely Roland" or "wise Roland" to my face would be rather embarrassing, which was why they substituted other adjectives instead.

Yep, this was just a unique method of expressing the deep friendship between us. It definitely wasn't because my friends objected to me or anything like that, such as the one on my head. Although she was a bit emotional right now, I staunchly believed that she was simply too shy and embarrassed…

"Um, isn't that enough? There should be a limit to how embarrassed you can get. I know that you're really grateful to me, so stop acting awkward… I'm bleeding again, stop biting! Hey, did you hear me?"

Kacha! *Kacha!*

What was it supposed to mean when she transformed her teeth to that size? Did she intend to cosplay as a saber-toothed cat? The transformation ability wasn't supposed to be used that way!

Alright then, let us ignore the fact that my head was currently bleeding, as well as ignore the incredibly embarrassed (?) young elf on my head. At the very least, I had many other important things to take care of.

I hadn't lied when I had Beifeng tell the others to go back first without me. For the time being, I wasn't going to be able to leave the Earth Elemental Plane, so I could only have

them go ahead first.

Even with the Earth Elemental Throne shard as a converter, my new world still required large amounts of earth element for its foundation. And the best quality and highest quantity of earth element obtainable was of course in the Earth Elemental Plane. My System had also given me clear notifications regarding this, telling me to stay in the Earth Elemental Plane without going anywhere else.

After Emordilorcan's death, the connection between planes had already been recovered. A certain shameless Death God tossed the responsibility for cutting off the connection between planes to Emordilorcan, since nobody would dare to question Ayer about his possible involvement anyways. This matter would likely end just like that.

After the connection between planes was reestablished, I spent a lot of time dealing with questions from the mortal plane.

However, the news that I heard back from them helped me to relax somewhat as well, as the situation in the Northlands was going pretty well. Amelia's new product had already been confirmed to be effective by the druids, and it was planned to begin planting her new seed everywhere during next month's beginning of spring. My knights' military restructuring work was going smoothly as well, and the Mist Alliance was formally beginning to be put into place. Everything seemed to be developing excellently…

Of course, even if most things were going well, it couldn't be helped that there were some chaotic noises mixed within as well.

I might as well just tell the truth… I didn't spend all that much time on serious affairs, instead using most of my time to defend myself against those rumors that spread even quicker than dimensional transmissions. The scandal between Prince Roland and the witch had reached its third edition, and judging by the tearing and wall-scratching sounds from the other end of the transmission, a certain Demon Marchioness must be rather angry. That was why, until she calmed down at least a little, I should temporarily avoid—cough—cough—I meant I should just cultivate a little longer here for the time being.

Since the Northlands didn't have any military affairs that required my attention, most other affairs didn't have too much to do with me personally. However, there was still

some news that I paid close attention to.

"The Auland Empire's plan to recapture their capital has failed, and the City of Rain is continuing to increase in size and area. Large numbers of the seafolk are now constructing defensive fortresses, and even ancient sea beasts have been seen aiding them. The tide and height of the ocean increase every day, and it's looking bad for the humans."

All of these were preliminary battles to the Holy War started by the Elemental Gods, but the result was quite different from the one in the Northlands. Judging from the news that I received, the Auland Empire was in a bad situation.

"The Queen of Storms has actually promoted in rank? Her divine power has gotten stronger?"

Perhaps it was because the seafolk had gotten more devout in their belief towards their Guardian God, or perhaps Chaos was rewarding her for her achievements. This female warrior Goddess, who was famous for having an inscrutable personality, had gotten stronger through battle.

"…It seems that Gods are indeed the critical point of battles. If Lorci hadn't been killed by Karwenz for us, perhaps our straits would be equally dire right now."

When I compared the two battles, they were actually quite similar. Both were battles started by a True God on the Chaos side, but unlike Lorci, who had caused her premature death with a double betrayal, the Queen of Storms was probably one of the most well-liked rising stars of Chaos. From a certain standpoint, she was getting closer and closer to the position of Sea God that she dreamed about.

"Oh man, that's rather troublesome. How perfect! My world also requires sea-related divine power and Divine Spirits. It seems that we're definitely going to have another chance to meet her again in the future."

After all, there were significant grudges between us. The System had even reminded me in the past to not approach the sea, and the Queen of Storms was quite famous for being one to bear grudges. Just having the Borealis stop by the sea for some repairs had caused the Queen of Storms to send annoying sea beasts to attack it, and although we had won that fight, there was now a deeper grudge between us.

At the time, I didn't have spare time to deal with her, but now it seemed like I could

spare time for her. After all, my two quests where I needed to gather sea-related divine power from the Sea Gods and sea beasts probably had to go through the Queen of Storms, who had the title of being the leader of all the sea beasts.

"It's a pity that the Auland Empire views saving face as more important than anything else, which is why they're suffering. Not only did they not request aid from the Church of the Gods, but they even refused to accept aid from the other human kingdoms that volunteered to assist them."

As a person who believed in logic and reason, I was utterly unable to understand those who put the concept of face and reputation above all else. However, since the Auland Empire insisted on taking care of their own problem, the other countries and the Church of the Gods indeed had no reason to intervene.

"What's reputation supposed to be? Can I eat it?"—Roland Mist.

I shook my head and put this boring matter to the back of my mind. The other thing that slightly attracted my attention was something akin to a rumor.

"…Congratulations, Roland. Since you defeated Emordilorcan, you rose 6 ranks in the Calamity Rankings, and you're now #27. You've actually entered the top 30 so quickly."

I was unable to understand why Amelia seemed to be so envious when she informed me of this. Did she think that her ranking wasn't high enough? That being a walking human calamity was fun? I'd scare every little loli while walking around outside—that would be a sin… whoops, I seem to have said something wrong. I hate naughty children the most!

"Harloys! How many times have I said it—I'm really not a lolicon. If you dare to imitate my voice and act as me again, and ruin my reputation, I'll…"

Yep. The one who just said such a classical tsundere line was the "decoration" on top of my head. However, she didn't even look in my direction when I threatened her; instead, she showed an obvious expression of disdain that seemed to say, "What do you think you can even do to me?"

After all, if I truly did do anything to her, it would be bad for myself.

"I—I—I'll make you wear an elementary school girl's swimsuit while having cat ears and a cat tail, and I'll make you imitate cat sounds and dog sounds in the middle of

Karo City's largest plaza!"

Even Harloys was scared witless upon hearing this. It seemed that she never expected even me to be so shameless and come up with this method to threaten her.

"You—you do have those types of thoughts about me, after all. For you to be able to come up with such a perverted method of playing around, you still don't even dare to admit that you're a lolicon!?"

Fine then, it appeared that my reputation was continually darkening. She was so scared that she instantly transformed back into a black cat, but I was tempted to tease her even more upon seeing such a rare scene.

"Hmph! You think that I don't have any ways to deal with you if you change into a black cat? Did you forget that Beifeng is still in the Earth Elemental Plane…?"

Alright then, his name perhaps possessed more magical power than any forbidden spell. Harloys instantly changed back to her loli elf form and kept shaking her head.

"Don't turn me into a cat and lock me together with that mega-pervert! As long as you don't do that to me, I'll listen to anything you want! That day—that day… Wahhh!"

It seemed that her memory from when she had just left the Underground had given Harloys such a deep impression that she instantly surrendered upon hearing his name. Not only did this give me the perfect way to control her in the future, but it also caused me to inwardly sigh in exclamation at how the name of Beifeng Herault had far surpassed his actual power level in being able to scare someone like Harloys to such a degree.

Looking at the current Harloys, I couldn't help but inwardly exclaim. The mental spirit would affect the body, and the body would affect the mental spirit. After Harloys regained her life, she was affected by her physical body that was still rather young. She was now much more emotional than before, and often did some rather silly things.

This was a good thing for her. Although she recently did do many silly things, at the very least it made her seem more human. But, right now, I could only hope that her ability in magic hadn't decreased together with her physical body's age.

"Alright, then help me out here. You're probably the only one who can help me with this."

I indeed required Harloys' assistance, and this was something that I absolutely couldn't allow anything to go wrong with. It took me a lot of effort to figure out how to make her obediently work her hardest for me on this.

Right now, as one of the main locations where the battle had taken place, the area around the former Earth Elemental Throne had been cleared out and had become a forbidden zone with security patrols. The reason for this was the Seven Brothers of the Gourd that were fast asleep in the middle of the forbidden zone.

They laid there in all sorts of haphazard sleeping positions, and their snores were as loud as thunderclaps. As true world-level calamity existences, nobody wanted to see them suddenly wake up.

Obviously, making them hibernate forever was the safest way to deal with them, but I had promised Reyne to help her think of some idea to borrow their power.

"Impossible! Without even going into if it's possible to summon them to the mortal plane, or considering the huge price that one must pay to summon such a high-level existence, the moment they appear in the mortal plane, there's going to be plenty of fun in store for you."

Harloys instantly shot down the insane idea of borrowing power from these Divine Sins, but I didn't budge. I was well aware of everything she mentioned, but I had other plans.

"Of course, a complete summoning isn't going to be possible, but how about a partial summoning?"

"Partial summoning? What's that? I've never heard of it; just what are you talking about?"

For Harloys, who had the wonderful title of being "all-knowing," to actually admit to never hearing of this concept, it seemed likely that it didn't exist in the entirety of Eich.

"Summoning is a connection between two beings. Either the spell fails, or the entire body is summoned. What do you mean by partial summoning? Only summoning half of the body?"

Harloys was always easily excited about the topic of new magical knowledge. This time was no different. She seemed to have forgotten about how angry she was with me

earlier, and was eagerly asking me about this.

I directly nodded at hearing Harloys' question.

"Yep, summoning only part of the body."

I ignored Harloys' shocked expression as I began talking about my objective. And as I explained, Harloys' expression changed from shocked disbelief to helplessness.

"It's such an amusing plan. You're the best at finding abnormal shortcuts. I've never seen you so serious when you were studying magic before."

"Do you agree that it will work?"

"Although I don't want to admit it, it's highly likely to succeed. Go ahead and try it out. It's impressive how many strange ideas you can come up with."

I nodded in satisfaction. Since even Harloys was saying so, then that meant that the rate of success was quite satisfactory.

Actually, my plan was quite simple and didn't even require any high-level knowledge. It only required the most basic knowledge about dimensions.

"First, open up a small dimensional connection through which only one of the Divine Sin's limbs can pass through, and then have Reyne wake up the Divine Sin while she's still in the mortal plane. When the Divine Sin wakes up, it'll definitely attack everything in front of it instinctively, while that tiny dimensional connection won't allow it to pass through; the dimensional connection will be the only way that it can vent its strength. Then, the enemy on the other end of the dimensional connection will naturally become the target of its wrath, and afterwards, Reyne just has to order the Divine Sin to hibernate again, which will basically end this partial summoning."

The logic behind it was quite simple, and it was somewhat bending the rules, but it was fine as long as it worked and was practical. After all, even I wasn't confident that I could survive a single attack from a Divine Sin.

"I've even prepared a name for it already—'Look At My Golden Finger!'"

"Golden Finger? And I have golden legs—what does that mean? It doesn't seem to fit at all."

“…Then how about the Magically Appearing Divine Palm or the Nine Yin Divine Stomps?"

"Why don’t you just say that you’re an absolute failure at proving that you’re a genius at coming up with names? Those are even worse than Golden Finger!"

Chapter 231
Day of Celebration

"The Great Stone Sculptor started the first battle? Oh my, I didn't expect her to be so hasty."

When I heard that the Earth Elemental Lords had begun fighting each other, I wasn't surprised at all. After all, rather than fighting after the Earth Elemental Throne revived itself, it was better to clear out one's enemies while one could still be proactive and gain control of the situation as early as possible.

A battle was never something that required both sides to agree to. It could even be said that a battle was never something that both sides wanted. As long as one side felt that their side had obvious advantages and could reap huge benefits from the battle, it would only be a matter of time before a battle exploded.

The current Earth Elemental Plane was just like a wild animals' arena that had lost its manager. All the wild beasts were locked together in a single cage, and when they learned that there was now a spot available for only one of them to rise to the top, the strongest beasts among them began to unhesitatingly get rid of those who were capable of threatening them. The weaker beasts, on the other hand, began teaming up with others in hopes of gaining benefits. And, so, a chain reaction of battles began.

With the lure of becoming the Earth Elemental God as the end prize, I could foresee that this battle between the Earth Elemental Lords would probably last several hundred years.

While the Earth Elemental Plane was busy sinking into chaos, the seemingly peaceful mortal plane was in an even bigger amount of trouble.

Lorci's death, the Queen of Storms' promotion, and the shaking up of the Gods that had remained consistent for the past thousands of years was more than enough for those who were waiting in the shadows to begin taking action. Not to mention that these two Gods weren't the only two who were either lucky or unlucky.

Emordilorcan's death shocked the entire world. It wasn't only that—I had also

confirmed through my channels that the Fire Elemental Goddess had also mysteriously perished, which ended up benefiting a certain Fire Sea Demon Marchioness. There were only two out of the four Ancient Elemental Gods remaining now, and the two still alive were the weaker two among the four. This caused a chill in the hearts of all those who were undying, and also caused ambitious individuals who weren't satisfied with the status quo to begin taking action.

However, none of these individuals was the best "newcomer." This glorious title was obviously taken by Wumianzhe. He had been promoted from a city's judge "that nobody had ever heard of" to the Law God, then from a Weak God to a Middle God, and now he had even obtained the Divine Obligation of Guardian God of the Northlands and was being worshiped by the national churches of the numerous northern countries. The path he took would typically take other Gods over thousands of years to accomplish, but he did it in a mere two years. This was far above the level of any epic or legend, and everyone found it inconceivable.

A successful example would doubtlessly bring many imitators, such as the undying ones that wanted to become Gods themselves, as well as the ancient Gods that were forgotten by history. None of them wanted to miss this "opportunity" that was so hard to come by, so they began taking action.

Some of them began organizing various barbarian tribes, some woke up their own tribes from deep hibernation, and some even freshened up their appearances and personally strode forth. In the past month, news about encountering the supernatural had already surpassed the amount of the past ten years' combined encounters. Various border clashes also reached the highest peak in thirty years.

"Giant Flame Demons have been spotted in the Amu Mountains. They seem to be the descendants of ancient Giant Demons. They attacked the hunters living in those mountains, and seem to be claiming the area as their own territory. It's said that they possess characteristics of both elemental creatures and the living, and are incredibly powerful."

"A strange creature has appeared on the Kazlan shoreline. It's reported to resemble an octopus that can walk. These octopuses use wondrous engineering tools and mind magic. They've been enslaving the local humans for labor purposes, and they're building a semicircular-shaped tower reaching the skies."

"The southwest mountains' elven kingdoms have made an announcement. They've

announced an elven alliance, and have begun forcing all humans living within their borders and near them to leave. The Elven Gods have remained silent on this, but without their support, such a thing could not possibly happen."

"The eastern human kingdoms have broken off all contact and business relationships with the other kingdoms, and have even begun to kick out the other kingdoms' ambassadors… Ever since they started believing in that strange voodoo religion a hundred years ago, I've expected this day to come. Sooner or later, they're going to transform into something inhuman that doesn't resemble either demon or human."

"A new type of half-human has appeared on the Aimon Plains. Their adults appear like young human children and are slightly less than half of an average adult human's height. They have beast ears and are incredibly skilled at beast taming. None of this is the most important—the most important is that their females are all incredibly cute! It's basically a heaven for lolicons… so many members of the Gentlemen Alliance have volunteered to be among the first for a scouting or ambassadorial mission, but in order to avoid racial disputes, not a single member of the Gentlemen Alliance was permitted to go."

"A storm is about to come." I was certain that even the stupidest person would think this after seeing the many clear warnings of the upcoming war. After the preliminary battles that signaled war were finished with, it was obvious that a major storm was brewing.

The only part that was worthy of celebrating about was that the Northlands, which had just experienced a battle, was now abnormally quiet; in fact, it had become abnormally isolated.

"It seems that killing our enemies off has been effective. At least, for the time being, no fools will be rushing to attack the Northlands."

Perhaps in the eyes of most of the undying, the Northlands had already become Wumianzhe's territory. At least, for a short while, nobody wanted to challenge this new hotshot rising star.

This temporary peaceful respite was also what I wanted. In order to truly rule over all the numerous northern countries and establish the Mist Alliance, even if it was a rather loosely-regulated alliance, it would require a lengthy amount of time.

However, merely passively responding to threats was a bad idea. This was just like playing chess. Even if you managed to establish control over one tiny corner, if you lost the entire game because of that, there would still be nothing you could do.

"Using the name of East Mist or my name to interfere with affairs may cause many troubles, and Wumianzhe's intervention would likely cause the other Gods to team up to attack him. I need a more neutral identity… perhaps that mercenary group Absolute Gentlemen Alliance will be useful here. It seems like it's time to have a good discussion with Beifeng."

After some consideration, I felt like that mercenary group, which I established just for the fun of it, was probably the best identity for me to intervene in the continent's affairs. Although the Gentlemen Alliance had an excellent relationship with East Mist, thanks to Beifeng and the others' efforts, their finances and organizational structure were all independent. It could be said that they seemed governmental but actually weren't governmental at all. This type of mercenary group definitely had the potential to act across borders and was the most appropriate group through which I could take action.

"I almost forgot! I'm even the leader in-name of that mercenary group. Yep, it would seem like there's plenty of tricks I can use."

Actually, it was only when I finally returned to the mortal plane that I learned that this joke of a mercenary group had already become the most renowned mercenary group throughout Eich, with branches in every country. Those bastards used my name while hiring more members, and every official in every country had to give them face. Probably, in most outsiders' eyes, this mercenary group had become my private soldiers.

Of course, this was doubtlessly something that most lords feared. In history, there were plenty of examples of how mercenary leaders became kings or emperors themselves, but there was a unique, special internal relationship within East Mist. Mainly, Reyne and I had a subtle relationship, and most of us were happy to see this mercenary group expand. In fact, they even viewed the Gentlemen Alliance as a type of backup governmental official.

Governmental military troops were always going to be limited. In this era where the strong ruled, military might for self-protection would forever be necessary. Mercenary jobs would always be popular, but if they lacked a well-disciplined organization, it was

possible for mercenary groups to only occasionally be mercenary groups and turn to thievery during peacetime. This was especially true if you hired some mercenary groups to transport valuable goods—you would have to worry about the mercenaries themselves turning into bandits.

And if the mercenary group received an ill reputation, they would just have to change locations and continue doing what they always did. In this world where conflicts never ended, people with martial prowess would never fear not being able to find a job.

However, compared to most common mercenary groups, the Gentlemen Alliance had an excellent reputation in the eyes of the public.

"Although they charge high prices, their overall strength is quite strong, and they're very trustworthy. Although their members are rather strange, they're all good people. Even if there are complaints about the strange habits of their individual members', there are currently zero complaints about them regarding professional work ethics. Their employers' reviews about them are also very high."

This was the Mercenary Guild's review of the Gentlemen Alliance, which further improved their trustworthiness.

"Yep, that uncle volunteered to help me find my cat. He didn't even accept my spare change. He said that I only needed to hold my doll and smile at him for payment. And they always have candy in their pockets! They're so nice."

This was the strange statement that came from a loli who hired their services. The people that heard this statement had even stranger expressions afterwards.

"Most of their grunts are local youngsters and retired soldiers, while their middle and upper ranks have many well-known strong individuals that are even heroes from this recent war against the beastmen. The most important part is that the leader of this mercenary group is actually His Highness Roland. Even if they charge slightly higher fees than average, it's reassuring to know that they're trustworthy. However, there is one rumor which says that the members that join them will become stranger and stranger… that must be a rumor spread by those who are jealous of them."

The Gentlemen Alliance was considered trustworthy, strong, backed by the East Mist government, and always had familiar local members. Not to mention that countless numbers of people hired them, and the most important of all, they had many

achievements racked up from the war against the beastmen. It would have been strange if they weren't able to make it big with all these factors.

And, so, even though this mercenary group had an absentee leader (me), and the number two leader (Beifeng) always acted ridiculously as he pleased (he always only did the things he was interested in), this strange mercenary group actually managed to have excellent internal organization and keep expanding. Now, it was the largest mercenary group in all of the Northlands and was well trusted by the citizens. It imperceptibly became a faction that could no longer be ignored.

And, in the distant Northlands, the things that I wanted were actually well in progress.

As my hand-picked "substitute," Elisa performed as expected. After receiving all those reports about the abnormal, Elisa unhesitatingly sent out a huge number of scouts and spies. In fact, it was at her request that the Gentlemen Alliance began building branches in all the other countries and that the Administrators of Justice from the Church of Law began traveling to other countries.

"Waiting for news to come to us while we shut our doors is definitely unfeasible. Right now, we need a large amount of information. The more the better. Especially information regarding the undead as well as the Bardi Empire."

Actually, there were some things that still hadn't been reported to me yet. Among the chaotic amount of information that came in, one piece of information that had been treated as an urban myth attracted Elisa's attention.

"The Bardi Empire discovered a large skeletal door constructed of white bone. According to the records, it seems to be a dimensional door from the Undead Plane! Not only that, this dimensional door seems to have already existed for a year and a half."

This piece of information was only a tiny secondhand rumor, but Elisa viewed this information as incredibly important. While the other countries were still treating the upcoming Undead Calamity as a joke, she had already sent out her own informational resources.

"Summarizing the abnormal movements recently happening in the Bardi Empire, if the truth of this report can be verified and if this dimensional door's existence can be verified as well as the fact that it has remained peacefully in the Beldi Empire for over

a year, then there are many things that we need to reconsider."

But before she finished any of her preparations, a new order interrupted all of her current preparations.

"A celebration? At such a time? Has Roland gone crazy again?"

Yep, a letter had just arrived for Elisa across dimensions. This letter explained in detail that a celebration should be held at the end of winter for a holiday I termed as the "Day of Peace." I also mentioned the programs that should be performed during this holiday, such as organizing a circus performance, a military parade for the citizens, an end of winter hunting competition, and inviting diplomats from various countries to a banquet.

"There's less than a month until the set date, so how could things possibly be finished in time? We haven't even resolved our long-term food supply issues, and now we're supposed to arrange an extravagant celebration? During a celebration, food resources will be used up at three times the normal rate!"

Just the diplomacy and business negotiations required for the Mist Alliance were already overloading the East Mist Communal Country's government officials. At such a time, giving them less than a month to prepare a national-level celebration seemed absolutely impossible.

It was said that after seeing the contents of my letter, there were numerous government officials that were so shocked that they collapsed on the ground, and the hospital ran out of emergency beds.

"His Highness Roland is trying to kill us. Even if we work our hardest, this can't possibly be accomplished."

This was already what everyone was thinking in their heads, but a certain person forcefully suppressed all complaints, worked overtime to create a list of tasks for everyone, and forcefully succeeded in advertising this holiday.

"Sister Kelly, there's no need for you to listen to Roland's ridiculous request. There's no way this plan can be carried out in time."

Yep. As the highest-ranking female government official, and Kelly was, in actuality, the civil official in East Mist with the highest authority. Only she could force such a plan

by using her longtime authority and accumulated respect. But even Elisa couldn't bear to see all the government officials that had fatigue and frowns on their faces. And, so, she decided to directly come find Kelly for a discussion.

Kelly suddenly broke out into laughter at hearing this.

"You still don't understand Roland well enough. It's whatever if others think that he's being ridiculous, but if even you think so as well, he's going to be very sad."

Elisa didn't understand. Was there supposed to be something behind this sudden celebration?

"You see, this may seem ridiculous, but it's actually something really important for us. Organizing an end of winter major hunting competition, this matches with one of our original goals. By the time spring arrives, the hungry wild beasts will naturally begin dispersing, and it'll be much more difficult to deal with them. But now that the war is over for now, it's obvious how much distaste the soldiers and citizens have for military things right now. Organizing the soldiers on a large scale to hunt down the beasts may not be a good thing for us, but if it's something like a hunting competition, that'll easily motivate everyone."

"Then, what about inviting all the other countries' important diplomats for a banquet, as well as organizing a grand military parade? We haven't even resolved our food supply issues! Isn't it too wasteful to be spending extravagantly right now?"

Kelly shook her head at this. She elegantly turned around and gently caressed her hair—it seemed like she was secretly laughing. She seemed to be exclaiming at Elisa, and her eyes appeared to be filled with a mature seductiveness.

"When I first saw his request, I didn't understand it either. But after closer consideration, this is a marvelous move to solve our current diplomatic and business negotiation problems. It seems that even if little Roland hasn't been personally participating, he's always been considering our problems."

"Huh? What? How is that even possible?" Rather than questioning, this was more like complaining. It would seem that Elisa had accumulated a significant amount of complaints against me.

"You see, inviting the important diplomats to a banquet here is doubtlessly an excellent chance to solve some diplomatic issues currently on our plate. And as for

showing off our soldiers in a military parade, that's also the perfect opportunity for them to observe our new weapons, troop types, and combat mechas."

"You're saying that arms deals will be made?"

Elisa truly began considering things for the first time. Being a supporting army in name but actually making arms deals was a task that had long since been on the list of things to do, even higher up than ensuring the steady supply of our new products or resolving the food supply shortage. According to the original plan, making arms deals should have been put in place right after the beginning of next year's spring via middlemen merchants.

Logically reasoning it out a little, now was a chaotic time, with all the countries all preparing for possible combat. East Mist had become well renowned from its recent battle, and if they organized a military parade with the goal of showing off their newest developed weapons and technology, perhaps it would attract many important officials from other countries to their banquet. At that time, it would basically become an auction house, where they could raise prices as they pleased and make massive profits.

After she came to the conclusion, Elisa finally understood and looked at Kelly with a complex expression. In a way, for Kelly to understand Roland better than herself who was supposed to be Roland's girlfriend made her feel a little jealous.

"At least that circus parade is just for the heck of it, right?"

Kelly shook her head. In her mind, that was the most important part of all.

"Actually, when I saw it at first, I also thought it was just his whim. But thinking over it more carefully, we overlooked his intention. Roland must have noticed some things that we didn't because we were too close to affairs here."

Kelly walked up to the window as she talked and opened it. Things outside were flourishing; redevelopment of the older city areas and the construction of new city areas were proceeding at full speed. With plans for new crops for the next year and the reorganization of the military, everyone outside was busy for various reasons. Although most appeared to be tired, they still seemed to be in high spirits.

"Too many things have happened recently. Although everyone is working hard for the future, a string that's too tightly wound will snap easily. There will be so many things

to be done next year as well, so we'll be even busier in the future. If we can have a year-end celebration to help everyone relax and celebrate our victory for a few days, it'll help everyone to mentally end this chaotic year."

Elisa fell silent for a moment before she nodded in agreement. "Perhaps Roland has another meaning behind this as well. Actually, the Red Hunting Hounds have acted in a circus before at Sulfur Mountain City, and Roland wrote in the letter that he intended to personally watch the performance. He probably wants to use this circus as an opportunity to establish a closer relationship between the living and the undead."

Kelly couldn't help but chuckle.

"I didn't think of this. As expected of little Roland's girlfriend."

Alright then, this sudden direct attack caused Elisa's cheeks to flush red, and she seemed like she didn't know how to react. Soon, however, she adjusted her glasses and calmed down. It was just that she was now looking at the letter that seemed so thin yet contained such deep meaning.

"Let's begin; we don't have much time. We must prepare the most marvelous celebration before Roland returns."

"Yep!"

And several days later, when a thick celebration plan arrived in front of me via the goblins' expensive dimensional transportation device, I had complex feelings about it.

“…We will do a good job with the preparations. You can relax. We didn't expect that you would take so much into consideration."

Harloys read the addendum at the end in a tiny voice, and she spoke up with a tone of astonishment right afterward.

"Oh my, I never expected your celebration to have so many objectives. You're really amazing! And they actually understood what you wanted. You've picked up such excellent subordinates."

After a moment of hesitation, I decided to tell Harloys the truth.

"Actually, I didn't think of anything at all. I just wanted to have a grand party…”

"Then why did you want to have a celebration? And on that particular day?"

“…It's just to celebrate our victory; I didn't think into it at all."

"That's all?"

Harloys' was filled with disbelief. Since she was connected to me in heart and soul, she could sense that I was still hiding something. I felt awkward about being stared at by a loli like her, so I could only nod helplessly.

"That day… is actually my birthday… Why are you looking at me like that? I worked so hard and achieved so much; I can't even have a grand birthday party for myself? My requests aren't really that much! I just wanted to watch a circus, have some fun while hunting, and attend a banquet. This isn't too much, is it!"

Harloys wiped away some cold sweat as she glanced over the three hundred and forty pages of the celebration plan that definitely contained far more hard work and sweat than I ever put in. She was now beginning to sympathize with the normal people working under Roland even more.

This plan covered everything and was incredibly detailed. It couldn't have been completed without at least forty or fifty individuals working overtime for two weeks straight, but it was actually finished in just three or four days. It could only be said that its creators definitely made it with blood and sweat, with all their passion.

"This time, you're forbidden from telling the truth. Just do as it says in this plan. Otherwise, even I will want to beat you up."

I could only nod at this. What else was I supposed to say?

Chapter 232
Invitation

When mentioning mages, most people would think about mage towers that reached the clouds, orderly libraries, wondrous automatic magical tools, elegant mage robes, long beards that represented wisdom, and, of course, eyeglasses.

Actually, I've never seen any mage that could do all of the above—no—I should say that I've seen incredibly few mages who could keep their places clean and tidy.

In fact, most mages' laboratories were chaotically messy, with books haphazardly stacked everywhere and unwashed experimental test tubes letting off a disgusting stink. If there were some that weren't cleaned for far too long, then it was even considered normal to see some magical beasts or slimes as well.

"Aren't there self-moving brooms or puppets that can automatically clean the bookshelves?"

"If those devices are the rechargeable type, daily maintenance will require a great deal of mana, not to mention they're all really expensive. And if it's a one-time-use device, when you add in the cost for the materials, it's even more expensive. Those toys are only things that the Mage Country shows off to others in public in order to improve their reputation, but anyone who's ever used one knows the truth."

"But since they're wise mages, it shouldn't be *that* difficult for them to clean their own rooms. If they're really that bad at it, they could always hire a servant to clean it for them."

"Many objects are very dangerous for those who lack magical knowledge, and the mages can't rest assured having fellow mages touch them. Cleaning their own rooms? I'd love to use 26 hours per day instead of 24 to focus on research if I could; I have no free time at all. That's why I'm going to leave everything up to you—that's right—remember to water the southern garden once every day; you don't need to personally do the watering, you only need to go to the center and turn on the watering device… Oh, right—when you have time, find another gardener for me. He stopped showing up three days ago after entering my garden. I bet he ran off with the salary I paid him. I

really should stop paying salaries in advance, he's the twentieth already."

From a certain standpoint, the mage school from back in the day was very similar to modern-day academic institutions. Apprentices would learn from their masters, as well as act as their masters' personal servants. Since the mages found it inconvenient to hire outsiders to do their chores, it was the most normal thing of all to have their apprentices do the chores instead.

Long ago, when I first began researching under Senior Amelia as an acolyte, I hadn't had any contact with doing chores yet. The first task that she gave me utterly turned my impression of mages upside-down.

"Mage robes? Those aren't convenient to move around in, so I don't use those at home. Easy to retrieve and use magical ingredients in? Heh heh, when you reach my level, that's not necessary."

If the gentle-seeming Senior from back in the day had only upended my common sense despite appearing to be surprisingly nice, then the research laboratory cleaning task afterward had almost got me killed.

Don't even think about some nice scenes, like the beautiful teacher accidentally revealing some skin or asking me to draw a picture of her; her personal clothing, which took up two full rooms was so tiring for me to clean, but the task that gave me the greatest "joyous surprise" was actually watering her garden.

That daily task made me utterly abandon my beautiful fantasy about Amelia and see her true nature.

Probably everyone understands by now.

Back then, Amelia wasn't so vicious to the point of planting her Seven Virtues in her own backyard. But I first "enjoyed" the attempts of Piranha Plants to hunt me and the tangling of Black Forest Vines around me, playing a stimulating biohazard survival game in her garden. If it weren't for the fact that I already had a decent power rank back then, I probably would have died off without even knowing it, just like all her previous gardeners.

And my studies under her afterwards were all similar experiences. I finally understood why this Senior with such a good reputation always needed new acolytes…

I angrily roared from the bottom of my soul as I swung my sword to slice through one of those familiar distorted Piranha Plants.

"Being an acolyte under her will be impossible to survive without at least a Sword Saint's strength!"

"Why are you suddenly shouting! I'm going deaf!"

Alright then, I wasn't careful and accidentally roared out loud to vent my accumulated anger. That chaotic mess back in the day wasn't entirely my fault. Perhaps she didn't have evil intentions back then, but even for me who had a Sword Saint's strength at that time, I was on the brink of life and death in her garden. Who would I blame, if not her?

When taking that into consideration, making her suffer right before I left was actually committing a good deed. At the very least, there would be a lot fewer victims in the future, such as all her missing gardeners and acolytes.

"Oh my, how exaggerated this all is."

As for why I was bringing up those things from the past, it was because the scene before me was all too familiar. I was witnessing an overgrown forest, and not only that, Piranha Plants and other similar vicious plants were just as common as weeds here. Toxic pollen spread throughout the air, and tremendous mushrooms of thirty meters in radius actually inhaled this pollen. The most ridiculous part was that there were pumpkin carriages being pulled around everywhere by humongous rats. At any rate, this was a definite dangerous territory where various vicious plant species lived and acted as they pleased.

When I returned to Karo and heard that Amelia actually hadn't left with the others, I already guessed what was going on.

"This is the most perfect location to do as she pleases, after all. Back in our country, there are officers of the law and a board of regulators. She can do every type of rule-breaking experiment she wants here."

Should I say that everything before me was expected? When I arrived at where she was temporarily residing in the Earth Elemental Plane, I actually witnessed such a scene. It was obvious that unless she was intending to write a several-tens-of-thousands-of-words-long report, she had gone overboard playing around again.

"I think we should turn around and leave. Since Amelia herself hasn't come out yet, she's probably gotten trapped inside. If even a single one of her 'Virtues' goes berserk, it's a painful experience that nobody will enjoy."

At the time, I unhesitatingly turned around and began walking off.

What? Worry about Amelia? If the standard for calamities was that they could live for a thousand years, then Amelia could easily live for a minimum of ten thousand years. For her, no matter how overboard she had gone with playing around, it was still just playing for her—she could still take care of it afterwards.

"Didn't you say that you were going to invite her to participate in your birthday party? No matter what, she recently helped you out so much. Isn't this too cold of you?"

That silly cat—I suppose I should call her a silly loli now—was tugging at my clothes and not allowing me to leave. It seemed that she was dissatisfied.

I was getting a bit of a headache now. Ever since Harloys had regained her life, she had become much more emotional than before. At least she was cuter when she was a cat, since at the very least she was mostly uninterested in anything that didn't have to do with her. Now, she was basically like a curious child whose emotions changed quickly. Not to mention that she was getting more and more skilled at transforming her teeth into something sharp. If I wasn't careful, my head would end up getting injured.

"Would I bite you if you didn't anger me? Stop guessing at how I knew even though you didn't say it—anyone would understand from your expression. Right, why is it that you're inviting so many guests to your birthday party? And why did you want to have one in the first place? You don't seem like the type to celebrate something like a birthday at all."

"In your eyes, am I someone who should have a serious expression all day while secretly plotting behind the scenes with a minimum of three backup plans? And then plan out a series of underhanded plots for every single thing I do?"

Alright then, this fake loli actually dared to energetically nod in response to my question. Just wait for my revenge upon you! Hmph! Starting from next week, there's no breakfast, lunch, or dinner for you; either you can go outside together with me to do that Food God series of achievements together, or you can go ahead and eat Amelia's experimental products… it seems that the latter can also do those damned

Food God achievements.

"Lorci is dead now. Since one of the major figures on your list had died, you should be a bit happier."

Harloys nodded lightly at hearing this. On her list of targets to take revenge on that she had given me, True God Lorci of the Elven Gods had been ranked in the top three.

"Anyways, you're among the living again…"

"If you want to convince me to abandon my revenge, don't even think about it. Even if I'm not alive, that will never cancel out my past grudges!"

"Don't get so excited… I'm not foolish enough to attempt to convince you to let go of your grudges. I just want you to look forward to the future and live more for yourself. That doesn't clash with seeking revenge at all."

Some words had been in the bottom of my heart for a long time already, and I hesitated quite long about it, but I finally said them out loud.

"Actually, I'm the same as well. I'm tangled up in things from the past. No, I should say that we can't let go of the past. With all these years having passed, I can still remember the Mist Kingdom being destroyed in my nightmares. This is so not fun."

I paused for a while. Since I had bottled things up within me for too long, I didn't even know how to express myself anymore.

"I won't tell you to let go of the past, nor will I tell you some useless words like 'revenge is meaningless.' After all, that would be nothing more than an insult to people like us who live for revenge. But just like how Lorci's death will make you feel more relaxed, the Mist Kingdom's revival is also a type of release for me."

By now, I was feeling rather awkward, but it seemed like stopping here would be even more awkward, so I steeled myself and continued.

"If you can't forget the past, then just look more at the future. Anyways, we're no longer alone in our path of revenge, and we sort of count as family now. If there's anything troublesome, then we can toss the burden to others to share. At the very least, I plan to use my time to enjoy what I missed in the past before, even if I fail in the end."

Alright, after saying all that, I could even feel my face turning red.

"So, finding a few friends to help me throw a small birthday party is something quite normal. How was I supposed to know that they would make such a big deal out of the celebration?"

"Don't Elisa and the others know that it's your birthday?"

"Kelly probably forgot about it already as it's been several hundred years; who could possibly remember? As for Elisa… we didn't celebrate our birthdays in Sulfur Mountain City. We had our own celebratory holidays, one that I invented."

"Then what did you celebrate?"

"Since we were undead, and the day we died was the new beginning, we all celebrated our 'deathday,' and I happened to have several deathdays, so I was too lazy to celebrate them. It's normal that they don't know."

Harloys was rendered speechless upon hearing this. Roland dared to say that he didn't know how to enjoy life before? When she was still in Xiluo, she had never even heard of the concept of undead celebrating their deathdays. Those Sulfur Mountain City undead really knew how to have fun.

"Wait a moment! Didn't all those high-level undead in your army die on the same day? Wouldn't they all celebrate together, then?"

"Yep, which was why we called that day the 'day of annihilation.' We would have a grand celebration and parade through the entire city, causing a huge ruckus. And in order to not scare others, we would put funny makeup on ourselves, and sometimes parade as a roaming circus. At other times, we would act out an epic story's play, and sometimes we even went out naked. At that time, we even had performances and floats for the whole city. Slowly, as time went by, the living got accustomed to it and viewed it as a strange undead festival, and it became the main holiday tourist attraction of Sulfur Mountain City—the day of the dead."

When talking about the past, it was unavoidable for people to become nostalgic. As I was reminiscing about memories long past, Harloys also nodded in seeming realization.

"You *do* have a plot after all. Can't you just say things directly out loud?"

"You saw through me?"

"I've been listening to you, and it's so obvious! How could I not see through you? Perhaps those hunting hounds of yours have realized it as well."

"Yep, even if I don't say it, they'll understand. In this generation, since the Mist Kingdom has already revived, celebrating something like the 'day of the dead' or the 'day of annihilation' on the day of the kingdom's fall is too pitiful. In the future, there's only going to be this 'day of peace' celebration that I've set up, which represents victory as well as peace. Since I myself intend to walk out from the shadows of my past and look towards the future, then I would obviously hope that they could be the same as well."

"…You are so willful and selfish."

I shrugged without denying it, as I knew it to be true.

"Every year's celebration is slightly different, but I believe that since my intention has been transmitted already, my knights definitely won't disappoint me. Bastian's ball-rolling performance is always the main event of every celebration. Now, here's the big question… Cough, my beautiful Princess Harloys, are you willing to accompany the selfish me at this celebration party? It should be a joyous occasion."

The loli blonde princess bent her knees slightly as she lifted her skirt and smiled a pure smile at me. She gave me an ancient ceremonial curtsy.

"Of course, my respected Prince Roland. It's my honor to be able to become your celebration's companion."

Chapter 233
Progress

[Roland Mist. Strength 32 (+10), Dexterity 22, Constitution 22, Intelligence 29, Will 20, Charisma 19. Racial talents: War Angel, Original Sin Demon Form, Sword of Order, Titan's Body, Feet of Ethereal Shadow, Divine Child, Chaos Barrier. Basic job classes: Level 60 Order Knight / Level 60 Chaos Lich King / Level 10 Four Elemental Swordcaster. High-level job classes: Level 3 Lord of Frigidwinter. General Level: 91, Actual Combat Strength Level: 100.]

[System Evaluation: An excellent meat shield that can take an ancient dragon head-on; a Gold-ranked newcomer that can face any Legend warrior… if you really want to go find a Time Dragon to fight and prove me wrong, that's fine as well.]

Compared to before, there wasn't all that much change in my stats. As a strength-based class, the growth in my Strength stat was satisfying, and the SemiGod Equipment I received from Emordilorcan even improved my Strength by 10 points, which could be said to have changed my entire attack pattern.

The only sad part was that even though this equipment had helped my Strength break past new boundaries, I still didn't have any foundational changes, nor did I activate any new racial talents. But as a melee class, Strength was always the foundation, and improving it would always help in many areas.

Mega-heavy dragon knight armor, anti-giant extended knight spears, dragonbreath cannons, and handheld ballistae—even without taking into consideration the improvement in my actual combat strength, I could now attempt to use these types of super-heavy equipment that no normal person would be able to use.

My new Dexterity-based ability Feet of Ethereal Shadow was a specialized ability. I could temporarily jump into the Shadow Plane for a very short period of time before coming back out into the mortal plane again… but no matter how much I thought about it, apart from escaping for my life against some ultimate abilities, this skill didn't seem useful at all. Not to mention that I never had any chances to use it in actual combat before.

Since I had already chosen a doublehanded sword-wielding magical swordsman approach, Dexterity was mostly a supporting stat for my Strength. Or, perhaps due to the burden of wearing heavy equipment, I was unable to notice much difference in my Dexterity stat. However, a low Dexterity would be a critical weakness.

Intelligence was doubtlessly the most important stat for any mage, and theoretically speaking, I had been improving my magic significantly via cultivation. I should have made some progress. But just as how the gap from 19 to 20 represented the gap between an ordinary mortal and a Legend, the gap between 29 and 30 represented the difference between Legend and the next ranks of Saint and Myth. Without some sort of foundational change, it would be difficult to make any more progress.

But, the harder it was to get over the gap, the larger the benefits one would gain. The Divine Sin's icy flames, Frigidwinter Earth, my now fixed Ice Treader Soul Imprint, my fundamental magic, Hibernation Chill, and the Four Elemental Sword Seal—in this long period of time, I had accumulated far more magical knowledge than improving my warrior status. Basic stats would directly impact the effect of my spells and abilities while obtaining magical knowledge and combat experience would directly influence my basic stats. My hard effort would definitely be rewarded in the end, and I was really looking forward to the benefits I will reap after breaking through this bottleneck.

Will was the main stat of any Priest-related job class. Will was related to the ability to communicate with the Gods, as well as how well one understood the concept of faith and a True God's teachings. Of course, Will was also related to the power of Divine Arts, as well as the resistance against curses or mind magic. This was originally the most useless stat of all for me, but the Chaos Barrier ability that had awakened before, when I was under pressure from Felix's Divine Domain, had an incredibly useful defensive ability.

[Chaos Barrier: Protect your mind from being suppressed by Divine Domains or Soul Worlds. Reduce the effects of anything that attempts to reduce your willpower or vision.]

Will was always the most difficult stat to increase, and there were no shortcuts whatsoever. Only those favored by a God would find it slightly quicker, and there were far too many Priests that were stuck at the Gold rank. There was even a saying about this: "Gods needed to use their own divine power to assist Priests in breaking through to Legend rank." (Author's Note: Actually, Roland's understanding of Will is

incomplete. Will is the ability to control oneself, and it's the only stat that will forever accompany the soul. Dying and reincarnating is actually the shortcut to improving Will.)

Thinking about how all those old Priests with white hair and gigantic beards had been stuck at 19 Will and the Gold rank for forever, if word of my job class that which completely ignored Will to actually surpass this barrier spread, those old and forever single Priests would probably be angered to death.

Apart from the Chaos Barrier racial talent, after that God's Descent I had performed on myself, I also received a racial talent called Divine Child. I didn't know whether to describe it as useless or useful. It was a passive buff to my body that would lessen the strain on my body when performing God's Descent. It would also greatly increase the success rate of God's Descent.

The final stat, Charisma, was a general stat. Not only did it represent one's physical appearance, aura, and personal charm, but it even included one's status, identity, and fame from past deeds. It would typically have a silent effect on any type of communication. It was just like how when someone beautiful was doing the exact same job, that beautiful person would receive more of a reward, and even though some newcomers to the job that entered the company at the same time would quickly find friends with their coworkers, others would never find any friends at all… fine then, perhaps my analogy wasn't an appropriate one, but that was basically what it meant.

Although Charisma may be very useful to some, it didn't have much meaning to me, so I'll just skip over it… Hmph! It definitely wasn't because I was jealous of Harloys' 33 in Charisma or anything like that.

In just a short period of two years, I was very pleased to have reached such an extent even if I experienced many dangers and almost died several times.

And this time, obtaining the Frigidwinter Earth was the explosive accumulated result of my rewards. After reaching the Gold rank, I had also finished organizing my personal path of development in the future. What remained was only to persist until the end.

Right now, the small trouble before me was perfect for my first test opponent.

"By the way, just how did she create such a demonic forest in the Earth Elemental

Plane? Isn't this an area which greatly lacks the wind and water elements?"

Plants never required as much to survive as people thought they did, but for seeds to sprout and mature, air, water, soil, and fertilizer were all still basic requirements. Obviously, apart from the earthen soil, there wasn't anything else here at all. I really didn't know how she pulled it off.

"Her Soul World? Or something even more troublesome…"

This was the only explanation I could come up with. Invading her Soul World for no apparent reason was no different from declaring battle against Amelia's SemiGod-rank power, and Soul Worlds themselves typically always had self-defense mechanisms.

To be honest, I didn't want to enter Amelia's forest domain at all.

As a former Truth Overseer and a member of the Mage Country's highest-ranked council, Amelia was at the pinnacle of mortal mages, the SemiGod rank, and she was a veteran who had reached that rank two hundred years ago. Nobody knew the true extent of her power.

If I died to my own teammate rather than Emordilorcan, that would seem foolish no matter how you look at it. Unfortunately, not only did this possibility exist, it was even rather high.

At the very least, if any of her three current Virtues came out, I might be finished here as I was currently unable to make use of my Frigidwinter Earth.

"Oh my, this is really such a bother. Amelia, remember to be grateful to me."

I put my silver Sacred Sword behind my back. For these crazed plants that were filled with the powers of nature, Holy Light and Law were obviously not the best counters to them. I clutched my intertwined sword of ice. This power of ice that I was getting more and more used to was the representation of nature's cruelest power, and it would definitely be effective against plants as well.

The moment I stepped forth, it was as if I passed an invisible boundary. All the plants around here suddenly became active, and the magic forest sent a "get out" message to the uninvited guest.

"Damn it! I shouldn't have given you the task of plants vs. zombies. Also, Amelia, when did you join the cult of 'as many cannons as possible?'"

Nobody would enjoy being pointed at by numerous amounts of plant artillery. These definitely weren't the cute versions from that game in my previous life; those magical peashooters were twice the height of an average human and had mouths that would fit several basketballs at once; they were even the special type that possessed multiple mouths that could all shoot at once.

Boom! *Boom!*

Plant bullets covered the skies and left me with nowhere to dodge, but this wasn't even the most dangerous part.

Before I even got close, numerous large Mandrake Plants had reached out and unearthed themselves. They were rushing towards me and Harloys while shouting out curses that sounded like what a person what shout as he was dying.

"Peppers? Capsaicin [1] [1] will enter a person's body and spice them to death? Don't joke around."

Amelia had unhesitatingly refused the concept of pepper bombs from the original game, and went instead with the Mandrake Plants that already possessed death curses as the best "self-destructing mines" of all.

"Does this count as me shooting myself in the foot again?'

But, before they could get close, they were all transformed into ice cubes by a sudden chilly wind. They then shattered into pieces.

"Frigid North Wind."

My sword of ice's sword energy had transformed into a frigid chilly wind, which was able to take care of the trouble rushing towards me at a long range.

I casually swung my sword, which emanated chilly air. It created floating ice stakes in midair in order to prepare for the upcoming battle.

For the Four Elemental Swordcasters, adding Sword Seals to their magical swords was already the basics of the basics. As for my opponent, the most dangerous would no

longer be the sharpness of my sword's blade.

"Frigid Beifeng? I didn't expect that you cared so much about him…"

Upon hearing this, my foot slipped and I almost tripped over and fell down. But, the next moment, I finally believed that Beifeng must have been jealous of my excellent naming sense, so I decided to change the name of this new attack of mine. [2] 2

"How about… Frigid South Wind? Or Cold Wind? Spring Wind? Wind of Peace?"

"…Just because it was born from the Frigidwinter Earth, you're calling it Frigid-something Wind? What's with those random-sounding names you keep coming up with? It's fine as long as you like it. I'm not going to bother commenting."

"Then stop looking at me with a sympathetic expression! And don't say anything out loud either! Ahh, your pity is killing me! At this rate, even I'm going to believe that I'm really pathetic."

While we were relaxedly "chatting" on the battlefield, some others were unable to bear it anymore.

"Ah!!!!"

Identical Mandrake Plants actually popped up from right beneath us, without us noticing at all.

Cling! *Clang!*

That was the sound of ice cubes crashing together. These underground assassins didn't seem to notice that I had long since solidly frozen everything around me.

"Everywhere I tread shall become the frigid Northlands."

With just a light step, a whiteness spread out from underneath my foot and speedily transformed this area into my territory by enveloping everything in snow.

Ever since I obtained my Frigidwinter Earth—no—ever since I obtained the Ice Treader Soul Imprint, my combat style had already been decided.

Slowing down my footsteps in order to accumulate snow was just my trap, roaring

winds containing blizzards would be my weapon, ice stakes suddenly descending from my sky would be my assassins, and even that ice river, which froze everything, was the extension of my will.

The Borealis that I constructed was my castle and fortress, and the moment that any enemy of mine entered my territory, they would become the very enemy of nature itself.

I strode forward slowly as I ignored the peashooters' projectiles that filled the skies. These projectiles were all frozen solid in midair as their very heat and time were frozen. Those Piranha Plants became exquisite flowers of ice before they could even get close, adding a sense of decoration to this world.

"Although it has a nicely sized area of effect, in actuality, the larger the AOE, the more mana it will cost to maintain. How much longer can you maintain this? Five or ten more minutes?"

"I estimate roughly fifteen minutes. But if 'my world' gets completed, then I can just directly take ice and cold air from there, which will basically be cost nothing."

"Hmph! What a rich and extravagant mage you are."

Without me realizing it, Harloys had put on a thick fox-skin jacket. Her furry tiger-skin cap even had two lively-seeming gem eyes. The ridiculous part was that she was actually complaining while hugging a warm cup. Judging from the hot steam's aroma and the color of the contents, it was top-quality hot cocoa.

I didn't think that I was cold originally, but after seeing the way she was, I somehow recalled the frostbite all over my body. This caused me to begin shivering with my teeth clattering, and so…

"Confiscated!"

I instantly stole her hot cocoa, sniffed that sweet aroma, then poured it down my throat in a single gulp.

"Hey—hey—that's mine… forget it, it'll never end if I get into an argument with you."

Harloys sighed helplessly as she was unable to steal it back from me even when she stood up on tiptoe. However, she instantly produced another hot cup of cocoa from

somewhere.

The coldness helped the hot cocoa to easily slide down my throat. The taste was wonderful, but right away, I felt like something was wrong. A strange flavor was cavorting about inside my stomach, and immediately following after, I heard the sound of my System enjoying my suffering.

[+1 to your Food God achievement progress. System Reminder: I told you long ago to stop stealing candy from lolis, and now you're suffering as you deserve.]

"Cough! Cough! What flavor is this supposed to be! It's too sweet, and there's such a strange aftertaste!? It's so choking!"

"Harloys' special-made hot cocoa, with savory catnip and kiwifruit. Would you like another cup?"

Harloys actually had a face filled with "concern" as she handed her new cup to me while watching me dry-heave. Due to smelling that overly stimulating aroma, my stomach felt even more uncomfortable.

My cheeks couldn't help but twitch as I watched Harloys slowly lick that frightening special-made drink of hers while recalling that frightening taste.

It was probably because she had stayed in cat form for far too long, not to mention that she had finally reobtained the sensation of taste after far too long without. Her sense of taste had obviously become distorted. Plus, with her mysterious ability to produce strange items out of seemingly nowhere, Harloys was becoming more and more similar to a certain blue earless cat ever since regaining life. [3] 3

[Magical pet: Harloys (Greed), species: ? (How am I supposed to classify her when she's part gold elf, slime, Divine Sin, Frigid Nightmare, and banshee? I suppose she's living). Strength: 6 (There are three benefits to lolis: small, soft, and easy to push down), Dexterity: 7 (With Dexterity low to such an extent, she can perform tripping over nothing for you; clumsy girls are quite cute you know), Constitution: — (As your soulbound equipment, she cannot die unless you die… so relax and use the loli as your meat shield, but you're going to have to worry about the loli's baby teeth afterwards).]

[Intelligence: 40 (Yes, she's actually much smarter than you; you're nothing more than an idiot to her, so don't even think of playing cards or betting against her. Yep, I'm definitely not teasing you about the ridiculous fact that you played cards yesterday

with your magical pet and lost even your underpants); Will: 29 (She loathes the Gods, and refuses to accept any blessing from any God); Charisma: 33 (This is beauty that's sufficient to allure any mortal); Job class: Level 60 Mage / Level 20 Generalist Archmage / Level 10 Magic Great Saint / Level 10 Divine Sin (abnormal); Overall Rating: 120+ (Epic rank), Racial Talent: Transformation (Epic rank) [4] [4] , Splitting Off Bodies of Greed (Legend rank), shadow teleportation, Ice Calamity, living magic bloodline.]

[Racial talent, Transformation (Epic rank): Transforming into a harmless cat is the weakest of her abilities, and a cute loli is just her preferred disguise for acting cute and harmless. She has several dozen powerful transformations that can instantly kill any Gold rank, and as your soulbound equipment, she can also choose to transform into a weapon. Currently, there's a mage staff (Death Breath), and a sword (Ice Calamity).]

[Racial talent, Splitting Off Bodies of Greed (Legend rank): She can split off small bodies of Greed, which will have part of Harloys' abilities and characteristics. As long as the separated body remains within a certain distance, it will be completely under Harloys' control and can act as her eyes and ears. When people are unlucky, they always think that black cats, which bring misfortune, are everywhere. As for Harloys, being everywhere is so easy. She's always capable of transforming into a crow / black cat / sharp-tongued loli in order to laugh at your misfortune. System Evaluation: Although this ability hasn't evolved at all, due to Harloys' overall increase in power, each of her Greed bodies' power has also significantly increased. If you don't want to be killed off by this loli, then don't anger her.]

[Racial talents, shadow teleportation and Ice Calamity: These are racial talents from the Divine Sin, so please try not to use them in the mortal plane. Otherwise… System Reminder: Both your Chill abilities can't be used without Harloys, so you should probably carry around some extra catnip with you.]

[Special Bloodline Ability: living magic bloodline. As a member of the species that created magic, gold elves have talent in magic far surpassing all other species. She is able to analyze any magic in the world after seeing it only twice, learn it, and easily make it stronger than the original version.]

[System Evaluation: This is your magical pet, but unless you count your cheat-like little world, she's much stronger than you are. She was never able to reach the peak in the past due to her undead constitution, but now her tens of thousands of years of magical

knowledge can finally come in useful. She's basically a living, walking version of a magical treasure trove. And now… she has reached her peak.]

My System listed her main statistics and racial talents, and the strongest part about Harloys was still her ridiculously high amount of magical knowledge. And now that she was among the living again, all the magic spells that she wasn't able to cast before due to being undead had been unlocked. After seeing this evaluation, the pathetic event of me being weaker than my magical pet reoccurred once again.

And from what I could tell, as I continued improving my power rank, her growth potential would become higher and higher as well. It seemed likely that the difference between us would grow even further.

Seeing a massive, faint black shadow approach us, I had an excellent idea.

"I choose you! Harloys! Come out, cat!" [5] 5

"Meow!" The silly loli pounced and bit me instead.

"Ah!"

Don't misunderstand; Harloys wasn't playing dead. I was the one who needed to worry about the extra "hat" on my head.

Note:

1. According to Wikipedia, capsaicin is an active component of chili peppers, which are plants belonging to the genus Capsicum. It is an irritant for mammals, including humans, and produces a sensation of burning in any tissue with which it comes into contact.

2. Untranslatable joke here. "North Wind" is pronounced "Beifeng" in Chinese, the same as Beifeng's name. It's a homonym.

3. Doraemon reference.

4. This part is inconsistent. I am 100% sure the raws say that it's God rank here. In the next paragraph, however, it is written that Harloys' racial talent, Transformation, is Epic-ranked. Perhaps the author made a consistency error? I wouldn't be surprised if it happened once, given the complexity of this series :p We are going with Epic rank

for the time-being, as I doubt Harloys is at God rank power.

5. Yes, this is a Pokémon reference!

Chapter 234
Black Forest

In a land far, far away, there was a thorny forest within an ancient kingdom. The enchanted magical thorns there were as scary as demons, and blocked all attempts at seeing through what laid behind this forest. Nobody, however, knew that in the middle of that silent forest was an ancient, historical castle, and in the highest level of the castle, that there lay a beautiful sleeping princess.

That pitiful princess was born as such a pretty girl, yet was cursed by a vicious witch to fall into an eternal sleep during her youth, the time of her life when she would be the most beautiful. Only a prince from a distant land would be able to wake her up with a kiss containing true love.

She waited and waited for several decades, without a single prince ever arriving. Only after several hundred years passed did the tardy prince finally arrive, after getting lost…

"Harloys, if you keep messing around by telling stories, I'm going to hang you up on the wall for your terrible narration! I'm capable of doing it!"

The venom-tongued witch was jumping and hopping about in the dark, black forest while gathering precious plant ingredients into her bag. She was just like a mushroom-picking little girl. However, the additional narration coming from my side made me speechless.

"I didn't say anything wrong! Just look at this forest; isn't it the exact same as the one from the fairy tale? Amelia was a former princess as well, and you are indeed a prince; it's basically like the fairy tale came to life, with the heroic prince slicing through thorny plants in order to save the girl! It's the childhood dream of every young girl!"

"You are Prince Roland!

"She is Princess Amelia Milan!"

"This is the thorny kingdom from the fairy tale!"

"I’m the kind fairy that guides the prince!"

The young (fake) loli held an ice flower in her hands and revealed a mesmerized expression. She had even created tiny fairy wings for herself, skipping and dancing around swiftly in midair, with a smile that seemed like she had gone nuts. She was just like a girl in the prime of her youth who had a lowered intelligence as a result of falling in love… I seem to have accidentally insulted a certain group of people—cough—cough—I apologize; don’t mind me.

She was having lots of fun, while I only felt a headache, heartache, and stomachache. This magical pet of mine was acting too casually. Although she was much livelier after partially letting go of her hatred, and the gears of time, which had stalled for so long on her, were finally turning again, the past Banshee Queen now mysteriously gave the feeling as if she was a mischievousness little girl. But, if you were the one she was toying with, perhaps you wouldn’t be happy about things, either.

Right now, no matter how much she acted pure and innocent, I didn’t even need to look at that sly look in her eyes or her constantly shaking tail. The emotions in her heart were transmitted to me through our soul connection, and I was well aware that from start to finish, she fully intended to watch me make a fool out of myself.

"Of course it’s the same! The culprit behind that thorny forest, the antagonist evil witch of that Sleeping Beauty fairy tale, is right before us… right, there’s something different compared to other fairy tales. The antagonist boss wasn’t defeated even at the end; was it because nobody could do anything to Amelia? That was why they finished with the prince and princess’s blissful life together as the ending, yep, what a terrible ending. It seems that I’ve been wise yet again, discovering the truth without even realizing it. Please call me the perceptive Roland." [1] 1

"You’re still as shameless as always…”

The "little fairy" was unable to keep up her act anymore as she landed on my shoulder. However, I tightly gripped the white sword of ice in my hand. If Harloys wasn’t playing around anymore, it could only mean that there was new trouble looking for us.

"What is it this time?"

"You don’t want to know. Fine, you already know."

"How can I possibly not know!? How can it possibly be this big! Did Amelia steal an

ancient Tree of Life from the elves?"

Normal treants [2] 2 were quite large, but they were still only from four to ten meters tall. They could only be said to be on par with a giant's size, but now, the tremendous treant before us was so tall that I couldn't see more than its feet—even when I stood on tiptoe. It was likely that this treant was taller than even a Titan. At the very least, it seemed to be on the same threat level to me as a certain yellow duck.

The gigantic treant strode in our direction. With every step it took, the ground trembled mightily. All the magic plants ran for their lives, and when it finally got closer and I could see it more clearly, I accidentally dropped my sword on the ground as I stared in disbelief at the giant tree before us.

"Hahaha! Look at its face! It looks exactly like you!"

Alright then, that silly cat was actually laughing and rolling around on my shoulder as I helplessly gazed at the tall treant. Its carved wooden features just happened to match mine exactly?

"Hahahaha! And it's even naked! It looks like all of Karo's getting to see your naked body—this is so funny! This is so funny!"

That's right, the treant was naked. When I took a closer look, I discovered that its body shape was proportional to mine, only with extra tree bark on top. Perhaps, if you looked at it from a distance, it really would seem just like me in person.

"Amelia, you bastard! What are you thinking!"

I picked up my sword and furiously shouted as I rushed in the direction of the giant treant and towards my death… cough, I take that back. I turned around and ran off when I was halfway through my charge.

"This enemy is too dangerous! Let's retreat!"

"Ha… I can't even breathe anymore from how funny this all is. Let me rest a little—why are you running? Kill that treant; do you want everybody to see you naked?"

"I'm not even as tall as its little toe, and one slice from my sword will likely be nothing more than a mosquito bite. Have you ever heard of a mosquito defeating an elephant? It's not even a competition."

"Roland!"

There wasn't much reaction from the treant before I started running, but after I did, that treant actually began to chase after me. As it ran, it even shouted my name loudly like an angry housewife, causing a tremendous gust to arise.

I was running for my life while the "little fairy" on my shoulder kept snickering.

"A Soul World is the reflection of one's inner mind. See just how important she views you! You're definitely the most 'important' person in her heart of all."

Important? Me? Sneaking a quick glance at the astonishingly huge tree chasing after me, Harloys was right in her own way.

I grit my teeth and suddenly caught the "little fairy" who was still rambling on and on, braked, turned around, and tossed her as if she was a javelin.

"I choose you, Harloys! Go! Big tree, take a look at my loli shield!" [3] 3

Alright then, the system notification was quite accurate. Harloys was indeed an excellent tank, but the prerequisite was that she was obedient.

Halfway to the treant, Harloys transformed into a crow in midair and flew back towards me, using that crow beak of hers to peck at my head. I now had an extra enemy to deal with…

This was only the beginning of my nightmare. I wasn't able to find the end of this forest.

"Those tower-like dandelions have opened up their flowers—so many bones! So beautiful!"

"The hell its beautiful! Those are magical explosives! Those are distributed cluster bombs; hurry up and run!"

Those beautiful silver dandelions sent out their winged seeds with the help of the wind. However, the second one landed, there would be a mushroom cloud and a huge hole in the ground.

"…Nice rose? What's this? It changed its form, and is now tossing its flower petals at

us? These petals actually split open tree bark; are they knives? This smells so sweet, what is it?"

"Rose Executioners. Their instant explosive power is greater than even a Gold-ranked archer's, and they even have a certain amount of melee combat strength as well. Don't ask about that sweet scent… forget it, since we didn't die immediately from inhaling it, it means that this level of poison can't affect us."

The fresh red rose garden seemed enough to cover any plains region, and the sweet scent filling the air was actually a toxic poison that was sufficient to instantly kill even a SemiDragon. Since we were fine and didn't even feel anything from it, it could only mean that our biological systems no longer counted as human.

"What is that? An apple bomb?"

"Don't get close to them! They eat humans! They love eating human organs the most!"

"Those humming 'little apples' were actually massive red apples that jumped up and down according to some playing music. Not only was this the scariest mental pollution of all, if you touched them accidentally, they'd even shriek 'Don't touch me, I'm really expensive! You can't afford me,' attacking their enemies both physically and mentally."

"Roland, this definitely has to be one of your original disgusting designs."

"…I don't deny it."

"A field of sunflowers? So pretty!"

"Duck! It's a sunflower laser cannon formation. Those who have used it know how effective it can be!"

These magical sunflowers' only method of attack was to absorb sunlight, store energy, and shoot it out with their magical crystal cores.

If there was only one sunflower, then that would probably be nothing more than a light burn. However, there was now an endless field of sunflowers before us, and their heat rays were extremely suited for stacking on top of each other and increasing their power. Getting hit would definitely be a pitiful experience.

"Damn it! What other things are there!"

All those abnormal plants had originally only been plans and designs, but they had all now come to life. After arriving in this garden, I was now getting somewhat worried about Amelia. These plants seemed like they were beyond her power level. Unless she suddenly had a large increase in her power level, she, too, was having problems.

There would always be a price to pay for using power above what one could handle. No matter how many aces Amelia had, this Soul World of hers was just far too much. Amelia's current situation seemed unusual.

"I hope that she's alright." I silently increased my pace.

The slow journey finally neared its end, but when we reached our destination, I was stunned with my mouth wide agape once again.

"In the deepest part of the thorny forest, there is an ancient castle of white jade, with a white jade staircase leading to the top of the tower. The prince that finally made it through so many difficulties is now starting to hesitate…"

That silly cat started yet another narration, and I didn't even know how to stop her anymore. After all, right before us was exactly such a fairy-tale-style castle.

As we approached, just like what was written in the fairy tale, the black thorns that sealed off the castle automatically retreated and created a path for us.

"Let's go! What are we waiting for?"

"Let me sit down for a little while and mentally prepare myself. I think the upcoming developments will be a bit too much for me to handle. At the very least, I need to prepare for my worldview to be turned upside-down."

Everything that happened along the way here was ridiculous enough as it was, and if it weren't for the fact that the return path would be nothing more than the same ridiculousness, I would have long since turned around and left.

"You still need to say that? Is there anything related to you that's not ridiculous?"

[System Notification: You should go now. The King of all Gentlemen is currently observing you.]

Okay then, just what should I comment about? Harloys who hit me in my weak spot,

or the System that always managed to sprinkle salt on my wounds and add fuel to the fire?

"Why can't I have normal people around me?!"

"That's because you yourself are as far from normal as can be!"

While I was in the midst of agonizing whether or not I should turn around, the main mage headquarters in Karo City was in a busy uproar.

There would be no city leader anywhere that would be able to accept a forest suddenly popping up in their own city, especially since none of the city's residents were ever seen alive again after entering that forest.

Luckily, the highest-ranked person in command, Kaid, guessed what had happened after seeing a forest pop up in the Earth Elemental Plane. He did his best to stabilize the situation.

"The higher-ups have long since reached their limit on tolerating Teacher Amelia's actions. If she gets caught conducting some forbidden experiments or causing some huge incident, perhaps, at the very minimum she'll lose her status as a teacher."

Kaid did his best to suppress any information from leaking after taking into consideration the fact that they were old acquaintances. He only told others that this was a special experiment. However, dimensional connections were going to be reestablished soon, and the Mage Country was certain to send a special envoy to understand more about the situation over here. If that abnormal forest was still there when the envoy arrived, there would be no way possible to conceal it.

"There's still no news about Teacher Amelia? What about the result of the divination magic? Is there still no result yet? Is she currently stuck in her own Soul World?"

Divination for a certain person or object's location was one of the few reliable types of divination magic of this highly unreliable branch.

However, Kaid's two students Atadia and Soranto awkwardly exchanged glances with each other, not knowing how to reply. Finally, Atadia furrowed his eyebrows while telling Kaid about the vastly unexpected divination result.

"Our divination result shows us that Teacher Amelia isn't actually within that forest."

This divination result could only give answers like "Yes" or "No," but this answer obviously surprised Kaid as well. It was the most basic knowledge that Soul Worlds couldn't be separated from their masters, so could this forest not be a Soul World as well?

"But the strange part is, when we used Divination Magic to find out if Teacher Amelia was still within Karo City, the answer was a yes."

"Finally, we decreased the radius of our search parameters for the Divination Magic, and the end result still pointed us to that forest."

"In the end, we finally came up with only one possibility. The divination result also supports our completely inexplicable conclusion."

Upon hearing this, large beads of sweat began forming on Kaid's forehead. He had already guessed the possibility.

"You're saying that this entire forest is…"

And in the deepest part of the forest, I had come to the exact same conclusion.

"This entire forest is Amelia herself! All of these countless magical plants are part of her body. This entire black forest is her complete form."

"She's literally insane! Is a human body supposed to be modified like this?"

"You dare to speak of her? Aren't we the same?! We stopped being human long ago."

Note:

1. This is Harloys speaking.

2. In EFT's translations, the term 'dendroid' was used. However, from now on, we are changing 'dendroid' to 'treant' or 'tree warrior,' where both are interchangeable. The previous occurrences of 'dendroid' will be changed to 'treant'/'tree warrior' for consistency in the near future.

3. Another reference to Pokémon!

Chapter 235
Good Morning

Amelia Milan was born in the year 145 A.D. as the third princess of the royal family. She was considered intelligent since birth and began learning magic from the Mage Country Arlodante at the tender age of five. After her younger brother inherited the throne, she didn't care about her status as a princess and became a teacher of the Cloud Tower. Still, the Bardi Empire forever recognized her status as a royal, and she was currently number sixty-seven in the line of inheritance.

However, if you took the time to read through the Bardi Empire's own records, there would only be some meaningless information.

Actually, only one word could describe the original stories regarding Amelia—witch.

Ever since she was born, she was viewed as a strange one. She never acted naughty or noisy like other young children. She was always sitting there by herself, not crying or smiling, just like a wooden puppet.

Even her birth mother and everyone around her suspected that something must have been wrong with her intelligence at the time. However, the first time that she ever spoke, she caused a huge amount of trouble.

"Mother, why do you all have to kill those cuties in the garden? Their cries are so pitiful, so why is everyone ignoring their pleas for help? Don't you always tell me to help the weak and helpless?"

The young Amelia was unable to understand why those vicious-seeming adults with gardening scissors were destroying the tiny lives of those pitiful, screaming plants. No matter how pitifully those plants screamed, nobody would ever help them.

"Perhaps nobody can hear them because they're too small. Since you all can't hear them, allow me to be their helper."

And so, Amelia took action herself.

"Uncle tree, help us out. Take care of that bad person with the big scissors."

Just as everyone was celebrating that the princess had spoken for the first time in her life, misfortune descended upon them.

A mere young child's words became an order that transformed the tremendous rubber tree in the garden into a human-eating tree monster that swallowed the enemy of the plants, the gardener, in a single gulp.

"Save us! Guards! Where are the guards!?"

"Ahhh! There's a man-eating monster!"

The numerous tree monsters that suddenly appeared in the royal garden caused a huge panic. Amongst all the chaos, there was a tiny princess who stood out from the others. She was currently smiling sweetly at the many plants in the royal garden.

"Relax. From now on, Amelia won't allow anyone to ever bully you again."

All the fresh flowers and trees in the forest shook, and flower petals and fruits landed in her hands. These seemed to be small gifts, as if the plants were thanking Amelia's kindness to them.

For the young Amelia, she viewed this as helping the weak, an act of justice. However, for everyone else, they saw the little princess causing a huge disaster the first time that she ever talked, transforming the trees into monsters that ate an innocent gardener using only the power of her words.

There were well over one hundred people present for that incident in the royal garden. Everyone now viewed Amelia, who had trod over the gardener's corpse and fresh blood to greet the plants in a friendly manner, as the most abnormal existence of all.

The Bardi Emperor's strict command for everyone to seal their lips still couldn't stop rumors spreading of how the third princess was a witch. Every time that Amelia walked somewhere, she would see others looking at her with hatred and fear, always whispering unpleasant things about her.

"Look! That's the cursed witch. Her first words ever were a curse."

"That look in her eyes is so scary! Don't look at me…”

"She glanced over at me! Am I going to be cursed?"

"There are even rumors that say that I'm a witch. It's all because of that strange child that caused even His Majesty to disdain me." Even Amelia's mother, the emperor's concubine, hated her own second daughter.

At the time, the Bardi Empire's royal power wasn't stable yet. In fact, there were political enemies that often attacked the as-of-then weak Bardi royalty, which gave the Bardi Emperor at the time plenty of headaches. He already had five children and never liked this strange daughter of his to begin with, and even considered exiling her.

Originally, with both internal and external pressure, especially with both of her parents disliking her, the best possible result for Amelia should have been to live all alone in a nun cloister somewhere. Luckily for her, she caught the attention of the Bardi royal archmage at the time, Antonius.

"She isn't a witch at all. She just has a natural talent for communicating with plants. This child was basically born to become a mage. Little Amelia, would you like to come with this old man to Arlodante to learn magic? You'll meet many young companions just like you in Arlodante."

Amelia unhesitatingly nodded because she could detect kind intentions from the old grandpa, compared to everyone else's fear or hatred of her.

Actually, everyone had underestimated Amelia's abilities from the very start. She didn't have something as simple as the ability to communicate with plants—her natural talent was the entire Concept of "Communication."

No matter if it was plant, animal, or human, she could communicate with anything through her consciousness alone. In others' eyes, she may have been a strange child that didn't know how to speak or show any emotions, but she was always communicating with her surroundings through the power of her natural talent.

Her incredibly pure natural talent was far too powerful, which actually wasn't a good thing. Amelia was still young and had a simple way of looking at things in life, while there were too many around her with numerous desires and evil intentions that Amelia found it all difficult to accept.

Her ability wasn't mind reading. It was a simple, direct communication of sorts. If I tried my best to come up with a suitable analogy, perhaps I should describe her power

as the ability to "see through someone's desires."

She hated her own maids. Their empty minds had nothing but money and gossip. She hated her brothers. Their immature bodies and minds were filled with carnal lust and ambition. She even hated her own mother and father. Her mother only treated her as a tool to gain the Bardi Emperor's favor, while her father, the Bardi Emperor, was busy with political affairs and scheming every day.

The glorious-seeming royal palace was inwardly filled with nothing but filth. After some time, Amelia even began to hate all of humanity. She loathed this species that was filled with endless greed and desires.

Plants were simple existences that only needed sunlight, water, and nutrients. They became her haven. She would often avoid everyone else and walk around by herself in the royal garden, not even returning to her room when it was late at night, which actually added to her reputation as a witch.

When Amelia decided for herself to leave her home and become a mage in the Mage Country, the true feelings she sensed behind all the "congratulations,""how nice,""I'm so happy for you," and so on gave her zero intention of ever returning to her home country.

"Perhaps things will be different in the Mage Country. At the very least, I won't be considered the only abnormal one there."

But, sadly for her, humans were humans. There was even more greed, desire, and ambition there. Amelia viewed all these people to be as incomprehensible as aliens. It was only that this time, as Amelia grew up and mentally matured, she learned how to hide her true thoughts so that she didn't appear to be too different on the surface.

As for her natural talent of communication, that helped her to make the rapidest progress of all in the area of plant magic. Magic was supposed to be the process of searching for the truth to begin with, and as she had the talent of "Communication," it was no different than having a cheat activated to help her grow. It wasn't long before she became the youngest high-level teacher of all time in the Mage Country, before she even reached the age of twenty.

Yet no matter how much stronger she grew in magic, there was no foundational change in her as a person. She was still that witch who hated humans. As for why she

was always described as having "stormy emotions," it wasn't because of her seemingly random way of treating some strangers politely while treating other strangers incredibly rudely—it was actually because she could see through anyone and if they had good or bad intentions.

Due to her hatred of humans and love of simpler life forms, her sense of values was different from most people. In her mind, simple, cute plants had far more value than dirty humans. She even began to hate her own identity as a human. That was why, in order to approach her own mental image of a perfect existence, she unhesitatingly used her colleagues and acolytes as experimental subjects to make future preparations for her own personal body modifications.

Most crazy people believe that the world was crazy while they were actually the only normal person around. If this was the standard used to measure insanity, then Amelia was doubtlessly completely insane, as she always believed herself to be the only normal person out there.

"I don't have friends, I don't have enemies (because they're all dead), I don't have a lover… I don't have any of those hated two-legged animals in my life. Ahh, what a joyous life I have."

And just as she began shutting herself off in her own little world, believing this to be how life should be lived, she met a new acolyte, the Roland from that year.

"Ah, there's actually such a pure person?"

Don't get me wrong—Roland from that year had just crawled out of the grave. What was pure about him definitely wasn't kindness; he had just been betrayed by the entirety of human society, so his pureness was pure hatred and desire for revenge against the entire world.

"Even though he appears to be smiling so sunnily on the surface, his only desire is simple destruction and revenge. Not only that, he's not targeting any specific person, he's targeting the entirety of humanity. Ahh, so beautiful! 'Something as scummy as humanity doesn't even need to exist in this world; this world doesn't need a savior! Just let everything be destroyed.' His understanding of how things should be is truly amazing."

From a certain standpoint, the way I was in the past created this maniacal witch of

today. Back when I was treating humans as nothing more than ants to be stepped on, I didn't know at all that I was being a source of pollution that was infecting Amelia with hatred.

And after Amelia chose me as her acolyte, the two of us that both hated humanity now began walking down the same path. On the surface, I was researching ice magic while she was researching plant magic, but in actuality, I was researching undead creation while she was researching forbidden animal and plant combination magic. Neither of us had any limits or moral boundaries of any kind, and we influenced each other as well, becoming worse and worse.

For Amelia back in that year, she considered me to be a true friend that understood her, someone which she would never meet again in a thousand years. I was the only person in the world who she could be honest and direct with. Imperceptibly, she sunk farther than even she expected.

Plants were simple but lacked intelligence. The most they could do was listen to Amelia's complaints, but of course it was impossible for them to react in any way. However, humans were social creatures by nature, and all humans desired to communicate with others, desiring to be recognized, trusted, and known by others. Even Amelia, who believed that she had gotten used to and enjoyed being alone, was no exception.

After Amelia, who had been alone for the past over one hundred years, opened up her heart for the first time to this "male childhood friend" of hers, she really treated me well, not holding back at all on teaching magical knowledge. In fact, she was a little naggy and obsessive about it, which helped me greatly.

And when I got what I needed, and obtained the power to take my revenge, I unhesitatingly sold out Amelia right before leaving for my journey of revenge.

During my studies in the Cloud Tower, I did make some true friends as well. Although my desire for revenge had never been shaken, I unhesitatingly reported Amelia just for the sake of Kaid and my other friends' safety in the future.

Of course, Amelia found it impossible to understand such feelings. She only found it strange, strange and incomprehensible.

"Why did you betray me? why did you betray me so unemotionally, without any rage,

without any desire for revenge, without any ambition, without even any personal benefits? It's basically like 'The sun is coming up from the east, it's probably going to rain today. I'm in a good mood, let's go report Amelia,' and just betray me with a state of mind as if it was only natural… is it only because I'm still a human? I'm what he hates?"

My leaving sunk Amelia into a state of utter confusion and despair. Perhaps the fact that she completely abandoned her identity as a human not long after was also related to this.

When Amelia finished dealing with the trouble I left behind for her and decided to confidently go looking for me for revenge, she heard the news of her "acolyte's" death.

Amelia, who had always had an icy nature, met with a furious surge of emotions for the first time in her life, but those emotions weren't the joy that she was expecting. Instead, she felt angry, unwilling, despairing, lost, and sad. She found, to her astonishment, that she had a heartache—not because of the pain of betrayal, but from the pain of losing the one person who knew her best. That pain felt like someone was digging into her skin and tortured her for a long time afterwards.

She thought of how she could never see that person she loved to hate so much. She thought of how she would never be able to see that fake smile on the surface again, how she would never be able to see that person who understood her way of thinking, how she would never be able to truly open up and talk to another again, and how she had forever lost this only haven of hers. Amelia felt a heartache for the first time in her life, but she didn't even know where her heart was anymore. At that time, Amelia regretted for the first time that she had abandoned her human body, abandoning her ability to cry.

From that day on, time stopped flowing for Amelia… she was still alive, but only that. She once again shut herself within a box with nobody else inside, and used a false mask when dealing with everyone else.

And three hundred plus years later, fate caused us two with such a love-hate relationship to meet each other again, and helped Amelia's gears of time to begin turning once more. But this time, when we met, Amelia once again didn't know what to do or think.

She had expected that I would be shocked, afraid, or even instantly attempt escaping

when I saw her. And although I indeed acted like I wanted to escape, and never stopped complaining on the surface, her own ability told her that I was quite happy to meet her again, happy to see her, happy to have a reunion with her!

At that moment, the hundreds of years of grudges and dissatisfaction all vanished, and she almost laughed out loud from the joy in her heart. She was only forceful in her words and threats but not actions, because at that moment, Amelia finally came to a realization and noticed what she truly felt.

"I was actually in love with him…"

Researching plant magic? Everything was only an excuse or a fake reason. "I want to be by his side" was actually the source of everything.

"He already has a girlfriend… well, I only wanted a friend anyways—yep—it's fine as long as I have fun by his side."

Amelia's strong sense of pride made her abandon thoughts of competing for me, and even made her unwilling to express her emotions to Roland. "Being friends" was enough for her, even if it was just an excuse that she used in order to numb herself.

As for her behavior in attempting to learn how to cook, that was just another way of her displaying her unwillingness to lose.

But, a certain rash person's actions broke that excuse of hers that even she didn't believe in.

That appeal for love and all those flowers on that street couldn't possibly fool Amelia. She only took one second to understand my true intentions with her ability, but Amelia was shaken by this chance that would never come for her again once in a thousand years.

"As long as I accept—no—as long as I don't severely refuse him, we'll be viewed as lovers by everyone, and he'll even become the one that was chasing after me…"

In the end, she made her decision, and even personally helped make those scandalous rumors spread even faster. She was even related to the fact that those rumors reached Elisa's ears as if rumors could grow wings… Even she herself didn't know why she did all that. Probably, she could only barely come up with half a reason—this was her instinctual method of declaring a challenge, hoping for a direct competition.

But after that battle, she sunk into hesitation and confusion due to being overly shaken.

"I don't even have a normal physical body anymore, nor can I possibly have a normal child. Will he mind?"

"My reputation is so bad, and I've done many bad deeds—will he hate me if he knows?"

"Although he only views me as a friend, at least it's better than what he sees that Elisa as. Roland only views that girl as family, as if she's his own daughter. At the very least, Roland still views me as a woman."

"I…"

Countless thoughts kept her mind in constant turmoil. She hadn't fully recovered from her injuries from the battle at Red Maple Castle yet, and now she just finished fighting with Emordilorcan. In order to perform to her fullest in this Earth Elemental Plane that lacked the wind and water elements, Amelia had worked harder and paid more of a price than what she appeared on the surface.

Now that she was in such a weakened state and a confused state of mind, it caused her to lose control of her entire physical body, revealing her truest form—a pitch-black forest. Her own personal consciousness right now was just like that of an ostrich that had stuck its head into the ground, sinking into a deep form of sleep.

"I should just continue sleeping like this; everything won't be so bothersome anymore… What will Roland do? Will he be sad if he notices that I'm no longer around anymore? Will he still be together with that little girlfriend of his? Will he forget about me? Will he forget about this foolish woman who doesn't even dare to confess to him? Will he forget about this foolish woman who doesn't know how to do any housework whatsoever?"

Her consciousness kept floating around for what she felt an unknown length of time. It wasn't that she was unable to control the situation outside—it was that Amelia unconsciously gave up on attempting to control her physical body under all her self-complaints and self-regret. She had trapped herself within high walls of her own construction. However, finally, there was a familiar knock on her mental door.

"Hey, my dear sleeping beauty, it's time for you to wake up. If you keep sleeping, you're

going to miss my birthday party. It's going to be really awesome; you'll really regret it if you don't go."

Was this another hallucination? Why did this hallucination seem so real, then? That familiar smile even had some rare sincerity beneath it, but the joy and delight at seeing her seemed all so familiar to her, as if it was long ago, when this no-good acolyte of hers had cooked breakfast and was attempting to wake his teacher that had pulled yet another all-nighter experimenting.

"Good morning, Roland."

The red-faced Amelia didn't know why she had replied with something so empty, but she saw that Roland felt surprised for a moment upon hearing this, before he smiled just as always in the past.

"Good morning, Amelia. It's delightful to be able to see you again."

The witch's face instantly became burning hot, and unbeknownst to her, her smile arced upwards. She nodded ever so slightly, while she complained in a tiny voice that only she could hear.

"He's so sly with what he's thinking! That Roland, he's basically cheating…"

Chapter 236
Going Home

"Good morning, Amelia. It's delightful to be able to see you again."

I had a smile as bright as the sun and felt delighted from the bottom of my heart. I gave her a warm embrace. For Amelia who wasn't prepared for all this, it was basically like an irresistible toxic poison. Amelia's face was so red from embarrassment that she didn't even know what she was thinking or saying anymore.

An embrace? That's right. Amelia was currently completely "naked," with only a cape covering the most important parts, lying in my arms.

"Let me go!"

Amelia finally noticed the situation that she was in, and she began struggling as she hadn't mentally prepared herself for the next step yet or to get married.

"Don't move!"

A low angry roar suddenly stunned Amelia. This was the first time that Roland had ever gotten angry at her, and Amelia paused in stupefaction as she watched his face getting closer and closer to her.

"Could it be that he wants to… at such a place?"

Roland seemed to be checking something as he lowered his head, and Amelia's heart was filled with shock and disbelief as his familiar face got closer and closer. However, her entire body felt so soft that she couldn't work up any energy.

She mysteriously lost the willpower to resist, and could only watch his familiar face continue to get closer to her. She allowed him to randomly touch her body as he pleased.

“…There still hasn't been a confession yet; I'm definitely not someone who's so casual! At least—at least there needs to be a confession first, and I need to be mentally

prepared! I hate perverted things the most!"

She didn't know how, but she somehow recovered some strength and viciously slapped Roland. If Amelia had been just a normal girl, it would have been an ordinary reaction of embarrassment, but a certain witch always possessed mysterious strength. This reaction of embarrassment was more than enough to kill a dragon.

"It's good that you're still in good condition and awake; now hurry up and control those rampaging… ah!"

Alright, I was unlucky enough to be treated as a pervert and sent flying by her mega slap before Amelia had regained her senses and noticed what was going on. I hadn't been able to finish speaking.

"…Since you're awake now, stop watching already! Hurry up and control those wild plants that are chasing after us!"

Amelia's three Virtues, the huge Roland treant, the rose garden, and everything that was capable of moving had followed me. If Amelia had woken up just one tiny bit later, perhaps I would be nothing more than plant food.

Amelia was the core of this forest. Since her consciousness's core had been taken away by me, it was basically the same as someone grabbing away her heart. Naturally, every single magical plant in this forest would furiously chase after me and attack me in an attempt to steal back its heart.

After figuring out her own misunderstanding, Amelia really wanted to go hide herself in a hole somewhere, while Harloys casually said a sentence.

"Heroine, you read too much into things."

Alright then, when Amelia discovered that there truly was someone else who saw through her intentions, Amelia really did attempt to dig a hole to bury herself in.

Since I went flying, it was only natural that the cape covering Amelia ended up falling to the ground. Amelia reflexively attempted to cover herself with her hands, but although she was "naked," that was only her upper half. Her entire lower half from the waist down resembled roots, and scales that resembled tree bark also covered her body. It was obvious that she was no longer fully human.

When the witch took a glance at Roland who was flying in the air and saw how he couldn't possibly see the way she looked, she heaved a sigh of relief for a reason unknown to herself.

With Amelia's awakening, everything around us slowly returned to normal.

The forest started contracting, and all its parts combined back together with her. All these magical plants transformed back into seeds and Concepts, and soon, a brand-new Amelia was reformed. This entire area was now covered with her hair's green strands, which transformed into a grass carpet that absorbed this magical forest.

"Here, wear this."

Harloys helped Amelia put on that white cape that had fallen off earlier, while Amelia unhesitatingly put it on without worrying about her nakedness. As for Roland? I was busy figuring out how to dig myself out of the hole I was now buried in from the impact of flying.

"Why am I the one that's always injured?" When I finally managed to crawl out of the hole, I barely got the chance to complain before both Harloys and Amelia rolled their eyes at me while adding insult to injury.

"You deserve it."

"It's all your fault."

Although I didn't know exactly what had happened just now, I was obviously doing a good deed for once, making it through all those forest levels with great difficulty and being chased all the way. But then I mysteriously got beaten up and then had both of them glare at me.

I kept feeling like I accidentally pissed someone off. Could it be that the entire universe hated me? Why do I so easily choke while drinking water or randomly trip over on flat ground?

However, I felt relieved at seeing how Amelia was fine in the end. After all these years, I didn't have many old friends left alive, and out of the living people I knew, there were more enemies than friends… Why do I keep feeling I'm so pitiful the more I go on about it? I do have some friends, after all, even if I didn't contact them in a few centuries (Kaid: You bastard, you probably just forgot about me), as well as my bro, even though

he sliced me twice (Adam: Do you intend to remember that forever?), and even relatives (Karwenz from the Abyss: Brother, are you calling for me?). Oh right, I even have a girlfriend as well (Elisa who's currently sharpening her sword: Heh heh, I'm waiting for you to come back.)

Alright, in order to avoid spreading salt on my own wounds, I should stop giving examples. In this day and age, chuunibyous were the most popular, lone wolves were the mainstream, harem protagonists would be bestsellers, and something like friends were completely unimportant… I'm definitely not jealous or anything of people that have lots of friends. Yep, I have plenty of friends, including in this Earth Elemental Plane, such as Kaid—such as a certain Kaid— such as… such as Beifeng…? [System: Are you asking me?]

Just thinking about Beifeng and his new friend that was several hundred meters long, I unhesitatingly eliminated him from my list of possible friends. I did my absolute best to bury him within the deepest recesses of my memory. Alright then, it should be about time for us to leave the Earth Elemental Plane anyways, so why don't we just leave? Beifeng? Who's that? A local resident here? I have no impression of him at all.

"Isn't that too heartless of you? Didn't he just help you out?"

"I did want to reward him, so what do you think of the title "Mist Alliance Eastern Mist Communal Country's highest-level diplomatic officer slash head military officer slash immigration officer slash translator slash janitor to the Earth Elemental Plane? I think that's an excellent title; he should be more than happy to stay behind in this world to enjoy life with his new companions."

This wasn't even a joke. After any battle would typically be post-combat dealings to discuss the future benefits to be gained from the territory, and after paying so much of a price here and killing Emordilorcan with great difficulty, would we leave just like that? Giving these benefits to be gained to someone else? That would be an obvious waste.

With evidence that various other organizations had set up camp here, this Earth Elemental Plane that seemed like a wasteland was actually a treasure trove of abundant resources. Pretty much any tiny rock that could be picked up was valuable as long as someone was willing to make the effort. Having outposts here was valuable to every faction.

Let's use the Mage Country's outpost, Karo City, as an example. In order to defend against the fearsome sandstorms, the spell array for the anti-sandstorm barrier cost a significant amount to maintain, and the highest-ranked city guardians had to have high combat strength, not to mention the cost of dimensional transportation. In order to create at least a medium-sized outpost, which could collect and mine materials and transport them back to the mortal plane as well as have sufficient military strength to deal with potentially dangerous situations, the cost for all this would be astronomical.

It was obvious that neither the Mist Alliance, which was still under construction, nor the dirt-poor East Mist Communal Country would be able to pay the large price required to establish an outpost here. However, by the time the Mist Alliance really did need the resources here, the most valuable territories in the Earth Elemental Plane would likely have long since been claimed by others. Wanting to take over territory then would probably be extremely impractical.

"That's why, Beifeng, your task is to establish our territory. You don't have to do anything at all; you just have to let others see you around."

Yes, this was an outright grabbing of territory. As long as Beifeng took his Sand Worm army with him and went around, making it known that he was claiming this land, I had confidence that the other factions wouldn't dare to try using force to compete with us for territory.

Well, it was a good idea, and my plan was a solid one. But whenever something involved Beifeng, things would always get distorted in the end…

Afterwards, I endlessly regretted my decision. As I expected, it was completely wrong of me to put any hopes upon Beifeng. That guy didn't stay in the Earth Elemental Plane for long before he came up with an abnormal idea to deal with the task I gave him; his idea even caused damage to my reputation.

What did he do? He created countless numbers of signs that he hung on his Sand Worms and other followers: "Mist Alliance Eastern Mist Communal Country Earth Elemental Plane Vice Immigration Officer" was an ancient sand dragon that was charmed by him, "Mist Alliance Eastern Mist Communal Country Earth Elemental Plane Head Immigration Officer" was a large earth spider of some sort, and various strange creatures all received signs indicating their positions from him. In the end, the entire Earth Elemental Plane became their campground, the legendary land of Beifeng's cult.

It wasn't limited to that. Since I casually gave Beifeng the authority as the head of everything here, he really did have the authority to give out other positions, which was how all these strange creatures became part of the Mist Alliance. Later on, when we had time to spare to develop this area, not only did we have to deal with the fact that all other factions looked at us as if we were aliens, there was also the fact that our new allies were quite strange as well.

"What? This Sand Worm is my boss? Does he even know how to do anything other than eat and dig holes?"

"There's no helping it. According to the structural organization, he is indeed your boss, but we can just pretend he doesn't exist… Think of it from a different angle—having this type of boss is pretty nice; at the very least he won't randomly tell you what to do. Yep, just think of it like that; otherwise, you'll get angry like your predecessor and spurt blood."

This wasn't even all that bad, since at the very least that Sand Worm was quickly fired from his position due to "competition" for his position and not fulfilling his position's duties. The other original residents of the Earth Elemental Plane were actually assiduous and did their best, performing even better than the government officials that we sent. Not to mention that on top of their excellent work performances, they were more used to the local environment to begin with, which made me speechless.

The final result was that this location became the home of both native elemental creatures as well as species from outside. I even had to prepare tours to the mortal planes as rewards for the most outstanding workers, which caused a huge amount of trouble and became a joke in others' eyes. Just look at some examples—I had to prepare an onsen [1] [1] as well as a large brush for a mega-sized elemental giant. I had to also help a sand dragon enjoy his own personal snow skiing adventure… If I ever learn which bastard told them about such experiences, I swear that I'll exile that person to the Earth Elemental Plane to shovel sand for the rest of his life!

And the most troublesome of all was that a certain Dracon spread all sorts of nonsense here and left behind a huge religion of True Love behind him, which became a toxic burden that spread across countless planes. And as the creator of this religion, he became a wanted man by numerous factions, and at the same time this place actually became that strange cult's holy place of origin and main headquarters. Countless numbers of weird creatures started visiting here in order to pray to and trade stories about "Beifeng."

Yep, by that generation, Beifeng even became a specialized forbidden word, and as for just what his name meant… cough—cough—good children don't need to know.

I was always the butt of numerous jokes because of this. When I finally couldn't tolerate it anymore and intended to choke that damned Dracon to death, he already ran off to who knew where. As for his "head of everything" position that actually somehow became real? He had forgotten it long ago. He never worked for more than a few days to begin with before a new "beauty" took away all his attention, so he ended up playing truant to the work he should have been doing for all these years.

Cough, I should stop talking about future events now. At the very least, I was highly satisfied with my decision at the time. Apart from this person before me whose ability to survive was stronger than even cockroaches from the planet Mars [2] [2] , I couldn't think of anyone better for this job.

"Go take that duck of mine and stop it in the area that I marked out. I doubt that anyone will dare to move it. Relax, when have I gone back on any of my promises? If you do a good job, I'll reward you with everything I promised. Yep, you're now my head officer in charge of everything here, so do a good job for me!"

After I finally got rid of the troublesome Beifeng, I turned my attention to Harloys and Amelia who were waiting for me next to the dimensional teleportation gate. They seemed to be in a rush to return to the mortal plane.

"Let's go back already; I have several new experimental research projects that I want to undertake."

The tall and slender witch had already recovered her typical gentle aura, and she was naturally reading a cooking guide (Complete Edition on How to Poison Others) under a parasol. It seemed like she didn't care about anything at all, but compared to her previous distant aura, I kept feeling like there was something additional in it.

"Is there any use in telling Beifeng so many things? Do you really think that he'll do as you want? I can guarantee that the moment he gets tired of the creatures in this plane, he'll run off immediately."

Alright, Harloys' opinion happened to match mine exactly. But hey, you fake loli, could you stop eating candy on my neck? Even if you have to eat candy, don't talk while eating! You're dripping saliva on my head! It's so sticky!

"We'll just have to do the best with who we have. Right, Kaid, it's enough to take us here, you don't need to…"

I knew that I had wasted my words. This old lolicon was currently in a stupor as he stared at the loli on my head, seeming to have lost himself. Judging by the fact that he had such a foolish expression with a lollipop in each hand, he had completely ruined his own image as an archmage.

At the very least, his disciples behind him were all covering their faces, not daring to look at him. Some of them were even beginning to wonder if they had signed up under the wrong teacher back when they were choosing.

After some hesitation, I decided against telling this old lolicon that the loli on my head that he was staring at so happily was Teacher Harloys who was famous for being strict back in the day and who even failed him on one of his exams. She punished him by making him hang a sign on his neck indicating his exam failure while hanging upside-down in the plaza. I'll refrain from telling him, so that he could have at least this beautiful memory.

"Cough, why are you being so polite, actually rushing over to return my money. I'm delighted that you're going to pay off your 30,000 gold debt to me. How about I give you a discount. Since it's not that easy to carry around so many gold coins, you can just give me one of the goblin bank's gold exchange tickets…"

"It's only three gold coins! No, that's wrong, it's not even a single gold coin! I was almost fooled by you! I finally remember now, you were the one who owed me money! Why did it become that I owed you money!"

"Tsk! Stingy. You finally remembered the moment that you heard about money. Let us forget about such small matters."

"…Why didn't you forget about it, then, and you even dare to say such things! You were like this way back in the day as well…"

While chatting about the past, we couldn't help but chuckle out loud. A meeting between old friends would always end in wanting to chat a lot when it was time to separate. In the end, with Amelia urging us to end things with the look in her eyes, we finally said our goodbyes.

"Oh right, my shift here in the Earth Elemental Plane is almost over. If you have the

free time, come find me at the Cloud Tower. There's news from there that some majorly important person is looking for you, and it's apparently good news for you. Your teaching certificate is real as well, so you can just enter the Cloud Tower normally."

After we said our goodbyes, the final sentence he left me with surprised me, but the dimensional teleportation gate had already been activated. I waved my hand to indicate that I heard him, as there was no need to say anything else.

"Goodbye, old fellow. Live long, so that we can meet each other again."

As the purple light of dimensional teleportation magic enveloped us, I looked around at the people accompanying me one more time. Amelia had long since prepared all her luggage, while Harloys had taken all of Kaid's candies and was enjoying her sweets. They seemed to be more than ready for our next target as they eagerly awaited the end of the dimensional teleportation.

Note:

1. An onsen (温泉) is a Japanese hot spring and the bathing facilities and inns frequently situated around them.

2. A reference to the manga Terra Formars.

Chapter 237
Vacation

"Peace is so wonderful."

As I sat in the plaza's tea house and lightly tasted the fragrant tea in front of me, I felt as if I was leading a blessed life of retirement. I observed the calm winter scene before me.

Ever since returning to Diffindor, I had been satisfactorily enjoying this calm daily life, without needing to go to work, without needing to plan various things, only needing to sit here and watch the sunrise and sunset. What a dreamlike beautiful life it was.

"Boom!"

Yep, it seemed that Glina had arrived for my celebration party as she promised. So what if there was a slight sound of explosions? Everyone had their own hobbies; we should respect others' freedom.

"Catch that bastard! He actually dares to get even worse than before!"

So what if there was a group of naked men running around before me? I already experienced so much at Sulfur Mountain City that I had long since gotten used to such things, and the new Town Security squad here seemed to have gotten used to it as well, but…

"It's whatever for the others, but if people hear that the highest priest Xueti is involved as well, that'll affect Wumianzhe's reputation. It seems that I need to tell Lilith to keep that Tauren under permanent house arrest during the celebration festival. There are so many diplomats from various countries here, so let's not have him lose face any longer."

How could these small matters possibly impede me from continuing to slack off—I mean relax in such a good mood? I put in some effort to clear out what had just happened from my memory and poured some more tea for myself. I continued to slowly enjoy my peaceful life.

And then, a group of winged naked men paraded through the sky…

Pu!

My eyes were hollow as I gazed at Eaglestorm and his tribe in front of me. Partial transformation was supposed to be a high-level druid technique, so weren't there too many these days that knew how to do it? When I looked closer, I saw many of the Blackwing Tribe. That was Camdian's follower tribe.

"I hear that Eaglestorm's druid sect has been quite successful recently in expanding their teachings. Last time, when I read the fairies' report, they actually managed to steal two seats at the druids' Voice of Nature conference, and even received the right to speak there. That Eaglestorm was even praised as the 'most outstanding theoretical revolutionary' of our generation. As expected, all druids' brains are just mush; if this sect keeps spreading, there's going to be more and more winged tribes that don't wear clothes, which will be nothing more than mental pollution… I should give a heads-up to Town Security, yep, and they can even be target practice for our anti-air troops. No need to thank me; everyone has the responsibility to prevent cults from spreading. Please call me your friendly neighborhood Spiderman."

"Selling potions, a big sale on alchemic potions! Complete effectiveness on anything from healing to keeping healthy. More than ten Gold-ranked alchemists worked together on these products, and every common potion can be found, at half price to boot! What are you waiting for? Anything that you want, we have in stock. Sex change potion? Super hair growth potion? Blue mighty man potion? [1] [1] Take a look, it's our safe brand! And it's definitely effective! Definitely safe!"

I looked at the goblin and his cart of potions walk in front of me with the familiar Beyar brothers' "safe brand" on it. Most importantly, I even saw the "Miracle Alchemist" Olivia's brand on those potions; so, for the sake of Diffindor's citizens' safety as well as next year's cleanliness rating, I unhesitatingly began writing my second report against someone.

Hmm? Why did I absolutely have to report against the Miracle Alchemist's brand? Olivia didn't have that nickname at the time; her current nickname was "Alchemist of Randomness." Her potion ingredients were random, their effects were random, the targets were random, and one batch of potions could have more than ten different effects. Who would dare touch such things?

“…Mommy. Why does that goblin not have any fur?"

"Don't look; let's hurry and go."

Alright, I retract my previous statement. At the very least, this acolyte had professional ethics and tested the potion himself. Although this hair removal potion was a little too strong in its effectiveness, at the very least it worked, didn't it?

Although having fur all over their bodies was basically the symbol of being a goblin, and a furless goblin was even more ridiculous in appearance than a hairless Alaskan husky dog, this acolyte's willingness to sacrifice himself was praiseworthy.

“…I clearly drank a height-increasing potion. Man, those advertisements really can't be trusted."

Alright, this muttering didn't escape my ears. I added yet another example to my report.

I knew that this wasn't because Olivia's alchemy level wasn't high enough. It was rather the opposite. She had too many ideas—she always loved changing the potion's formula and creating new potion formulas. As a result, many dangerous products would be created.

Normally speaking, these products shouldn't have had an opportunity to be sold outside, but unfortunately, Olivia's master, Yingou Beyar, was a pure goblin. How could a goblin possibly waste such valuable resources?

"Roland!? Oh, sorry, I mistook you for him."

The person that suddenly walked past me was a certain witch who was carrying a cauldron filled with unknown objects. Recently, she seemed to have fallen in love with cooking. But now that I had finally returned to the mortal plane, which was filled with abundant tasty foods, how could I possibly volunteer myself to continue working on those damned food achievements?

"Big sister, are you looking for His Highness Roland? I saw that he went outside the west gate of town, riding on a horse. He probably left the city."

Right now, I was currently pleased with myself at my foresight. In order to succeed at slacking off—whoops—I meant quietly being the handsome man I was, I took off my

ring that could change my age, and enjoyed my vacation using my true appearance that nobody knew about.

"Tsk! He escaped again! But I clearly feel that he's close by… Eh? Little boy, have you eaten lunch yet?"

"I have! I ate an incredible amount for breakfast."

In Amelia's cauldron of mysterious objects were tentacles and eyeballs. At such a time, anyone who wasn't an idiot would instantly refuse and furiously shake their head, but…

"That's perfect! I'm worried that you may vomit everything if your stomach was empty. Little boy, be my experiment—whoops—I mean taste this lunch that I personally cooked myself. I took so long to finish it, so it would be a waste to throw it away."

I smiled, and then turned around and ran… but the vines beneath my feet instantly hung me upside-down. She had long since anticipated that I would attempt to escape.

With the terrifying witch forcing me and tying me up tightly all over, I increased all my food achievements by one point again in order to not expose my identity. It must have been difficult of Amelia to make her food into something so disgusting yet somehow not fatal every time.

"Ptui! Seafood and orange flavored? It's slightly better than her last dish that tasted like burned rubber, but only ever so slightly. It's even different every time; she's so creative."

But the strange thing was that even though she clearly didn't realize that I was her main target, Amelia actually seemed to be delighted as she watched me eat it all. She even began humming as she cleaned away the dishes.

"In order to conquer a man, the best way is to conquer his stomach. The best way to a man's heart is through his stomach, after all. Little boy, what did you think? Was it delicious?"

It was apparent that she had a misunderstanding about this classical phrase. If the word 'conquer' meant to "kill someone and force them to surrender," then I felt that she had succeeded in her goal. At any rate, my stomach had thrown up countless white

flags of surrender already, and lacked only a tiny bit more to go before it would completely revolt.

"Beautiful big sister, if I was your target, I have already been completely 'conquered' by your cooking. Please give it directly to your target next time; there's no need to waste food by giving it to someone else."

This wasn't because I wanted to suddenly work on my food achievements again, nor was it that I didn't want Amelia's hard work to go to waste—I simply didn't want to see someone die because of her. If even my constitution, which wasn't human anymore, could suffer to such a degree under her cooking, most normal people would probably instantly die of poisoning.

It seemed that my sarcasm-laced words were too indirect. Amelia actually smiled and nodded, and it was evident that she was in an excellent mood.

"Yep, I won't let anyone else eat it."

Alright then, I said goodbye to this "big sister" who was preparing to go to another plane in order to gather ingredients for dinner, and seriously considered for about a minute whether I should consider hiding out in this form of mine or really leave the city and escape immediately, but that was when I met a new trouble.

This time, a group of royal knights ran in front of me, and their eyes were all searching the crowds. It was obvious that they were looking for someone.

"Has His Highness still not been located yet?"

"Lady Kelly said that if we don't find His Highness today, none of us need to go back anymore. All of us will be performing a 500-kilometer marathon around the city."

"All the countries' diplomats are here, and so many major personages said that they want to meet His Highness Roland. Just what does His Highness Roland intend by disappearing like this?"

"The military also said that His Highness Roland needs to personally go discuss the military parade's preparations with them; otherwise, they're going to go on strike if we can't find him."

Upon hearing this, I brought out my personal disguise tool—wondrous black-rimmed

glasses. As long as I had these, my face would be ignored no matter how close I was to them… Fine then, I was making this part up. I was just curious about how in those famous stories a person who everybody knew so well only needed to wear a pair of glasses and a hat and cause nobody to recognize them at all. Sometimes, it was even to the extent of fighting against friends, which would be a heartrending experience.

However, at the moment, these classical black-rimmed glasses would act as a double insurance for me. And in order to appear even more convincing, I absolutely needed to bring out the best weapon of children: lollipops. But the strange thing was, when I put on my black-rimmed glasses and brought out my lollipop, those knights actually noticed my presence.

"Lady Elisa said that His Highness Roland might disguise himself as a little child, and if we meet someone who suddenly tries to change his outer appearance when he sees us, such as putting on a hat or putting on some glasses…"

"She also said that 'the old ones really like to use lollipops to pretend to be cute,' and if we see any child that's eleven or twelve years old but still sucking on a lollipop, then there's no mistaking that it's him."

What else could I say? I turned around and ran without saying anything.

Alright, now that I was running, I was considered guilty even if I had really been innocent. Those low-level knights naturally ran after me, and as we ran, we ran into an empty little alleyway.

Ten-ish seconds later, I exited the alleyway, with a horde of tin cans collapsed on the ground behind me.

"You really thought you could take me on? Before you go fishing, you should first consider if your fishing pole can carry the fish's weight or not. Didn't Elisa tell you to be careful of me getting angry out of too much embarrassment?"

"Is that Roland?"

I couldn't help but sigh. Why was I always being seen through? It would appear that my disguise was useless, but just as I was preparing myself to use a memory-erasing kick, I saw a nightmarish figure.

"Little Rolo!"

This figure jumping at me, wasn't it the "Mad Dog" Momo that had just finished the task of helping the gray elves to settle in? Of course, there was also Diana who was looking at me with an expression filled with surprise.

What else could I say? I continued to flee.

"I've had enough! I don't want to do anything at all until it's my birthday, and nobody can stop me from having my vacation!"

Note:

1. Euphemism here, Viagra reference.

Chapter 238
New East Mist

The current Eastern Mist Communal Country was no longer that former weak and poor small northern country. With new residents, new armies, a new religion, and so many changes, this country had essentially changed at its foundation.

Its citizens mostly consisted of humans and gray elves. There was no census to count the population ratio, but no matter what the ratio was, there shouldn't be too much of a difference between their overall general power ranks. After all, the former Tassel Kingdom was still the strongest of the four northern elven kingdoms, far stronger than the weakest northern country of East Mist. Not to mention that the elves' individual power ranks were far above that of humans, and there was no comparing their high-ranked combat strength and potential, either.

In order to avoid conflicts from accumulating over time from both species' long-term interaction, I refused to do anything typical according to common sense. Instead, I forcefully pushed through a mixed-living arrangement policy for humans and elves to live together in the same areas.

Perhaps, at the beginning, this would cause conflicts and trouble, but over the long term, this would definitely be far better than misunderstandings and differences creating larger and larger conflicts over time and ending in explosive conflict under the influence of those intentionally sowing discord or those with ambition.

The People of the Mist was a tribe of many different ethnicities to begin with. It was a cultural product of the citizens coming together. Perhaps, as long as I did a good job in dealing with this, I could get this to become completely culturally accepted and become a future leading voice.

In the north, the Eastern Mist Communal Country was probably the only country with more than one species making up its core. But what was more unique about it was the absolutely special makeup of the country's upper-level leaders.

The original Eastern Mist Communal Country was established as a communal country and not a kingdom, because when it was established, it indeed borrowed some mega-

level empires' strength. The founding king Charles was even the archduke of the strong country Yintanlo, and even made a promise to appear as Yintanlo's dependant state, at least on the surface.

Charles had the status of a knight that developed a new land for some major country. The fact that he received material resources and power to back him up, and then became a lord in his own right and swore fealty to the original country were all a normal course of events for any newly-born country.

However, it wasn't long before East Mist truly became a country of its own. Charles tore apart the more than ten dependent state agreements that he had signed. Yep, that guy was fooling everyone from start to finish; he had actually requested and received assistance from more than ten countries, as well as swore fealty to them.

Of course, all of those major countries were in no way happy to discover that they had been fooled. However, the result of Charles playing around with so many countries at once was that all of these countries checked and balanced themselves. None of them gained any benefits in the end, causing the Eastern Mist Communal Country to become truly independent. Actually, this was a difficult and complex process. The geographical advantage (being in a distant location, and so poor that there were few financial benefits to be gained here) also helped tremendously.

However, the consequences were likely that Charles's personal reputation was in the pits, and this affected East Mist's reputation right from the very start of its creation. All the human countries in the middle plains viewed East Mist as nothing more than barbarians, not to mention its trustworthiness was at rock bottom.

This was also the historical reason of why all the rulers of East Mist were kings and not archdukes. In fact, even though there were still two archdukes within the Eastern Mist Communal Country, East Mist's nobility system basically had no more connection with the nobility system in the plains. It was common that East Mist was treated by the other countries as "barbarians playing house games."

In this feudal age of knights, the noble domain lords all had significant private armies and were in charge of protecting their own citizens and domains. They were indeed the backbone of this country. But now, from my standpoint, they now posed an obstacle.

At the very least, they had gotten in the way of my policies multiple times already. I

knew that they were difficult to deal with, with bucketloads of reasons and excuses against me, and they forever stood against centralization. Especially after I intentionally began to centralize policy and political power; I became their group target, and every month Reyne would receive several local domain lords' letters reporting that a dishonest official (me) was fooling her, causing plenty of gossip.

And this time, I put the elves into the new city areas under construction and the royal demesnes, as well as into territories of nobles who were friendlier with the royalty. This caused many complaints from various major nobles, since everyone knew that apart from the elves' artwork and magic, the elves themselves were a great resource.

This was also why I didn't dare to completely disperse the elves. The lands were vast and the ruler was distant, so the domain lords were the biggest authorities in their own lands. I couldn't count on all the domain lords being of good moral character. These gray elves were already afraid after having so many incidents happen to them, so I couldn't possibly allow anything bad to befall them yet again. That would cause all my long-term goals to go up in smoke.

But this situation, where the domain lords acted like local kings, couldn't be allowed to continue. Perhaps it was because of my experiences as Yongye and in the Underground that I had gotten used to centralized authority gathered in one place, but I was dissatisfied with this feudal system from the very start.

When I merely wanted to open up free movement within the Mist Alliance for all its citizens, it caused a huge amount of obstacles and backlash against me, which made me all the more determined to utterly overhaul this system.

But, I also knew that forcefully changing the political system would affect all these nobles' personal benefits, which would be no different from starting an internal civil war. That was why I could only take the slow method, sharpening my sword and killing one at a time, step by step.

The newly-born Eastern Mist Communal Country was a country that was unified with its church; it worshipped the Law God Wumianzhe as its national church. There were two highest-ranked leaders in name—Her Highness Reyne, who had civil authority, while the other one was the highest-ranked priest Xueti, who of course had religious authority… just thinking about how this country's highest-ranked leaders were actually a naughty child and a bastard that was often surrounded and beaten up by Town Security made me feel an oncoming a heart attack.

Yep, after saying all this, perhaps some of you would have guessed how it was that I intended to decrease the local domain lords' authority. The battle between civil and religious authority was an endless one in any country, and the unstoppable force of divine might would make any domain lord have difficulty countering it.

Since the Church of Law was the national church, it wouldn't be too much to ask for a large temple and local church branches to be constructed in each domain now, would it?

Since the Church of Law has been recognized by the citizens, then having Judgementors and Knights of Justice patrol around the entirety of East Mist and spreading the church's teachings wasn't too much to ask for, was it?

Since the divine job class members of the Church of Law are humble yet skilled in battle, and were excellently viewed by all sections of society and welcomed everywhere, then taking the long term into consideration, it was only natural to expand their forces, and recruiting people from your domain wasn't too much to ask for, was it?

Since…

Under that series of "sinces," when the Church of Law continuously expanded in each local domain, there could only be one result.

"Since the Law God's teachings stipulate that everyone should be equal under the law, since you committed serious crimes just because you were a noble, then it wouldn't be too much to ask for to cut off your head, now, would it!?"

By that time, since I was the one who truly controlled the religious authority, I would naturally be able to decrease the domain lords' civil authority and complete my goal of centralizing power.

In my plan, if the Mist Alliance could be compared to a tremendous giant, then the Eastern Mist Communal Country would definitely be both the giant's critical spot, its heart, as well as its fist, as it was the first country that recognized the Law God as its national church. As the main headquarters of the Church of Law, every step the East Mist took would surely be imitated by other places, and it definitely had to become the perfect model that I had in my mind.

"Along with new development in technology, floating airships for citizens' use and

transportation technology for traveling between cities will become a reality sooner or later. After transportation becomes more convenient, moving military forces will become more convenient as well, which will cause the domain lords' duty to protect their own citizens to lose meaning. The system of each domain being like its own small kingdom will naturally become meaningless."

Of course, it was still a long way until that could be realized, but wasn't it nice to have some expectations?

What I had to do was simply plant my seeds, and patiently wait for the day of harvest.

"Yep, it's definitely not because I want to slack off or anything like that."

But, from a certain standpoint, my status was quite awkward.

In name, I was an ancestor of East Mist. In that case, my status should be above the current ruler's. Of course, this didn't include actual authority, since in history, all those emperor's grandfathers and so on stopped involving themselves in political affairs. Any that were technically retired and still wanted to get majorly involved meant that the country would soon be involved in civil war.

That was why, in terms of civil authority, my status was incredibly awkward. In a way, any that swore loyalty to me were technically betraying the current ruler's authority, but luckily, Reyne placed total trust in me and even gave me the identity of "Teacher to the Queen," giving me support in all areas so I wouldn't be too awkward in the royal palace.

But this still had its own problems. Human hearts would change. Even if Reyne maintained her trust in me, the people below her would have their own thoughts and consider their own personal benefits, not to mention that Reyne would one day get married and have her own children. [System: You're really getting ahead of yourself here] She would retire one day as well. Considering the unknown attitude that future rulers may have towards me, I figured that I should make my own considerations as early as possible.

At the very least, I had no intentions of interfering with any internal affairs of the royal palace, and made my attitude quite clear as well.

As for religious authority, my status was similarly awkward as well.

I had the identity of being Wumianzhe's God Envoy, which basically meant that I was the representation of Wumianzhe's will. But I didn't return to the Divine Kingdom afterwards; instead, I always stayed in the mortal plane. In a way, this caused an overlap with Xueti's job of being the highest-ranked authority of the Church of Law. He was supposed to be the leader of the Church and the representative of the True God in this plane, but I was also the representative of Wumianzhe's will, so if there were two representatives… fine, why was it that I was always in such awkward situations?

But since Xueti was someone who I brought up to his current rank, and all the higher-ups of the current Church of Law belonged to my faction, at least, for the time being, there wouldn't be any problems. As for any changes to the higher-ups of the Law of Church… due to Wumianzhe's connection with me, there would be even less problems.

From the very start, Wumianzhe was the core of my plan. How could I possibly allow any problems to affect him?

As for military authority, my status was the most awkward of all.

With countless new military squads being created, the original system of royal knights plus town defense squads was obviously no longer suitable. East Mist created a new military headquarters that organized military affairs for the entire country.

Yep, the entire country, including all the domain lords…

I couldn't use any plots that would definitely start an internal war, so in the current military setup, my status was incredibly awkward.

In this era, there was no such thing as a separation between the civil and military. The highest-ranked leader of a country's military would forever be the royalty. Reyne was the queen, and the military was an organization that served her. As the person who was in name the highest-ranked member of the military, I was also the representative of royal authority.

Alright, I also knew that representative this, representative that was all quite bothersome. But, the people in this generation really cared about such formalities. If one forcibly tried going against the sensibilities and unwritten laws of nobility in this era, then that person would have no actual authority. Without actual authority, the people under them would pull all sorts of tricks to resist carrying out your orders,

which would result in nothing ever getting accomplished.

"That's why I hate these wooden blockheads from a primitive age. How bothersome."

Cough, I should get back to the main topic.

The military situation was the same as the political one, with Reyne being the person controlling the military in name. But since the newly-created military squadrons were all under the command of my knights and I was her representative, all the generals followed my orders and the military was basically in my hands.

This was obviously not normal at all, but the most abnormal part was that everyone felt that this was natural.

The final conclusion was that although my status was quite awkward, in a way, I was East Mist's true number one. This made things similar to Sulfur Mountain City back in the day, with Adam and Little Red not doing anything at all, and Margaret too busy with all the daily political tasks, so the true one to run everything turned out to be me, a prisoner.

But this type of system obviously wasn't what I wanted. I had many things to do as well, and would often be going to other places in the future, so it would be quite common that I wouldn't be here for long periods of time. It would be quite bothersome in the future if they got into the habit of always relying on me.

That was why I needed to make myself disappear on purpose, in order to cultivate their own senses of responsibility and proactiveness. They should be able to do everything without me.

"After saying all this, isn't it all just to find an excuse to slack off? Since you know that you'll probably be really busy in the future, can't you just show off how hard-working you can be for once? Your office is already filled to the brim with paperwork, and even your living room and kitchen are stuffed with paperwork as well. Where is your so-called sense of responsibility and proactiveness?"

Since my magical pet was connected to my soul with a contract, even if I escaped, I would have to take this silly cat with me, which was probably the source of my displeasure.

Cough, don't listen to Harloys speak nonsense; I'm definitely not saying all this just to

slack off, I—I—I just wanted to improve my subordinates' abilities, so that they could quickly grow and become independent!

"Improve your subordinates' abilities in playing hide and seek?"

"You still haven't found His Highness Roland yet?"

"Town Security just reported that they discovered him, but he's slipped away again. Damn it, where is His Highness hiding?"

Another team of knights passed in front of me. Hmph! Actually using royal knights to perform a personal task such as finding someone, this was an abuse of royal authority. How unseemly. I absolutely needed to give them a lecture when I return.

"You actually don't feel any shame in lecturing others? Just obediently stay in your office and think of how much money it would save in administrative costs!"

"Silly cat, shut up! Otherwise, I'm going to make all your meals into dog biscuits."

"…Do you believe then that I'm going to find a chance to transform into your appearance and shout loudly 'I am Roland,' while dancing a square dance and sing 'Little Apple?' That's an ancient classic."

Imagining that frightening scene, I instantly shivered.

"I surrender! Please don't!"

Considering how Harloys' shamelessness wasn't in any way less than mine, competing with each other in how lacking in limits we could be would only result in defeat for both of us. I instantly submitted.

"Hmph! That's more like it. Oh right, I heard that there's a merchant group from some Allis Kingdom in the city's southern market that sells rather famous pickled cabbage candy; how about trying them out? Also, there's an Axilo performing troupe's musical showing at three p.m., and their ace singer and main dancers are all elves."

Alright, her intentions were obvious now. Wasn't this basically just outright extortion…?

"Let's go, we'll get tickets immediately!"

No matter where I was slacking off—whoops—I mean, taking a vacation, it would still be a vacation. Since it was all the same, I might as well just go along with Harloys.

Chapter 239
Whispers in the Shadows

As I idly roamed the streets of Diffindor and enjoyed the summer sunshine while everyone else worked so hard with their busy affairs, I felt that this day seemed quite joyous.

Those foolish tin cans wanted to find me? All I had to do was slightly modify the age that my ring displayed, put on some old tattered leather armor, and equip myself with a normal black iron sword, and a downcast-seeming middle-aged mercenary that could be seen anywhere appeared. They could just go ahead and continue searching for that child prince that vanished in front of them.

"What's the matter? You're still in a bad mood? You're that depressed at not being able to watch all of the Axilo troupe's performance?"

The only part that wasn't so joyous was that the cat on my shoulder had a sour expression, as if someone owed her money.

“…The Axilo troupe is supposed to be a famous roaming musical troupe. Their ace star Aliyas is skilled in seventeen different ancient classical singing styles. In the whole world, there are probably no more than three people who are capable of singing the climaxes of heroic ballads, and she's the only one that I had the possibility of hearing—do you know just how much I was looking forward to hearing her performance?"

Harloys seemed to understand better and better how to enjoy life after reobtaining it. I won't bother mentioning anything like gourmet food, even her natural pursuit of artistry as an elf had reawakened as well.

"To be honest, you should thank me. Do you know why I pulled you away and ran off? Do you know who that guest who volunteered to give a performance was?"

"Isn't she Gria? I knew her back when she was still living. Ancient dragons like her all really like to use the forms of high elves since humans back then were pretty much like ants."

High elves? I nodded as I recalled Harloys' adult form that seemed like such a pretty flower. While I didn't understand the specific differences between high elves and normal elves, at the very least high elves definitely had a greater average height, and they all knew how to act, which was quite sultry.

"Why do I feel like you're thinking something bad about me?"

"Heh heh, that's just a mistaken impression. Right, Harloys, do you know Gria's nickname?"

"Isn't she called 'Death Breath,' which signifies how powerful her Dragon Breath is?"

"No, looks like you don't know it. If you still stayed in that auditorium to listen, you would have learned. I feel sorry for all those youngsters that remained. I hope that there won't be too much damage to their minds."

"You're saying… that her singing is even worse than yours? She's actually capable of being worse than you who's ranked the worst out of everyone I know?"

"…If my singing is at a fireball's level, her singing is at a forbidden spell's level. Although this may be a terrible analogy, it should help you understand what I mean."

The emergency rescue personnel that hurriedly ran past us immediately proved my point.

Still, although I was being humble, my heart was bleeding. This silly cat just wouldn't let go of my weakness in singing.

Hmph! Just wait and see. I'm going to switch out all your candy for that pickled cabbage flavor! Those people from the Allis Kingdom are quite something, actually treating that as the best delicacy. Just one lick of that actually gave me +1 to my food achievements.

But the weird thing was that even though it barely counted as edible, and I somehow forced myself to eat so many, they actually counted as only one in total. How stingy of my System.

[System: No matter if it's pickled cabbage flavored candy, pickled carrot flavored pancakes, pickled fish flavored hamburgers or even pickled dragons, they all have the same name—kimchi. No matter how much you try to talk about it, if you use kimchi

to make a hundred different dishes at a tremendous feast, even if you think of a thousand different ways to make kimchi, it's still kimchi. Can you stop trying all that Korean cuisine now? You dare to call me stingy? Why don't you ask yourself—when eating all those different flavors, was there really much of a difference?]

Alright then, I really did think over it for ten or so seconds and found that I couldn't counter this at all. After all, I wasn't one of those Allis Kingdom residents that came from the mountains. I was unable to taste the delicate differences between the hundreds of kinds of kimchi-flavored candies.

"Hey, shouldn't you be telling me the truth now? We've known each other for so long; why are you still attempting to fool me?"

“…I just didn't want you to be frustrated; you saw through me?"

"Did you forget that I used to be the person in charge of information gathering back at Xiluo? You think that your little techniques can fool me? Weren't you the one who notified Gria to come and mess things up? I'm no novice; I obviously know that roaming troupes and circuses typically consist of over 50 percent spies. A high-ranked silver elf actually has to stoop to the level of becoming a singer? They must think that everyone else are just idiots; those elves are definitely spies from the southern elf kingdoms."

If she didn't bring this up, I really would have forgotten. The type of undead known as banshees had the power of possession, and information obtaining was akin to a natural talent for them. As the Banshee Queen, Harloys had always been the head of information back in Xiluo.

"Yep, their ace singer Aliyas? Heh heh, more like the silver elf Baroness Lia. But, they haven't done anything as of yet, and they can't do anything in the barrier of the 'Crimeless City' either. But, it's still no good to just let them be. Although it's not possible to put them in jail as they haven't committed any crimes, I don't want to make it so obvious that I'm antagonizing these elves, and making them disgusted to the point of not being able to eat for weeks and having headaches every day is a simple task for me."

Harloys nodded in contemplation upon hearing my words, but then she licked her lips, now seeming to be afraid.

"Is Gria's singing that astonishing? Could it just be a rumor?"

"It's more than astonishing; I'd use vicious to describe it. Just imagine; when I heard her singing, my bones continuously reverberated for three days and three nights in a row while that demonic noise caused me to lose all of my five senses. Her singing actually caused Emperor Yongye to have a headache for three days and three nights, and all the low-level undead that were present at the scene directly reentered the cycle of reincarnation. How could the word astonishing possibly be sufficient to describe it? Her singing is basically an AOE massive weapon."

But the strange thing was that even though I was clearly complaining, Harloys was obviously laughing more and more as I continued speaking. By the end, this silly loli even transformed back to her cat form and rolled around on the ground laughing.

"Wah! So—so—so… Your Highness didn't want to hear my songs —so, in Your Highness's mind… Wahh! I'm nothing more than an AOE massive weapon! Wahhh! So everyone saw me like that."

Alright, even without turning around, I knew that Harloys had dug a trap for me to fall into.

When I did turn around, as I expected, I saw Gria inconsolable with tears. But as expected of the Bone Dragon Queen, even her teary expression was so special, with a large hole appearing in the ground as each teardrop fell, which truly was scary as hell. Even her tears could corrode the ground.

After that, the silly cat stepped on my shoulder and made my head into her nest. The fact that she kept sweeping her tail in front of my nose was the best evidence that she was in a great mood; she was probably receiving great joy from my misfortune.

"Based on classical love scenarios, misunderstandings are the best opportunities to improve a relationship romantically. As long as the female lead is in tears, a series of accidents will occur, such as anemia, a car accident, sudden amnesia, or recovering of memories and so on. After that, there will be a series of misunderstandings that will make you want to vomit blood and mentally abuse both of you to death. If you still want to have any opportunities like that, go chase after her immediately."

"…I've heard that stories like that all originated from the Allis Kingdom. You must have seen those visitors from that kimchi Kingdom—you should stop watching such

performances. I've heard that if you watch too many of their dramas, you'll lose intelligence points." [1] 1

Why chase after her at all? That was what I wanted to say, but I couldn't say it out loud with how she was looking at me. This was perfect, though. I could save a big expenditure each year—it would be much more beneficial to use the cannon fodder undead I had to prepare each year for Gria's yearly concert as labor workers, after all. That's right; not only that, the zombie and skeleton workers in town have been charging more and more for their salaries recently. Should I change my job class to undead mage and go make some money?

While I was daydreaming, the silly cat spoke up, seeming to have come to a realization.

"The most important part about information is its veracity, and the most trustworthy information isn't something a novice can obtain. Personally obtaining information is always the most reliable method. So, the past few days, you were actually obtaining local information about the current state of affairs in Diffindor?"

"…Just along the way while slacking off, yes. East Mist's information department is still too much of a greenhorn; it has too many useless members. That mountain of reports they gave me is basically useless. It's not even a bit as effective as me personally investigating things."

"When you were buying snacks, you were recording food prices by category? Were you checking out the food market?"

"Yep. An area's snacks, side dishes, alcohol types and so on are directly connected to the residents' extra stockpiles of food, as well as directly related to their confidence in the future. If they can't even fill their stomachs next year, where will they have the extra food stocks to create alcohol or sell snacks? At the very least, the market seems to be abundant in food stocks, and the situation is quite healthy."

Harloys nodded slightly as well. Actually, she had the same conclusions.

"You even went to the blacksmiths' district and explored over one hundred blacksmith shops just to smith a normal black iron sword worth five gold coins for your disguise, and even explored two flea markets and numerous equipment shops just for a tattered piece of leather armor? So, you were inspecting the average equipment craftsmanship quality and battle resources available in Diffindor? What's the result?"

Hearing this, I shook my head. East Mist's industrial technology level was still too low. In order to improve this area, it would take far more than just one day.

"Terrible. Most blacksmiths are only capable of smithing low-quality farming implements, and the smithing technology for crafting weapons hasn't improved in the past three hundred years. After searching through the entire blacksmithing district, I found only one Silver-ranked great blacksmith. Even if they were provided with information on the newest technologies, with their current foundational knowledge, unless there were expert masters teaching them personally, these blacksmiths won't be of any use without at least a decade of training. However, we don't have a decade to wait around."

My investigation had proved what I expected. Due to master-level engineers from Sulfur Mountain City joining Diffindor, along with Olivia and company's research group, Diffindor's engineering and alchemy levels were probably at the top of the world. Plus, now that the gray elves had joined us, we could compete with the best in enchantments, but this made our shortcomings all the more obvious.

Creating the products of engineering as well as excellent weapons and equipment needed industrial knowledge as the foundation. Without smiths working away with clings and clangs on the basic things, even the most complex mechanical titan's blueprint would be nothing more than a useless piece of scrap paper. Without a first-class sword, even the best enchantments wouldn't even come close to making a renowned sword.

Although the gray elves had numerous elven smiths among them that had technology levels far surpassing the human smiths, when one considered that famous "elven armor" incident and how the elven smiths would casually make even a bow into a piece of artwork, I never expected anything from them the very start.

If our smiths also learned the elven smiths' attitude and production rate of only producing one sword every three years, that would be the end of us.

From start to finish, I preferred the rough and simple style of dwarven equipment—they were easy to use, sturdy, effective, and had no useless decorations. They were also highly suitable for mass production.

"How about we go to the Underground World and recruit some gray dwarf smiths to come here? But, those long bearded dwarves aren't easy to deal with; they won't

possibly stay without rich mining resources. We'd have to first get some mining resources from the barbarians' territory. Right, we can also bring some smiths from Sleuweir, to at the very least teach these blockheads how to make something besides farming implements."

Harloys nodded without saying anything. In this era of metallic weapons, blacksmiths were forever one of the most important resources of any country. Their average level and quantity immediately determined the frontline warrior's quality of weapons and armor. Every country treated blacksmiths as a treasure, and this was no easy problem to deal with.

"If this was Xiluo, things would be simple… forget it, forget I said anything."

There was no need to say anything else. I naturally knew what she meant when she mentioned Xiluo. Only one hundred or so years after their establishment, their technology level was terrible as well, but undead countries had their own methods of dealing with such a problem. Apart from having a bunch of human slaves working as laborers, they also had a different method of improving their technology that couldn't be used by other countries.

"Make cursed swords and armors out of bones? I don't want to become the enemy of all humanity, and besides, if a living person uses such equipment for too long, he'd die."

"How's the combat resource situation? You seem to be satisfied with your leather armor?"

"Equally terrible. The lower-class equipment shops have nothing but low-quality goods, the middle-class equipment shops all have half of their stock being fakes, and there's not even a single high-class equipment shop. Let's organize things in this aspect after we return."

In my eyes, this problem seemed difficult, but it was actually much easier to solve. We just needed to increase our trade with other countries. As long as other countries' products would be able to sell for a good price here, merchants would naturally flock to us, and once the Mist Alliance's policy of zero internal tariffs was established, I fully expected there to be a massive amount of trade creating an astonishing amount of profit.

But this was only a band-aid fix; it did not solve the foundational problem. Purchased products were always unreliable, nor would true top-level equipment be able to be purchased. If we couldn't come up with our own method to produce top-level equipment, no matter how much equipment we purchased, we would always be under the control of others.

And, so, I secretly set a goal.

"Every magical beast material obtained during the winter hunting competition for this celebration shall be purchased by the East Mist royalty. Even if we lose money, we need to be able to help our smiths cultivate their equipment crafting skills."

But, the national treasury wasn't well off. We still needed to see if weapon trading and selling would be successful or not during this festival. If we weren't able to take care of it now, then we could only leave it to the side.

We reached today's final stop, the floating airship dock where the Borealis was parked.

And, right now, "Envy" wasn't by itself. By its side was a pitch-black combat airship, with countless undead working busily around it, reinforcing the airship's body and putting down the materials for its deck.

Yes, that's right—undead, not human smiths. Although they were undead mages and believers of the shadow that most people viewed as enemies, they were currently working as the most hard-working smiths of all.

This was an undead airship that was currently under construction. Its body was made of real dragonbone, its pitch-black mast was enchanted with evil undead magic, and dark winds whirled around it. Marsolit's report also rang in my ears.

"The Dragonbone Battleship's construction is proceeding smoothly. Team 1, Airship 2's construction is on schedule to be completed. The 'dragonslaying plan' will proceed as scheduled."

Note:

1. Yes, all of this is a sarcastic barb against Korean TV dramas.

Chapter 240
Mizar

In the newly-born East Mist and Diffindor, there was a group that had a unique special existence—the Xiluo undead.

The newly-born Xiluo Empire was an empire with Omar as the lord, which in principle meant that they would automatically become an allied member of the Mist Alliance.

However, even after their reinforcements returned, a large amount of high-level undead stayed behind in East Mist at my request. In order to prevent unnecessary panic, I arranged for all of them to stay within the inner part of Diffindor, which was covered by the Crimeless City domain. At the very least, in this area that was covered by the Crimeless City domain, others would feel much more assured at seeing the undead as they wouldn't be able to commit any crimes.

Since Emperor Omar had some personality defects in certain areas, such as being brainless, having only muscles for brains, and thinking about nothing but muscles, it was completely impractical to expect him to do anything that a true ruler should do.

With everyone's support and the unified recommendation of the six original Senators as he was renowned for being the only normal one with an honest and upright heart, the Spider Archduke Lionheart became the new Xiluo's first Senator.

As for whether Omar would have any objections? He could just go play wherever he wanted, as long as he didn't get in the way of doing important things. Anyways, he only cared about whether or not he was considered to be the highest-ranked existence.

Apart from the reason of helping East Mist's people to accept the undead and improve the relationship between East Mist and Xiluo, there was also the existence before me that was another reason.

"Dragonbone Battleship Mizar [1] 1. Internal Reference Name: 'Dragonmouth.' Length: 473 meters. It's constructed entirely out of handpicked dragonbone. It's the combination of Auland's floating battleship technology and undead magic, and it is the Borealis' sister ship."

"Your Highness, I have a personal objection to your words just now. I'm tired of perverted people treating ships as females. If possible, please call it a brother ship."

I heard Marsolit's objection, but could tell that he was in an excellent mood.

"Heh heh, it seems like Captain Pier has been quite active recently. Right, Marsolit, if you want to let go of part of your physical body and power, I can help create a new body for you. Of course, your current body wouldn't be maintained anymore, but you can fully become an undead."

Although taking away this SemiGod level core would affect the Borealis somewhat, I had many high-level undead under my command now and could make up for that loss.

"I'm grateful for your kind offer, but this body is the best connection between me and my family. At least, until I get rid of my enemies that I've sworn revenge against, this body is extremely useful. It'll serve as a constant reminder to not forget about the past."

The current Marsolit was still in a half-alive, half dead state. His physical body was still half ice and half poisoned and corroded. If he ever wanted the freedom to move about as he pleased, it was obvious that this body of his would be no good.

However, his current declaration doubtlessly meant that he still had attachments to his physical body. Perhaps the memory of Dragonhunter Deimos the First killing his wife and daughter still tortured him every night in his nightmares.

Since this was his own personal choice and wish, I didn't continue convincing him and instead focused my attention on this new floating battleship, which was constructed completely out of dragonbone.

Auland's technicians and engineers were in my hands now, but the industrial level here was still far too low. If the smiths here couldn't even create iron swords, then how could they possibly create the parts necessary for a battleship? In a short period of time, even the production of smaller battleships for ambush attacks would be unrealistic, not to mention producing even larger battleships for large-scale battles.

Floating battleships' benefits were made quite obvious during the previous battle. Transporting the injured, being a resource warehouse, acting as reinforcements, providing cover fire, sending down resources via parachutes— they were obviously a cheat-like existence that only attacked others and were difficult to attack themselves.

Just the Borealis' excellent performance alone caused us to receive so many orders.

Moreover, this was only their advantages during war. What I truly valued was their worth when used by ordinary civilians.

In this generation that relied on metallic weapons, transportation between cities relied mostly upon horses or horse-drawn carriages. In that case, there was a limit to the speed of transportation, and it would cause an increase in time and human resources used.

There would also be dangerous beasts along the way, lawless bandits, and even legal robbery—by this, I meant local domain lords that collected tolls in order to pass through their domains. In that case, there were quite a few merchant groups that wouldn't even make it to their destination, or even if they did, their costs and thus prices would be raised astronomically.

After adding in all the tolls, the fees to hire mercenary guards, and money paid to the relatives of those who died during these travels and so on, it would be common for a product to be several hundred times more expensive than its cost of production after arriving in some other area. This didn't even take into account uncertain factors such as war or plague that would always cause the price of goods to quickly rise.

If we could make floating airships into something common…

"Stop dreaming! Do you think that nobody's tried using aerial cavalry to transport goods before? Anyone who can become an aerial cavalry rider is a big shot; making them work as transporters? Just the food they eat is probably more expensive than how much profit you can make."

I quickly received many objections. Perhaps it was this world's natural law of energy conservation; no matter if it was a magical artifact or a magical beast with the ability to fly, such flight would always have an astronomical expenditure.

Even if I got Auland's floating airships to come here and work for transportation, I figured that the money earned probably wouldn't even cover the energy costs of keeping the airships operational.

But, there was one type of existence that broke this natural law—the new generation's perpetual motion machine, the undead.

The best evidence as the popularity of the undead as laborers in Diffindor. This was because they didn't know fatigue, didn't require any rest, didn't need to eat, and wouldn't complain no matter how difficult the work was. They were basically the ideal laborer that any capitalist dreamed about, and this was the main reason why people accepted them so quickly despite their frightening appearances.

Since the Borealis was basically a top-level product of undead construction—Envy of the Seven Deadly Sins—it was technically a combat airship that had zero energy costs. Not only that, its main deck's mage towers and energy batteries created its own energy loop, and it could also absorb extra mana that flowed out from the local area as well as provide energy to other magical artifacts as well. It was basically an almost perfect combat platform, which could fight for long periods of time.

"If soul and undead airships become commonplace, and every major city sets up soul airship airports and gargoyle taxis appear in the cities… Fine then, I admit that sometimes my imagination may run wild, but this seems like a feasible plan. The technology for it is available, and we have tons of undead mages capable of creating these objects. All we need is the determination to push this plan through."

And this was only the civil side of things. It would be even more useful for politics. If all the biggest cities of the Mist Alliance established aerial trade routes, then the trade, diplomacy, and interaction between civilians of each country of the Mist Alliance would obviously become a lot more frequent. It would also tighten the relationship between countries… No matter how friendly two countries were, if they needed two or three months to reach each other, they would naturally drift apart. If reaching another country took only two or three days, however, it wouldn't be all that different from going to the next city.

Once my imagination started running wild, I was unable to stop myself. Not only did I extrapolate this scenario to the transportation field, I felt that agriculture could also use undead cows as tireless labor, and the industrial field already had plenty of undead laborers doing all sorts of manual labor. How could I possibly not be moved by the potential huge benefits and profits available in this field?

Of course, my goal did meet with a few small obstacles, such as the Holy Light that loathed the undead, such as Holy Knights that swore to eliminate the evil undead, such as the Holy Church which often shouted about the Holy War.

Fine, they were all actually the same obstacle. If I went about so obviously making the

undead into a central part of our workforce, I would immediately be declared the number one most evil heretical undead mage in the world. The Holy War was right before us, but I had to say, this wasn't a conflict that I couldn't take care of.

First, this was Wumianzhe's territory, not the God of Holy Light's territory. This was the most critical part in resolving this conflict. The Gods were very strict about territorial divisions, and the Holy Church viewed respecting the other True Gods of Order as highly important. After all, if there really was a battle involving the Gods and the Holy Church themselves were the side that lacked logic and reason, then the God of Holy Light, whose powers were like a divine server to draw power from, may not help his own believers.

Secondly, in the Northlands, the humans here hated the Holy Church more than any other humans did. In the battle not long ago, the Holy Church should have stood up for them but didn't, whereas the undead came to their aid, instead. This had caused history and reality to clash and the Holy Church to be publicly considered as unreliable, which further increased the northerners' distaste towards the Holy Church.

The most important part was that the Holy War was arriving and the Northlands wasn't the area that the Holy Church wanted to focus on spreading their teachings in. The higher-ups of the Holy Church were all focusing on those mega-level empires. As long as we didn't do anything too overboard, they would be more than happy to pretend to not see anything. After all, with a major enemy in front of them, adding a new enemy on top by breaking ranks with a former ally would obviously be the most foolish action of all. A great deal of effort would be spent for nothing but self-frustration.

Of course, I didn't expect them to have such wisdom or tolerance; every religion had their fervent believers and extremists, which was why my messenger was already on his way with an extravagant present for them. I intended to see if those red-garbed higher-ups of theirs really were cleaner or not than their predecessors from three hundred years ago.

Considering how the Holy War was coming and that they wouldn't want to lose their God's protection, on top of a large amount of gold coins for them, I had a more than 80% guarantee that the Holy Church would pretend to not see anything here, in which case I could try to push through my plan.

As for whether or not there would be a reckoning afterwards… there definitely would be one, but who knows which side would commence the reckoning?

As the inventor of undead construction, I had far surpassed the ancient undead emperors. This new airship was something that I personally designed.

It received the glorious name of being a dragonbone battleship because its entire body was crafted out of dragonbone. Every inch of it was made from real dragon skeletons. Some dragonbone was accumulated before in the past, some was recently gained in the Underground World, and some was even from that little brat Reyne during the previous battle.

This dragonbone battleship hovered in midair; the pitch-black dragonbone seemed to give off the faint impression of draconic might. The gigantic airship was covered in black mist, and the mast constructed of souls was accumulating mana. Black thunder could be seen flashing in the mist, making it seem like an ultimate weapon that would destroy the world.

The front, where the "dragonmouth" was located, had saw-shaped huge teeth harvested from real dragons. This would be the main weapon in the future, and it was also the source of its code name.

Dragonbone was already a priceless, rare magical ingredient. If I tried calculating the price of this vessel… fine, let's not worry about the details of cost effectiveness; let us discuss its functions instead.

Cough—cough—I shouldn't be blamed for wasting funds on investments like this. Every experimental vessel required an expense, and in order to achieve the best result, one had to ignore the costs. After it was truly complete, the final bill would likely make the original designer receive a heart attack, causing the final result to be that the design would be endlessly pushed back and become nothing but a backup technology reserve.

But, our situation was a little different; all our dragonbone had been accumulated over time. However, if we tried to create bone dragons, we would be unable to come up with complete skeletons, and forcefully creating low-level, low-quality bone dragons was something that we disdained. So, in a way, this was making good use of what we had on hand.

Of course, as one of the highest quality magical ingredients, dragonbone was indeed a bit expensive and a bit precious, but they had excellent effects and numerous properties. The parts where the structure was unreasonable or not up to standards were forcibly ignored due to the excellent quality of materials used.

And, apart from this, the precious dragonbone had another usage—it looked really cool.

The countless dragonbones interweaved with each other to form a huge combat airship. This dragonbone battleship descended from the skies accompanied with dark clouds, and it resembled a demon king that crawled out of the Chaos Abyss who was bent on destroying this world. It possessed a depraved beauty… fine then, I'll stop being ridiculous. It was true that it looked rather scary, and that was exactly what I wanted.

After dealing with the trouble of the Holy Church, the other trouble on my plate wasn't so easy to deal with.

That trouble was the people's old-fashioned biases against the undead and undead objects. Although the Red Hunting Hounds' knight squadron and the undead laborers' existence made the East Mist far more accepting of undead than most other countries, there was still a long way to go before people here could truly accept undead products as part of their daily lives and even necessities. However, this process could be expedited through governmental guidance.

"This shall become a heroic combat airship just like the Borealis. It shall become a new legend in its own right. When all our citizens view it as their pride, they'll naturally no longer be as resistant towards undead products."

Considering that troublesome 'deep sea hunting quest' I had ahead of me, one airship could never match up to a flotilla. It would definitely be necessary to expand the airship squadron. Transporting mining and human resources from the barbarian tribes could also become a regular daily occurrence if the airship numbers were expanded.

"Something like airships should be well organized in squads in order to have true might. Your Highness, we need at least a full squadron in order for the airships to show their true might; they'll be able to cover each other, support each other, and utilize combat tactics. It's the same with woman—one could never be enough; you need a

harem…”

"Sexual harassment is forbidden!"

These were the words of Captain [NG1] Pier, who was scheduled to take charge of the Mizar, but before this perverted man who treated his own airships as women could complete his declaration on harems, he was knocked on the back of his head by his vice-captain[NG2].

Smack!

"My apologies, Your Highness. The Captain drank too much this morning again."

This vice-captain’s name was Shaweir, and she was was rather tall and had a handsome and open-seeming face. She appeared like the mature-older-sister type, but when I stared at her in astonishment, she awkwardly put the broken chair leg behind her back.

"Relax, Pier has really thick skin. A personality-punishing attack like that is nothing more than a little nap for him—he’ll be back to normal the very next day."

Taking a look at the shattered chair in Shaweir’s hands, the huge bump on Pier’s head, and the traces of blood on the floor, I didn’t intend to make a big deal out of this since she had said so. After all, this woman had the nickname of being "Pier’s conscience," and had been his vice-captain for so many years already. I hoped she wouldn’t kill him.

"I’ve heard that Shaweir has liked Pier for a long time already, but Pier has always treated ships as his true love. I never expected that this rumor was real… and why does the way they interact with each other seem so familiar?"

Cough—cough—I shouldn’t pry too much into certain things. I should get back to the main topic; having a trustworthy new Captain and his crew was really such a reassuring thing… just pretend that you believe that.

An airship battalion was absolutely necessary, but the industrial foundation and resource supplies were unable to follow up. This led to the undead battleships that were quick and easy to create to become the best choice of all. This involved my greater plan in so many areas, and I absolutely wouldn’t allow anything to go wrong with it.

"One hundred years later, perhaps people will treat me as the wisest inventor of all? Or the most dangerous undead mage to appear in the past thousand years? I think that both are possible… Marsolit, is there anything else that you need?"

As for why I referred to it as the Borealis's sister ship, that was because its internal structure was mostly copied from the Borealis. Even the people in charge of creating the Mizar were the same as the Borealis, not to mention that Marsolit was the overseer for this entire project.

Although I was asking, I expected that since he had plenty of subordinates and the best resources all provided to him, he wouldn't have any requests.

"Um, there really is an awkward request of mine that I would like Your Highness's approval on…"

Marsolit was actually hesitating? This was astonishing.

"What is it? Just tell me directly. As long as I can do it, I'll try my best."

"Alright, then I'll say it directly… Could you toss that pervert who keeps drooling at my engines and cannons into my cannon, please? I'm clearly an outstanding man who possesses the wonderful Cyclone Jet Armstrong Cannon [2] [2] , yet that bastard actually treats me as a woman! The engine isn't a butt! There couldn't possibly be any feeling no matter how much he touches it! I said, stop touching it! I'm talking about you, Pier Papin!"

"Ah, in front of an amazing engine that spouts thick smoke and tremendous booms, any beautiful woman's curves are useless. The curves of the cannons are the sexiest of all…"

Alright then, Shaweir was correct. Were all gentlemen (perverts) related to cockroaches? Bleeding so much just earlier—was that an instant complete recovery?"

Right now, in front of me, this muscular man was pressing his face against the Borealis's engine room while wearing a black skintight outfit. He was making a cool pose that showed off his muscles (what he viewed as cool), and singing his own praises (what he believed to be praises).

"Just try to bear with it; he's to be the Mizar's Captain… The hell, he's actually putting on Timlad's cat ears and magical girl sailor uniform? Someone prevent him from

polluting this world!"

But this was only the beginning…

With a twist of his waist, an elegant pose, and a sultry expression, he instantly put on the magical girl sailor uniform. The hairy thick legs beneath it in combination with the white lace that could just barely be perceived caused all the spectators to be shocked.

"Meow! Meow! I'm going to punish you in the name of the moon…"

Smack!

This time, what flew towards him wasn't a chair, but a table instead… I just now discovered that Shaweir had a Strength-related natural talent.

But, unfortunately, even Shaweir who was huffing and puffing didn't win anything.

That pervert's pink magical girl outfit actually flashed golden and helped him to entirely ignore that table.

"Ahhhh! My power is coming! Timlad's combat clothing is truly amazing! However, the pose and activation incantation required to use it is a little strange. Now then, let me try out the next incantation… Although I'm cute (seductive look in his eyes), I will summon death (panty flash)…"

Even the undead could no longer tolerate this. The workers were running for their lives, and those that hadn't escaped had all collapsed. Harloys had completely vanished somewhere, and I felt as if I had gone blind.

"I've changed my mind! Marsolit! Toss that bastard into your Armstrong Cannon, and shoot him to the moon that he wants to go to so much!"

Note:

1. Mizar is the name of the second star of the Big Dipper constellation.

2. Gintama reference!

Chapter 241
Visitor

"The Holy Church sent an envoy?"

Although the Holy Church had been pushed out of East Mist, they were still the main, most widely believed religious institution of the entire human society and the most important member of the Gods' churches. Since they were sending an envoy to me, it was only natural that I would view this with importance.

I received that important notification right when I returned to my residence. No wonder everyone had been in such a rush to find me. It was probably because that envoy group asked to personally meet with me.

"Cough! All those tin cans blocking my escape route, you guys must be tired. You can go back and rest now. I won't play the disappearing game anymore."

"That's not necessary, Your Highness. We're not tired at all!"

Although the knights remained orderly, judging by how their voices were filled with pent up anger and complaints, my good intentions only caused them to become more furious.

Perhaps I had vanished too many times recently. Right now, even Elisa and Kelly weren't looking at me in a friendly manner. If it weren't for the fact that they still needed me, their tiny fists, which were clenched ever so tightly, would probably be mightily walloping me.

"It's probably another foreign visitor who wants to meet with me personally. Alright, I shall go meet them now."

However, Elisa and Kelly shook their heads and handed me a document instead. It was the list of the names of those in the Holy Church's envoy group, and the moment I saw these names, I understood why they were so mysteriously filled with complaints against me.

"Whoa! Cardinal Soros, the Holy Blade Knights' vice-commander 'Red-Winged Griffin' Aivla, and 'Miracle Hand' Estrada. Each one of them is a big shot!"

I was immediately on guard when I saw this list of names. I thought that this would only be a normal diplomatic meeting, but the envoys were of too high a rank. It was obvious that the reason of their visit would be no simple matter.

"Soros is ranked seventeenth among the cardinals. Although there isn't a possibility of him becoming the next pope, his reputation is quite good for a cardinal. He's also famous for being gentle and amiable. The Holy Blade Knights are known as the number one knight group under the Holy Light's command. You should understand that organization even better than I do; you were a member of the Holy Church in the past."

Kelly's tone contained some traces of melancholy. Perhaps she was thinking about the unpleasant past.

"As for Estrada, there's been no news about him for over the past hundred years. But, from what we can recall, Estrada's nickname as the Miracle Hand isn't anywhere close to being as famous as his other nickname, 'The Strongest Holy Knight of All.' For three such major figures to come together with no advance warning, this will probably be quite a troublesome situation."

All three of them were part of the highest echelons of the Holy Church. The Cardinal Conference was the highest-ranked authority of the Holy Church, and even the pope would be chosen from among them. In the current era, where belief in the Holy Light was as natural as breathing, any cardinal visiting a country would be able to receive treatment surpassing that of a country's king.

As for the other two with Cardinal Soros, perhaps they weren't as highly ranked within the church as he was, but if you went, instead, by their personal reputations and power levels, then Soros, who was still an ordinary mortal, could never compare to them.

"The Holy Blade? Of course I'm familiar with them. After all, I was a member of that group back in the day as well."

The Holy Blade Knights typically stayed at the Holy Church's headquarters, and would receive a pitifully small amount of combat tasks to complete. Their members also included numerous princes and princesses from various countries, which was why it

was often made fun of as the babysitting knight group or the decorative knight group. However, for any of the Holy Church's enemies, this knight group, which started out with Legend-ranked strength and peaked at the Myth rank, were always destined to become their enemies' nightmares on the battlefield.

I had heard of the 'Red-Winged Griffin' Aivla as well. She was the youngest of the Holy Blade's three sub-commanders, and it was rumored that she was a Child of the Holy Light who possessed angel blood. She was a natural-born killer of the undead, and the number of liches and undead mages killed she had killed were probably so numerous that one could make a telephone book out of the list's thickness.

Although she was the least experienced of the three sub-commanders, her power level was definitely significant. And as one of the sub-commanders of the Holy Blade Knights, her status wasn't less than that of a Cardinal's at all. Not to mention that the knights guarding this envoy group were all Holy Blade Knights directly under her command.

The Holy Blade Knights was a very strange knight order. All of its official knights were carefully selected ace knights from the entire world, and their squires consisted of not only potential future talents but even various young royals from many countries.

Some came of their own volition, while others were forced. If everything were successful, these young royals would become a method for their home countries to establish a good relationship with the Holy Church, and if problems arose, they would basically become pitiful hostages with awkward statuses.

This was also why the Holy Blade Knights had the nickname of the babysitting knight group. They didn't have anything to do at all, and the members typically involved themselves in various political events. However, looking at it from a different angle, if a knight order with power levels like theirs had daily missions to perform, then the world would be in utter chaos.

I was one of the potential knights in that group back in the day. However, if I hadn't managed to become a Legend, I probably would have remained as an apprentice for the rest of my life. As for that 'Miracle Hand' Estrada, I was even more familiar with him.

"It's obvious that they intentionally sent him, that teacher of mine who seems mild on the outside but is actually wild on the inside."

Yep, back in the day, I was Estrada's squire. And this Miracle Hand had already established his fame more than five hundred years ago, and was the strongest individual out of all the Holy Knights. During the Yongye incident, we even fought with each other.

"One is a Cardinal who represents the pope's will, one is the boss of the knight order I was in, and one was my knight teacher in the past. Should I say that they really view me with importance? Making such thorough preparations, they really made an effort."

All three of these envoys were obviously specifically picked just to deal with me, but no matter what the Holy Church wanted, sending out such a high-ranked envoy group couldn't possibly be for anything small.

Kelly and the others also had difficult expressions on their faces. Everyone here knew about the Holy Church's typical style. The overall statuses of this envoy group's members were far too high, and no matter whether they had good or bad intentions sending out three veterans like this, where any one of them would be a hugely important personage in human society, wouldn't possibly be only for a simple greeting.

However, I laughed. What was going to come was going to come. The Holy Church had always viewed itself as the master of the entire human society, and with me causing such a ruckus in the Northlands, if they still had zero reaction, that would have been strange instead.

"Make them wait."

"This is the Miracle Hand we're dealing with, a real living Myth. Legends about his achievements have already been spreading for several hundred years. He's basically the living personification of the Holy Light."

"All the more reason to make him wait."

If it was any other envoy, it probably would have been fine to meet them right away. However, since Estrada was the envoy, hurriedly meeting him would obviously be a bad thing. It wasn't only that—I also faintly guessed at why they were here. Making them wait to show our dissatisfaction and uncaring attitude towards them would be more advantageous for our upcoming discussion.

"Have the tin can knights keep a close eye on them. Don't let them become too bored

and come out and tour around. That would probably cause an incident."

At my command, the tin cans came in, but the knight leader, who looked like a big silly bear, had an expression that revealed he felt this would be difficult to accomplish.

"What? You say that you can't do it? Stupid, did you think that you were supposed to just block their doors? Go ask that quiet-on-the-outside, wild-on-the-inside old grandpa about combat techniques and holy magic. Go ask that sub-commander about the meaning of Holy Light, and go tell that cardinal about your sins and frustrations. Make four teams among yourselves, and each team needs to ask them questions for a minimum of four hours. I want them to not even have time to eat or drink."

That knight leader, who was as thick as a silly bear, still seemed hesitant.

"What if they don't teach us?"

"In the Holy Church, one of their teachings is to 'Never refuse service to anyone who desires the teachings of the Holy Light.' If they try to use some excuse to not teach you, then just keep talking about this precept and cry while doing so. Let me see just how they deal with that."

Right when I finished speaking, all my knights were filled with an eager anticipation to try. If any of them could learn a thing or two from such famous Holy Knights, it would truly be akin to accomplishing something they could only dream about.

"You're still not going? This is such a great task. If you guys won't do it, I'll find someone else to do it."

Seeing my tin cans rush out the door, I knew that that old man Estrada was going to be really busy. As a living legend among knights, these young passionate tin cans of mine would definitely keep him good company.

"You're really evil. After all, he was still your knight teacher in the past."

"Yep, it's not like he's the first teacher of mine that came trying to kill me, and nor is he my first teacher that's suffered because of me. It's easy for me to make him suffer… I'm really not talking about you, Harloys! Stop biting me!"

Alright then, my head was in danger from a certain black cat, and I even felt a glare from behind my back.

"Amelia, don’t glare at me like that! What happened to between in the past doesn’t count! Alright, I apologize—I sincerely apologize! I give my two teachers here my sincerest apologies, which is why—please let go—Milady Harloys! I’ve been quite anemic recently. If this continues I’ll really die!"

I finally freed myself from the "soulbound equipment" on my head, and I organized my things and prepared to head out again.

"Um, in order to avoid being caught by Estrada, I’m going to go out again. If those guys come looking for me, remember to say that I’ve gone somewhere far away… why are you all taking out your weapons? I’m talking about something serious here! It’s definitely not because I want to slack off! I can make an oath! If I’m lying, let Beifeng be struck by thunder!"

"That bastard is often struck by thunder anyways, so let’s not discuss your meaningless untrustworthy oath; today, your task is to finish dealing with all the official documents piled up on these three desks! Before you finish, you’re forbidden to go anywhere!"

…

"Damned heretics! Damned barbarians! One day, I swear I’ll exterminate all the evil and heretics here!"

In a hotel for foreign guests in Diffindor, the three high-ranked envoys from the Holy Church were currently having a discussion. At the current moment, the youngest among them, Aivla, was currently shouting in thunderous rage. For someone like her who had a deep hatred of the undead, she had been filled with pent-up anger ever since she entered this city.

Soros, who was wryly smiling, was an elderly man who appeared to be a kind individual. He was currently doing his best to try to pacify his companion’s rage, but to be honest, he was inwardly angry as well. In fact, this was his first time getting angry in the past ten years.

High-level undead were actually appearing in public just like that on the main streets, and ordinary citizens even used low level undead as laborers. If it weren’t for the fact that they already received information about this beforehand, they could have mistaken this place to be the legendary Undead Plane.

Just like the female knight who was currently raging next to him, he had to restrain himself from acting to "cleanse" these undead all along the way. After all, based on the information they received, if any of them took action, not only would nobody likely thank them for it, but they would, in fact, be labeled as "murderers" and be marked by Wumianzhe's Divine Domain. That would surely give them an endless amount of trouble.

"My glorious Gods, why do you protect these evil undead? And, my pure and holy lord of Holy Light, what is your divine will? What are you intending? Why did you send your loyal servant to such a barbaric location?"

Even the most devout believer would have complaints at such a time. At this current moment, Soros was wondering about the mysterious divine will that had sent him here. He also wondered about the undead that were living here just like ordinary people, and he recalled the top-secret information that he had read through. Soros even began to doubt his own belief for the first time.

"The undying Roland? I never expected there to be such an existence."

Unlike Aivla who only had partial information, Soros knew everything about the content of their envoy group's mission. He also had a high enough rank to be allowed to look through ancient records that had been sealed for several hundred years.

He had read through the darkest parts of the Holy Church's history that were filled with the light. The Undead King, Forbidden Spell Mage, Divine Child of Light, Law God's Envoy, The Man Who Betrayed the Holy Light, The Heretic King—all these titles were given to just one person. Just thinking about how this one person had accomplished so many legendary feats, even a cardinal like Soros felt astonished and fearful. He didn't understand why he had to come to this heretical location, nor did he understand why he had to make a trade with this heretic king.

"My Lord, is this a test of my faith? Please forgive me for doubting your divine will, but looking at all the demons walking around on the streets, I feel like I really am making a trade with demons!"

Just like always, the cardinal's prayer, which was somewhat irreverent and disrespectful this time, received no response whatsoever. However, for him, he always believed it to be evidence of the inscrutable will of the Gods.

The legend among legends, Estrada, kept reading a book of his. It seemed like he didn't notice his two companions' complaints at all.

Estrada didn't appear to have a Myth-ranked hero's aura about him at all. His appearance was ordinary, his height was ordinary, his muscles didn't bulge, and even the evidence of holy power within him wasn't evident. He seemed almost exactly like an ordinary person, and on the entire way here, he had remained silent to the point that Soros didn't comprehend. Either he was reading a book or drinking tea. If Soros didn't know better, he would have mistaken him for a tourist who had come here only to enjoy the sights.

Soros couldn't do anything about this elder of his who appeared younger than his own grandson. He could only allow Estrada to do as he pleased.

One of his companions was filled with rage, and Soros had to stay on guard and prevent her from drawing her sword and attacking the undead, which would interfere with their diplomatic efforts and the Holy Church's reputation. Meanwhile, his other companion was living in his own little world, and he was unable to do anything about it at all. Although this wasn't Soros' first time as an envoy to another country, at the current moment, Soros felt that he had truly gotten old. He even began to consider whether he should retire soon.

And before his current troubles were even over, new troubles came for him. The sky wasn't even light outside when a noisy bunch arrived outside his door. It seemed that the lost lambs searching for the Holy Light's teachings had arrived again.

Although he considered it a good thing that people were willing to accept the Holy Light's teachings, they had kept him busy until 3:00 a.m. in the morning, which was quite tiring. Not only that, but these youngsters had such sincere attitudes, and kept talking about how the "Holy Light would never refuse anyone sincerely willing to learn." This made Soros, who always cared about his own friendly reputation, to be unable to say anything forceful in response.

However, just waiting around like this wasn't a good idea since their envoy group was here to discuss important matters, not to spread the Holy Light's teachings. Being surrounded by all these youngsters meant that they wouldn't be able to accomplish anything.

At the moment that the youngsters' voices reached them from outside, even Estrada

smiled wryly. Last night, he had been quite pitiful as he was surrounded by them as well. He was also the type who was unable to refuse sincere youngsters, and teaching was a tiresome matter, not to mention he taught several hundred yesterday, which took a great deal out of him. If this repeated itself today, neither Estrada nor Soros would be able to take it anymore.

"It seems that we can’t wait around any longer. Otherwise, Roland will definitely use even more devious tricks. It’s time to go look for him and have a direct discussion."

Chapter 242
Holy Bathing Basin

"The Holy Bathing Basin? There was such a thing?"

It wasn't difficult to discover the Holy Church's intentions, at least on the surface. After all, the Holy Church possessed many members, and there would always be loose-lipped ones among them. Not to mention that there were quite a large number of Holy Knights accompanying them for protection this time. It was just too easy to deal with those tin cans, whose brains were nothing but pure muscle, and find out some information from them.

"Haha! Don't joke with me. Among all the gifts that you sent to the Holy Church earlier, the 'Holy Bathing Basin' was the most special one of all. It was one of the three remaining holy artifacts left behind by the God of Holy Light while he was still human. The new Pope Caloma, who just ascended recently, was ecstatic, and treated the holy artifact's return as a divine miracle, a present from the Gods, and even organized a huge ceremony for the holy artifact's return."

Kelly seemed to be in a good mood as she looked over our newest information report.

It seemed that I was quite lucky; I had given them such an extravagant present at such an appropriate time. However, I didn't recall sending them a "Holy Bathing Basin" among the presents I prepared.

I did my best to recall my previous preparations. From a certain standpoint, if I wanted to have the Northlands develop as I planned, there was an obstacle that I would always have to face eventually—the Holy Church that reigned over the entirety of human society.

If I overstepped their boundaries by even a slight amount and that Pope Caloma had a stroke or something and declared some Holy War against the East Mist, then that would surely be quite fun for us.

This wasn't me thinking too much into things. With a huge upcoming battle, the God of Holy Light definitely wouldn't come looking for trouble with us; in fact, the God

might even come looking for allies (cannon fodder). However, the Holy Church consisted of mortals and it was much more difficult to guess at their future actions. It was all the more so since, in my "glorious" past, I had basically destroyed almost the entirety of the Holy Church's allied armies. It was now even easier to make them sensitive and injure their pride.

It wasn't limited to that. Just recently, we had just forced the Holy Church's branches here to leave. If we were just a normal distant country, with Wumianzhe supporting us, it wouldn't be too big of a big deal since there were plenty of countries other than the Eastern Mist Communal Country that had rejected the Holy Light's teachings. In this world of Eich where so many Gods existed, the God of Holy Light wasn't able to kill all the other Gods and become the only one who was worshiped.

However, we had just won a large-scale battle that everyone had been paying attention to. This fierce battle also proved that we were a force to be reckoned with, and all of human society now had a new opinion of the Northlands. What came along with that were some small troubles. The critical point, of how the Northlands overcame their situation, was long since discovered by those seeking information to be the return of the undead knights.

Knights that should have been in eternal rest walked back out from the pages of history. The former head priest in East Mist had tried to obstruct me, so I angrily shouted at him and even exiled him. Following that, the Law God himself had descended upon the battlefield. This entire city became the location of a divine miracle; it was like a fairy tale.

Actually, these legendary tales had already been spread by countless bards in taverns and on the streets. All the listeners were astonished by the tales of the undead knights who still waved their tattered flags. Not only did these tales serve to increase East Mist's reputation, but they also indirectly helped dig up some forgotten past stories. All those wronged and insulted heroic knights would naturally cause the Holy Church, who was the antagonist in these tales, to have their reputation be negatively affected.

Perhaps, after all their numerous internal changes, the current Holy Church was no longer that former foolish, arrogant, and ineffective institution. However, most people wouldn't care about those subtle differences. The masses were unable of discerning the truth for themselves and would naturally receive a negative impression of the Holy Church. Not to mention that there were already plenty of human kings and lords that were dissatisfied with the God of Holy Light's authority, and those kings and lords

inflamed the rumors, making the slap to the Holy Church's face hurt all the even more. If it weren't for the fact that there was currently an ongoing Holy War, perhaps they would have already come looking for trouble.

Of course, I wouldn't regret what I had done, but that didn't mean that I didn't want to avoid trouble.

If we had been destroyed in this battle after exiling the Holy Church from our territory, then this story would have turned into one about a fool who was so arrogant that he overestimated his own strength, causing his own destruction. However, we had won, and it was even a complete victory without any assistance from the Holy Church when all other battlefields were in dire straits. Then, the one who was treated as a big fool who received a vicious slap in the face obviously wasn't our side.

We accidentally made the Holy Church lose a significant amount of face and put them in a difficult spot. When I realized all this, I wasn't happy at all. Instead, I broke out into a cold sweat.

"This time, we definitely antagonized them seriously. If they wanted to do something against us, they won't even have to do all that much. All they need to do is publicly declare East Mist to be a heretical country, and request all believers in the Holy Light to stay far away from East Mist, and have all the countries that believe in the Holy Light to stop all trade and diplomatic relations with East Mist. This would basically exile East Mist from the entirety of human society. Since we still can't produce enough food resources for ourselves yet, we won't be able to handle it."

It was supposed to be necessary for everyone to band together during the Holy War? According to my numerous years of experience accumulated through my suffering, I could never underestimate those 'high' and 'mighty' who had authority in just how low their moral boundaries or shortsightedness could be.

Worry about the big situation? They could always take mysterious actions at even the slightest hint of a change in the weather. In history, there was already a countless number of shortsighted, foolish actions. As long as the treasures before them were attractive enough, they were capable of selling their own neckties that would hang them to death.

What? You're saying I'm thinking too much into things, and that I have severe paranoia? I'm just an unlucky individual who had suffered too much, so I never had

any expectations of my stupid teammates. Every time, I would always plan for the worst, and most of the time I would be correct to do so.

In such a situation, I still had to withstand the pressure and force my undead acceptance plan through. This was basically no different than wearing a crown that declared me as the king of all that was evil and heretical. However, right now, there wasn't much time left, and this time of revolutionary change that could explosively increase our country's strength wasn't something I could stop. Since the Holy Church still held the majority of humanity's faith in them, we absolutely had to eliminate any enmity they had for us. At the very least, they should not want to attack us until the end of the Holy War.

In order for my plan to succeed, I did indeed send some envoys bearing gifts to them right after the war with the beastmen ended. However, I recalled that I merely sent some former treasures left behind by me in the past that might have been somewhat valuable but were meaningless to me.

"A holy artifact left behind by the God of Holy Light himself? How is that possible? I couldn't possibly have had such a thing."

Not even mentioning the fact that I wouldn't have such a holy artifact, even if I did have one, how could I possibly give away something as truly useful as a holy artifact or God Equipment? And when looking at who I was dealing with, even if I grit my teeth and gave one to them, it probably wouldn't be as useful as some golden and shiny valuables.

"Are they just acting their own performance in order to mediate the relationship between us? I heard that when Caloma the First just ascended to the position of pope, there were some uncertain factors about his selection and his position was rather unstable. This sudden incident about challenging the Holy Church's authority was already going to be difficult for him to deal with. If he takes care of it by saying that we gave him an extravagant present as a way of apologizing, that would indeed be good for his own reputation and authority."

However, I immediately denied this possibility.

"No, he doesn't have any reason to act like this since the risk to benefit ratio isn't beneficial for him. In their eyes, we aren't even half as important as a human mega-empire, and this little controversy of theirs will pass by in just a few months and

become meaningless. There's no point in acting for our sake, and if they're exposed to be pretending, that would give them a much more serious impact. Then, that so-called Holy Bathing Basin must be real."

And so, I inquired as to what that holy artifact looked like.

"It's an oak wooden barrel that seems like it's crafted by hand. It's the last known artifact that the God of Holy Light used to bathe himself with before ascending to God status."

Holy artifact? It sounded pretty cool, but in all honesty, it was just something boring. Either they were important objects with great historical significance, or they were daily life objects used by True Gods when they were still mortals, so part of their essences was imbued in these objects. Who cared about a holy wooden barrel? Wumianzhe's holy artifacts included a little yellow ducky holy pillow and a raindrop patterned holy toothbrush cup. Cough—cough—I seem to have accidentally revealed too much.

But that didn't mean that holy artifacts' power could be underestimated. The more ancient a God was, the fewer holy artifacts that remained for them. And, with the faith of countless believers pouring into it, these ancient holy artifacts really did possess unimaginable power. Perhaps they were meaningless to people that had no relation to the God in question, but in the hands of a true believer, each holy artifact represented the sincerest form of devotion and high authority.

"A wooden barrel for washing yourself? I don't have any impression of such an item at all."

Everything I gave to the Holy Church as a present came from my personal collection. Most of them were from the Yongye generation, but I really couldn't recall any wooden barrel. Even if I did come across a wooden barrel of some sort, I couldn't have possibly added it to my collection.

"There is some huge beast's claw and teeth marks on it as well, as if some evil existence tried to destroy this holy artifact but failed in the end."

"Ohhh! So it was that item! Ah Bao's dog food bowl."

Right after I said it, I already knew that I had made a mistake by saying it out loud, and I covered my mouth. However, it was already too late. Judging by how Kelly was

clutching her chest, it seemed as though she was having a heart attack. Weren't wood elves supposed to be immune to natural illnesses?

"As one of the God of Holy Light's last remaining holy artifacts, it is one of the highest-level holy objects in countless Holy Light believers' minds. You definitely can't ever let any Holy Light believer learn that you used it as a dog food bowl; otherwise, the next Holy War will be right at our doorstep. I won't permit the newly born Mist Kingdom to perish again for such a ridiculous reason!"

Alright then, for the first time I learned that even the gentle wood elves were capable of angrily roaring.

Actually, this wasn't my fault at all. How could I possibly know that it was a holy artifact? Back in the day when I was Yongye and fighting all-out against the Holy Church, after one casting of Ice Aeon, not much would remain afterward. One time when cleaning up the battlefield after using Ice Aeon, I discovered that this wooden barrel actually wasn't damaged at all, so I thought it was quite sturdy. When I thought about how Ah Bao always accidentally tore apart his own food bowls, I decided to use it as his new dog food bowl. And so, it's been his dog food bowl for over one hundred years already.

Back when the Holy Church's allied armies were attacking the Army of Yongye, probably some major figure in their army had intended to use this holy artifact as their trump card, but after my forbidden spell, the owner died first without being able to use it, and it ended up as my loot.

"But why did I give it to them? Oh, right, there were too many random presents of all sorts of shapes and sizes, so I randomly found a wooden barrel to put them all in. So, the wooden barrel packaging was the most valuable of them all. Sigh, what a big loss."

Right when I finished speaking, I discovered to my astonishment that Kelly had collapsed while clutching her chest. It seemed that the wood elves, which were never supposed to get sick, were susceptible to heart attacks as well.

"Sister Kelly, don't scare me! If your heart is in a bad condition, tell me earlier!"

"It's all because you've made me so angry! Is it even possible for you to be more ridiculous?!"

After some consideration, I proudly nodded.

"Yes, I think that there is some room to improve."

"Don’t laugh so proudly! Nobody is praising you here!"

Chapter 243
Coincidental Meeting Before the Celebration

In the East Mist Royal Palace, during the end of winter, Cardinal Soros' Holy Church envoy group met with Princess Reyne and had a friendly and intimate discussion. Both sides exchanged their ideas regarding the current international situation, increased their understanding of each other, improved their friendship, and came to a mutual accord.

All of the above was obviously impossible.

First of all, let's not mention the fact that the Holy Church group was still hesitating in their hotel and not requesting a formal meeting due to certain reasons. As for East Mist, only Kelly was the one dealing with anything official on the surface. Reyne and I were both avoiding them, and it was obvious that both sides lacked sincerity. At the very least, until I was fully prepared, I didn't intend to meet them at all. They wanted to meet me in private? They'd have to find me first.

There was now less than a week until the scheduled "Day of Peace" celebration that I created for my birthday. The streets of Diffindor were filled with teeming hordes of people, and all the stores had begun draping colorful cloths and simple decorations. An atmosphere of a festival was already present.

If one looked carefully, expensive artistry and decorations couldn't be seen anywhere due to the lack of resources and materials. To be as extravagant as the people in Auland in hanging jewelry on their trees was unimaginable, but the northerners had their own neat little tricks. If artificial scenery was insufficient, then the natural scenery was pretty good by itself.

Ice sculptures were seen everywhere, including sculptures of even legendary beasts from stories. There was a tall snow giant with a fierce expression and a white dragon that was spitting out dragonbreath and flapping its wings. Across from the white dragon was even a brave knight made of ice, rushing towards it. Since there were ice sculptures of all these monsters, of course there would be ice sculptures of heroes, both real and imagined as well.

There were icicles hanging from the eaves of all the stores, and these originally crystal-clear icicles had been painted with colors. This was an attractive decoration that wasn't inferior to jewelry one bit.

Children were creating snowmen, the young were putting on new clothes and enjoying this rare vacation, while the elderly were out walking around, enjoying the rare warmth of sunlight during winter.

Compared to the celebrations of other countries, perhaps the overall organization and material resources available were poorer. However, judging from everyone's smiles, they were truly smiling from their hearts. After all, East Mist hadn't had a reason to celebrate for far too long.

All the diplomats from various countries had arrived as per their invitations. Although their main goal was the private military weapon trading to be done later, they didn't mind enjoying this rare Northlands celebration either. The number of people arriving from the future countries that would join the Mist Alliance was the most numerous. Not only did they have official envoy groups, there were also plenty civilian merchant groups and tourists. Although this revived country wasn't rich, there were plenty of potential opportunities and riches to be had.

"It's the safety brand; why are you catching me!"

The goblin that was selling his products didn't even get to finish his sentence when the soldiers immediately blocked him off.

"Last month, we received 329 complaints about your 'safety brand,' with an average of an astounding ten per day. Based on the new rules drafted by the Town Security, from this month onwards, all 'safety brand' sales are forbidden. You still dare to sell your products in public? Confiscate all his goods! Add a fine of 50 gold coins!"

Normally speaking, asking a goblin for money would be no different from asking for his life. Wanting a goblin to obediently pay up was definitely on the level of an Epic-ranked Quest. That goblin thought for only a moment before coming up with a devious idea.

"Misunderstanding, it's all a misunderstanding. Please take a look, this isn't the safety brand. It's written rather sloppily; you probably read it wrong. This clearly says 'public safety!' Yeah, I accidentally shouted it wrong just earlier, but saying it wrong isn't

illegal."

Alright then, he instantly changed to a new sign, but unfortunately for him, he wasn't the first goblin to use this tactic, and the soldiers were already prepared to deal with this strategy.

"Alright then, we'll charge you for selling fake products instead. Add a fine of 100 gold coins!"

The bystanders laughed out loud upon seeing this scene. I also nodded in satisfaction. The troubles of this new generation needed new laws and new ways to deal with them. It seemed that the newly drafted Town Security rules were quite useful, and the "The Guide to Hunt Gentlemen" that I had given to everyone had probably arrived as well.

"Hey, the weather's so good today. Why do two guys like us have to tour the streets together?"

As I walked around and observed the surroundings, Adam, who was accompanying me, was filled with complaints. "If it's just to tour the streets or observe things around here, you could invite any of your female companions, which would be much better than me. For two men to walk together like this, do you think that there are not enough rumors about us? Also, just what exactly are those 'boy love' books? Two men hugging each other? Those damned goblins, they'll sell anything to make money. Two days ago, I discovered that even Margaret is beginning to collect them. Even though she clearly knows it's all made up, she actually secretly enjoys them so much."

Hearing this, I was speechless as well. I could only look off into the distance and recall the past, which was filled with nothing but blood, sweat, and tears.

"About that, I already investigated it. Those goblins didn't actually make these books; they're only the sellers. The origin is actually from those damned Town Security girly brats, and the main perpetrators include your precious little Margaret. Not only is she collecting them, she's even one of the main artists. Back in Sulfur Mountain City, many of these types of books were her work as well. You don't know even after all this time?"

Talking about this type of thing made me feel helpless as well, but when I saw how Adam's face turned beet red upon hearing what I told him, learning that his dear Margaret collected *doujinshis* [1] [1] with himself as the main character, I felt a lot better.

"As expected. Rather than being frustrated by yourself, seeing someone more

miserable than you are will uplift your mood. That saying is so true. As for why I invited you, if I really did just casually invite a female companion as you said, I'd meet with a huge disaster. You should know that my sense for causing disasters to myself is quite accurate."

Adam, however, was looking at me with an expression of astonishment.

"Do you even need a sense for this? You can think of it even with your knee, not your brain, so can't you just use your brains to think about something normal?"

Hearing him say that, I felt rather displeased. Now I knew what it felt like to experience the pot calling the kettle black. Adam was a musclehead with only 9 Intelligence, and he dared to call me dumb?

But before I could think up a method to obtain my revenge, a new situation appeared in front of us.

There was a large crowd of people and the sound of arguing. It appeared to be some sort of disagreement.

"Pay up, otherwise you're not allowed to leave!"

A slightly hoodlum-ish young man was tugging on a female knight's shirt, not allowing her to leave.

She had silver armor and a golden sword, as well as a nice face combined with a tall and beautiful figure. Under the sunshine, her blonde hair seemed to glimmer, and she attracted everyone's attention as if she was the Sun God.

However, this heroic seeming female knight was in quite the difficult situation. She could only do her best to verbally defend herself under the other person's accusations.

"I just thought that those undead were about to attack you, besides—"

She didn't get to finish speaking before she was interrupted.

"What the hell are you talking about? Everyone in Diffindor knows about undead laborers by now. You destroyed the laborers I hired after working so hard to save money to afford them, so who's going to help me around the house now? Don't you dare try to run off. Either you pay for their costs, or you return back with me and work

on behalf of my skeleton laborers."

By the time he finished with that last sentence, the scummy look on his face betrayed what he was truly thinking, even if he was in the right.

"Or, do you intend on hitting people here? Or saying that it has nothing to do with you? Is there any law that says if you destroy someone else's things you can even hit them afterwards?"

With everyone watching, the female knight was both embarrassed and enraged, but she didn't know what to do. It wasn't that she didn't want to spend money to make her trouble go away, it was that she went out in a rush and forgot to take any money with her. And, with her status, she typically didn't have to pay for things herself.

Today, she just coincidentally came out to have a look around, and saw an undead that seemed like it was about to attack that man, which caused her to instinctively take action. The moment she did so, she knew that she had made a mistake, but it was already too late. Now, she had been caught by the other party, and couldn't think of any plans.

Judging by how the bystanders seemed to be looking in an unfriendly fashion at her emblem of Holy Light, the rumors that Holy Knights weren't welcome here must have actually been true. This was the first time that she had ever been surrounded by so much unfriendliness in a human city.

Just as she was hesitating whether or not to stop caring about any consequences and break free from this crowd, a figure suddenly stood before her with a sunny smile that made her recall the First Knight Squadron's ceremonial smiles. Only, this person made it seem even more natural and passionate. Also, the slight sign of Holy Light from that person's sword scabbard was evidence of his identity—a young Holy Knight.

"The Holy Light is above us. My lady, do you need any assistance?"

Note:

1. According to Wikipedia, a dōjinshi (同人誌, often transliterated doujinshi) is the Japanese term for self-published works, usually magazines, manga or novels.

Chapter 244
Saint of Holy Light

After the Holy Church's branches were exiled from Diffindor, Holy Knights became a rare sight. However, today, there were two obviously high-ranked Holy Knights chatting with each other as they walked around Diffindor's most flourishing business district.

"Oh, so you're here on an official mission? To send you here right after the end of the battle, it would seem that our Holy Church's headquarters must view the situation here with great importance."

The female knight nodded. This part was obvious due to the envoy group's arrival. She didn't need to deny it.

"With the Auland Empire currently in a stalemate, the Northlands received the first victory beyond everyone's expectations. This astonished just about every country as this was the first victory of the Holy War. Plus, East Mist sent a significant present at such a time, so the Cardinal Conference and His Holiness the Pope were all really delighted, which was why they sent us with rewards for this place."

"Rewards? That Roland is famous for being difficult to deal with. I doubt that it would be easy to satisfy him with any reward. Besides, since East Mist gave a holy artifact as a present, it means that what's given to Roland in return can't just be some verbal thanks. Could it be that the higher-ups are willing to pay up this time?"

“…Although it's still a secret, since it'll be publicized soon anyways, I suppose I can tell you. This time, what Pope Caloma the First granted is an incredible honor that nobody will believe…”

The "Red-Winged Griffin" Aivla was quite grateful to the young Holy Knight before her. If it weren't for his sudden appearance and help that allowed her to pay the costs she owed for destroying that other man's undead laborers, perhaps she would have lost much face. If the envoy group found out that she was held responsible for being unable to pay for damages to a civilian, it would surely have been humiliating for her.

Just as she was in the midst of her difficulty, this young Holy Knight arrived. Although she didn't know how this northern Holy Knight was able to obtain respect from this city filled with enmity, judging by how everyone's attitudes around them quickly softened, he seemed to be quite welcome here.

And it seemed inconceivable to her that in this city of Diffindor, where people were obviously biased against the Holy Light, all the bystanders kept bowing to him.

"Perhaps he'll be able to help out with our current difficulties."

Aivla was already intending to introduce this Holy Knight, whose name she learned was Rolo, to the envoy group. A local who was able to provide information and connections was just what the envoy group needed right now.

When Rolo asked her about the reason that the envoy group had come here, Aivla considered for a moment—he was also obviously a Holy Knight, plus she was grateful to him for having just helped her out, so she decided to just casually tell him the envoy group's goal.

"It's not some big secret, but the political meaning behind it is important and rather sensitive, so please don't spread it around. Especially the East Mist Royalty—they absolutely can't find out about it beforehand."

"Of course. In the name of the Holy Light, I promise that I shall never reveal this information to anyone from East Mist."

Aivla had an even better impression of Holy Knight Rolo after she heard him swear in the name of the Holy Light.

"This time, what His Holiness the Pope gave as a reward is the title of a Saint of Holy Light! The target is that Prince Roland who once had the glorious title of Son of Light."

"Saint Roland? How is that possible?"

"I know—it's utterly incomprehensible. I have no idea what the Cardinal Conference and His Holiness were thinking. Is the title of Saint of Holy Light something to be so easily given away? Not to mention it's being given to a living heretic. Perhaps in the past he was indeed an example to other Holy Knights, and perhaps finding a lost holy artifact is indeed a reward worthy achievement, and perhaps he had received glorious titles in the past, but the past is all the past. Just look at this city; the dirty undead are

everyone. He's allies with the undead, so why are we giving such a venerable title and the glory of a Saint of Holy Light to such an evil person? This is basically nothing more than a humiliation upon the entire Holy Church."

The female knight even stomped her feet in anger as she ranted. Her dissatisfaction, which had accumulated over the past few days, was now boiling over, and in front of her two elders in the envoy group, she didn't dare voice her complaints too much. Now, however, she felt like she had an opportunity to vent, so she was filled with complaints.

I understood why she was so frustrated, as the title of Saint of Holy Light was something that the Holy Church typically rewarded to people only after their deaths. And this wasn't only a mere title; it represented the God of Holy Light and the Holy Church's recognition of that person. It was both glorious and a useful identity to have.

This title would also be added in front of the names of a few countries, which represented their devoutness and the extra attention given to them by the God of Holy Light. Each mega-level empire competed intensely for this title, and only San Antonio and a few ancient empires were able to receive it due to their countless years of contributions.

"Just what is the God of Holy Light thinking, suddenly giving me such a huge present?"

There would be many benefits for me in suddenly receiving such a title.

For example, in order to maintain the Holy Church's reputation of forever pure Holy Light, and Saint of Holy Light was incapable of making huge mistakes. If a Saint of Holy Light really did some evil deed, it would all be swept under the rug, which was basically the best disaster-avoiding ticket to have of all.

The title of Saint of Holy Light wasn't something to be so casually given away. After all, no matter how many accomplishments a person racked up, there was no promising that they wouldn't make a big mistake later on in life.

That was why this title was almost exclusively for the dead. While there were a few examples of living Saints of Holy Light in the past, most of them were fervent believers of the Holy Church. Some had personal connections to the God of Holy Light's Divine Miracles.

Back in the day, when the Holy Light represented despair and flashed its last in the skies of Diffindor, there had been numerous voices clamoring for me to be given the

title of Saint of Holy Light as well. For me to have reached Legend from Bronze as a Holy Knight in just two years seemed similar to a Divine Miracle. The pure Holy Light of despair was also treated as a Divine Miracle, which was why there were indeed some cardinals who recommended giving me this title. Of course, in the end, it didn't come to pass.

Judging by the information I received from various places, I now knew what was going on.

Most probably, this newly ascended pope was incredibly pleased at receiving such a huge gift from me, and wanted to reward me with something. He took into consideration that I had been recommended for this title in the past, and he finally approved giving me the title of Saint of Holy Light. However, it was obvious that his envoy group had differing opinions about this, especially after seeing the undead here, which was why the envoy group was hesitating and stalling without contacting me directly.

"Actually, no. They should realize how much trouble a living Saint of Holy Light could possibly give them. If it's only for this reason alone, they're giving me far too much. They must have some additional reasons that I still don't know about yet. This little girl is obviously not the type to hide what she knows, in which case it means that probably even she doesn't know."

Yet still, I had to attempt to pry and find out more. Perhaps I would find out more beneficial information. “…This is His Holiness the Pope's decision, so we should be cautious in what we say. Although I don't really have the right to say anything, I also believe that Roland doesn't deserve the honor of being a Saint of Holy Light. He's never had the God of Holy Light in his heart to begin with, so aren't there other higher-ups with different opinions from the pope's?"

When she heard this young Holy Knight concur with her thoughts, Aivla continually nodded.

"Yeah; I can't understand it at all. There were so many arguments within the Holy Church. Originally, I was neutral about this topic, but once I arrived here and witnessed all these heretics unwilling to accept the Holy Light's teachings, as well as those undead that dare to walk around in broad daylight, it's unimaginable for me not to consider Roland as a heretic. His Holiness must have been beguiled by someone, which is the only reason he could have come to such a ridiculous decision, but…”

"But?"

"Well, it's nothing much—just my personal guess. Perhaps His Holiness hopes to be able to reestablish the Holy Church's branches here again. If the Holy Church is able to ease the relationship with Roland by giving him the title of Saint of Holy Light, it would seem quite likely."

I nodded, as this was within my expectations. Even if the Church of Law was the national church in our country, we permitted the branches of other churches as long as they belonged to the Order Gods.

Although it was rather forceful of the Holy Church, I had already decided to accept the reestablishment of their church branches. This wasn't only for political needs; it was also quite practical.

Even though the power of Law had many similarities to the power of Holy Light, and was even better than Holy Light at punishing evildoers, it couldn't compare to Holy Light when it came to healing in any way. There were far too few people on our side with Holy Light-related job classes, which was a disadvantage for us.

Actually, it was also because of the fact that Holy Light was so good for healing that Legend-ranked holy magic users, who could cure just about any normal illness, received so much gratitude from the populace. It was also why most countries found it difficult to refuse the establishment of the Holy Church's branches within their borders or to refuse to allow those with Holy Light job classes to spread their teachings.

Aivla's words made a lot of sense, but…

"That's still not enough. The deep grudge between the Holy Church and I left behind from the time I was Yongye won't be that easy to cancel out. Giving me the status of Saint of Holy Light is no simple matter, as that basically means they're publicly declaring that their past grudges against me have been completely resolved. Something so beneficial for me for no apparent reason is definitely dangerous, especially when this seemingly beneficial thing comes from a former enemy."

I carefully considered this as much as I could, but I still couldn't come up with the answer. Judging by how Aivla was still filled with complaints, I knew that asking her would be meaningless.

“…It would seem that she doesn't know the real reason."

On the roadside, under a huge tent, some undead knights could be seen busily preparing for the upcoming celebration, rehearsing the opening act of the undead circus so that they could perform well when the grand celebration began.

The undead knights wore pumpkin hats and were joking around, laughing with each other, while bone dragons wearing "brooms" and liches that were attempting to ride these "brooms" were currently competing with each other. The headless knights, which could directly go on stage without requiring any makeup, were intending to use their own heads as balls in the performance, while the skeleton general, who was also a Sword Saint, was currently practicing his ultimate technique.

"Damned undead! May the holy fires of heaven cleanse you all!"

Sensing the powerful force of undead, Aivla glared at the undead knights that were currently practicing their program and grit her teeth loudly as she cursed the pitch-black existences in front of her under her breath.

I could tell from her eyes that she wasn't even trying to conceal her rabid hatred of undead. It seemed that her hatred for undead stemmed from more than just her own job class.

Just as I was intending to ask her about it, a familiar figure appeared on the corner of the street. He seemed to be looking for someone.

"Lord Estrada! Are you looking for me?"

When Aivla hurriedly walked towards his figure, she didn't notice that the young Holy Knight that she had been intending to introduce to the envoy group had secretly vanished in the shadows.

When Estrada noticed Aivla, his first reaction was one of surprise. He felt as though he sensed a familiar person's scent upon her, so he asked immediately.

"Who were you with just now?"

“…Ah, perfect, Lord Estrada! Allow me to introduce someone to you. He's a local Holy Knight, and he helped me out. He's also really familiar with this area. Rolo, this is Lord Estrada. Rolo? Where did he go?"

When she turned around, that young and friendly Holy Knight who had helped her had vanished completely.

Not long after, when Estrada learned about the physical appearance of that oh-so-friendly Holy Knight who had just helped her out, he became quite pale. It took a long while before he was finally able to speak.

“…Let's go back for now."

In a nearby alleyway, I let go of my breath as I watched the two Holy Knights leave in a hurry. 'The Strongest Holy Knight of All' was quite famous and gave me a lot of pressure. It would have been quite troublesome if he had caught me.

"Hey—hey—why didn't you go greet your teacher? After not seeing him for so long, you hide the moment you see him? That seems rather rude. No matter what, he taught you back in the day, so aren't you being too cold?"

“…You bastard! I taught you your swordsmanship, but I have never seen you be polite to me."

I recalled that Miracle Hand from back in the day, rushing towards me through my untold hordes of undead armies while roaring loudly "I shall correct my own mistakes!" It made my head ache. Unlike the young Aivla, who was still lacking in many aspects, Estrada could be said to be just about perfect in every way—in wisdom, experience, personal strength, and his subordinates' strength.

There were plenty of Holy Knights to begin with, and even the number of Holy Knights in promoted job classes were uncountable in number. In order for all the other Holy Knights to willingly respect him as the "strongest" for so many centuries already meant a lot by itself.

For me, however, his Myth-ranked power level was only part of it. As one of the most veteran Holy Knights of all, his personal connections and reputation had actually surpassed any pope, which was the most crucial part.

If he said something like "the evil Roland must be exterminated," probably more than 70% of all Holy Knights and priests would view me as their mortal enemy, which would be quite a lot of 'fun' for me.

Back in the day, it was precisely his efforts that allowed the Holy Knights and priests

to almost completely break ranks from the higher-ranked cardinals. He was the main reason behind why that so-called Holy War didn't have a huge army of Holy Knights, which should have been the main forces to begin with. However, during the time of Yongye, Estrada and the knights directly under his command were my biggest headache and enemies of all.

Looking at how Estrada still seemed to be so young, I didn't have the slightest clue how to deal with him.

"Haha! So it was true." While I was dealing with my frustrations, that heartless Adam suddenly thought of something that caused him to start laughing.

"What are you laughing about? Did you eat too much?" This guy could always rain on my parade.

Adam was laughing so hard that he had to crouch, and he couldn't catch his breath. It took him a long while before he managed to wave his hand at me.

"No, no, it's just that I recently heard from Harloys that you have a tradition of the student always killing off the teacher. I didn't believe her at first, but now, it seems I absolutely have to believe it. You see, Harloys taught you in the past, and suffered because of you. Amelia taught you in the past, and suffered because of you. That's two so far."

In fact, Adam had even begun counting with his fingers to keep track.

"You taught Elisa, and she killed you in the end—that's the third. Estrada taught you, and you met on the battlefield on opposite sides. That's four. You're truly amazing—it's as if you're a living curse, and you still dare to take on your own students? Just look at how obedient my little Annie is. From what I can see, Reyne and Glina are quite something themselves, so aren't you worried about repeating the past—wait, why are you drawing your sword?"

[System Notification: You…]

"You shut up as well!"

[I still haven't said anything yet!]

"Do you ever have anything good to say? Isn't it always those ridiculous titles and

making fun of me? If it's not, and I was actually wrong about my guess, why don't you just try and continue?"

[…]

My System's silence (tacit admittance) caused me to feel that I was even more pitiful. I silently thought of how I had been killed off by Annie in "history," as well as the betrayal that Adam didn't know about by my Elf King student Atrion who had stabbed me in the back. I now absolutely had to use Adam as a target to vent my frustrations.

"I was just thinking how you forgot one… didn't I teach you as well, and didn't you kill me? Today, I'm going to teach this unfaithful disciple of mine a lesson!"

After a furious fight… fine then, I admit I was on the losing end since I wasn't careful and had misjudged the difference in power between us. However, Adam didn't have it easy either, as he underestimated my current physical strength. I was now a barbarian with over 30 in Strength as well!

Although I succeeded in giving that bastard two black eyes, that bastard was shameless enough to overwhelm a newbie Gold rank with his SemiGod strength. After I received a sufficient amount of beating—er—after we came to a mutual accord, we finally brought the conversation back to a serious topic again.

"Little Red and Annie have arrived. I called for you to come with me in order to greet them."

As the representative of the Underground World, Annie had brought her own envoy group with her. Little Red, who had finally woken up, was accompanying her. I even missed them a little after not having seen them for so long.

"And you gave me two black eyes? How am I supposed to greet them like this?"

"Isn't it the same for me? I'm even worse off than you. Couldn't you have gone a little easier on me? By the way, you need to prepare to teach your new subordinates."

"New subordinates? What?"

"I asked Annie to bring over a group of newly-trained Town Security troops and Law Knights. It's about time to take care of those bastards in the city. I'm leaving their training to you."

"Why didn't you say so earlier!? How am I supposed to be respected when looking like this!"

I laughed out loud proudly when I looked at his eyes, which I had personally blackened.

"Haha! This is exactly what I wanted. No looking cool for you in front of beautiful women!"

Chapter 245
New Tides

"OUR TARGET? NO CAVITIES… NO GENTLEMEN!"

In the plaza, my anger was transforming into something material. The large group of Town Security troops and knights below me shouted loudly in response.

On this temporarily constructed wooden platform were a few banners I had written. My forceful calligraphy were representations of my complaints and my will.

The left banner said, "Strictly strike down the gentlemen!" [1] 1

The right banner said, "Cleanse the atmosphere of the city!"

The middle banner said, "Beifeng, go die!"

Alright then, let us not look too deeply into whether these banners rhymed with each other or matched each other, nor should we mention how Beifeng, who was still in the Earth Elemental Plane, had been the unknowing target of my wrath. Nevertheless, when I wrote those last three words in front of everyone, the cheers that filled the heavens represented their attitude.

"Beifeng, go die!"

They tossed their hats into the air and waved their hands, and one elven female was so excited that she even tossed her personal undergarments—the ones she had been wearing—into the air. I couldn't help but sigh at this scene of high morale as I listened to the cheers that came from their very hearts.

"It's nice that they're spirited. A pity that Beifeng isn't here."

It truly was a pity. If Beifeng had been here, using him as a sacrifice would have raised morale more than anything else. If we were to take on the Gentlemen, what else would raise morale more than taking out Beifeng as our first target?

"Kill all the Beifengs!"

Wasn't this female elf getting something wrong here…? Beifeng's name wasn't a synonym for pervert—wait a moment—it really could be used this way. Beifeng's name definitely represented a greater concept than the word pervert could ever encompass.

"I've long since hated the sight of all those Gentlemen! I bought a bottle of whitening lotion and only used it for three days—don't look at me like that! How many times have I said it—I'm not a dark elf! I'm a human from the plateaus! I just got too much sunlight! Isn't it natural to want to be fairer?"

This lady wasn't a dark elf? She was so dark that I couldn't even make out her facial features. No wonder people always mistook her for a dark elf.

"Clothes-slicing demons and naked perverts, just you wait for me!" This one seemed to be a victim with a painful past. She was currently wrapped in two layers of steel plating, which probably gave her a feeling of safety.

As I observed the new Town Security troops, who were all gritting their teeth in anger, why would I still waste any words? With such high morale and anger, it was time to lock the doors and unleash these hounds… for their mission!

"Let's go! I won't say anything else! No matter if it's a crime in progress or a repeat offender, catch them all for me! No matter what those important targets are currently doing right now, catch them all and bring them to me!"

Watching the rabid dogs—er—successful knights rush out, I nodded in satisfaction. As expected of the new Town Security knight squadron created from the Sulfur Mountain City Town Security troops. They had incredibly high morale and high combat strength, and the most important part was that they had lots of experience in dealing with those bastards. They wouldn't let them escape.

"Team Number 1's task is maintaining order and cleansing the city. Captain Yawen shall lead this team. The most important target for you is the Beyar brothers' group, which is selling all that fake medicine. Those bastards—they actually dared to recommend their 'safety brand' engineering tools and alchemic potions! Do you know how much time I spent on explaining that those weren't assassination tools, bombs, and poisons? If selling fake products became an international incident, it truly would

be too ridiculous. Do a good job for me in dealing with those bastards!"

After Diana went to search for her own path of belief, her former second-in-command Yawen became the new leader of Town Security. And this time, I had the elites from Sulfur Mountain City come over, bringing more than half of Sulfur Mountain City's Town Security over to Diffindor.

Until they got used to the sunlight, main task of these dark elves would be to patrol and keep the town safe during nighttime. As for why I picked today for a massive cleanup? That was mainly because today was extra cloudy and we had plenty of people to go around.

Even though the sun was scarce today, their current appearances were still rather scary. They were covered over in every part of their bodies, and they were wearing the goblins' complete sealing anti-poison masks. The white gases being emitted from the back of their heads appeared just like boiling steam.

I felt it was rather strange to see these cute females turn into strange uncles, but luckily, it was currently winter and wasn't hot outside. It was somewhat tolerable, albeit still inconvenient.

"We need more specialized equipment. If you need human resources and materials, then use the unlucky ones that you catch this time as laborers and free wallets."

Although most of them were actually tomboys filled with raunchy jokes, these female elves with excellent appearances now seemed as if they were demons that came from the Chaos Abyss. At least their strength and experience were trustworthy… Fine then, I admit that I received plenty of complaints regarding them; for example, how they had scared some naughty children.

"Team Number 2's task is to maintain public morality. Momo and Kathleen, if you see anyone who's naked, tearing off other people's clothes, or who's wearing clothes but look even more depraved than someone who's naked—yep—I'm talking about Pier and Omar, those musclehead bastards, catch them all for me. Do you all know just how many complaints I receive about them every day? Take these mosaic spraying guns, and the moment you see something depraved for me, mosaic it!"

Was it advanced technology? It was only black oil. If everything was pitch black, that would be even better of a mosaic than "Holy Light."

"Team Number 3, your task is about forbidden goods, especially with regards to books and drawings that are overly detailed about opposite genders interacting with each other. Cough, I won't go into detail about it; you all know what I mean. Oh, right, it's also a similar crime for books and drawings about those with the same genders…"

I smiled in satisfaction when I saw all the Town Security knights leave upon receiving their missions.

The newly-born Town Security was also expected to be Diffindor's only standing defense army. Their members consisted of all sorts, as there were some novice knights and hunters that had just finished basic training, there were elites from the Underground World, there were some that were locals from Diffindor, and there were even some neutral mercenaries that voluntarily joined the military.

Due to the existence of the "Crimeless City" domain, as long as enough Law job classes were maintained here, Diffindor would, in a way, truly become the Infallible City. And, the Church of Law's main headquarters had been moved here as well… Honestly speaking, if the beastmen had attacked the current Diffindor, they would have been defeated rather quickly.

Alright then, since Diffindor didn't require the maintenance of too much combat strength, the royal knights would remain as the national army. Giving them the job of protecting the city's order and peace would be a waste. In that case, I used the military to reorganize things and gave the task of city defense and maintaining order to the Town Order Security Army—yep—I'm still calling them "Town Security" for short.

"This name sounds so plain, and the abbreviation sounds even stranger" was Elisa's complaint.

"Hmph, none of you understand! This name can help repel evil! With three thousand Town Security members, everything will be peaceful, as everyone will be scared of them."

Under my "singlehandedly forcing this plan through," this Town Security squadron, which I had personally named, became my most loyal underlings of all.

Their tasks were quite simple—they just had to enforce the law. For those who caused small incidents or troubles, they would only have to lock them up for a short period as per the law. If they caught anyone that the 'Crimeless City' had marked as a serious

criminal, then they would act as on the spot executioners. They would even become the anti-spy division if some spies entered the city.

In order to increase the overall strength of this newly born Town Security, I especially made sure to bring over a group of top-level individuals from Sulfur Mountain City's Law job classes. With these Gold-ranked and Legend-ranked Law Incanters and Knights of Justice helping out, I doubted that anyone could escape them.

As this was within Wumianzhe's Divine Domain, Law job classes would have their power levels greatly increased here. More than half of the Town Security knights in my new Town Security had Law related job classes.

Normally speaking, in order to assist in rescue and protection operations, there should have been a certain percentage of Holy Light job classes as well. Unfortunately, judging from the current team compositions, the number of Holy Light job class holders were pathetically few, completely insufficient.

Or, perhaps I should say that the effect of exiling the Holy Church's branches here was becoming more and more evident.

Since generalist type elites, who were good at everything, were difficult to come by, at the very least I tried to find some elites that were capable. In the end, after what sort of counted as picking from the cream of the crop, the entire Town Security consisted of an astonishing 70,000 plus individuals, which could definitely be called a huge Town Security Army. And each major team had their own district where they would typically be stationed. For this special event today, I had only taken approximately 10,000 of the elites from the elites.

This event was both something necessary in order to improve order in the city as well as a major group military event for me to see the combat strength of this newly born Town Security.

Soon, with other Town Security members and the assistance of "good samaritan citizens," numerous chases could be seen through the streets and alleyways.

"Brothers, they're just too much! I'm going to go all out against them… where are you all?"

This newly arrived Clothes-Slicing Demon hadn't figured out the necessary strategies for fighting against the Town Security. While he had intended to rush them, his

brothers had already abandoned him and vanished, while those that believed they were slow runners that couldn't escape just directly gave up and surrendered.

"Why would we go all out against them, you idiot? It's not like we committed any serious crimes. We'll just be locked up for a few days and fined if we're caught, but if we resist, we'll be beaten half to death."

Various unlucky bastards were captured, and forbidden goods piled up like mountains. Soon, I discovered that the open field I had prepared for placing them had already been filled.

"Sixty boxes of alchemic potions with unknown effects, where even their creator doesn't know the effects… Olivia, you can even produce potions with unknown effects—you're such a genius."

Olivia was an expert at improving and creating new potion recipes, but every successful improvement or creation meant hundreds of accumulated failures. As independent merchants, they kept straying into the gray area when dealing with their failed products, and they would always give it some new name and try selling it in order to recoup their losses.

I had heard about a certain maniacal alchemist's potions becoming famous for having completely random effects after you drank it. However, since the potions often had incredibly strong effects and were quite cheap to purchase, quite a few risk-takers purchased some to use as a gamble in case they were forced to the brink. One time, one person even drank a bottle and gained the ability to spit out dragonbreath.

"Heh heh! I'm not as good as you say."

Seeing how this ace alchemist Olivia was trying to pretend to be a fool, as well as how her master, Yingou Beyar, was doing his best to reduce his presence, I laughed as well.

"Heh heh! If you drink all these potions, I won't hold you responsible anymore. Otherwise, according to the new laws, you'll be fined ten times the price of your products… The hell, you actually dare to drink them?"

I underestimated the goblins' obsession about money. Before I even finished speaking, Yingou Beyar had already rushed over to the potion boxes, while his apprentice, who was, in fact, more talented than him, was trying to stop him.

"Don't drink those, Master! You'll die if you drink too many of those failed products!"

"Money is my life, so if I don't drink them, I'll definitely die! While if I drink them, I still have a chance to live!"

While watching this goblin great alchemist turn half cyan and half white from a potion's effects, I was once again astonished at the goblins' lack of all limits regarding money. Although I knew that these potions probably wouldn't have fatal effects (as they wouldn't actually dare sell them if they did), who knew what would happen to him in the end after drinking them?

"Come! Half for me; half for you!"

"Alright…" *Gulp!*

Yingou, who was now rainbow-colored, thought for a moment and instantly came up with the thought that rather than drinking by himself, he might as well get someone to drink with him. He actually made his own student drink the potions together with him.

And, so, various potions were poured into Olivia's mouth. Now, it was time for this alchemist to enjoy her own wildly imaginative creations.

"A transformation potion, a cloning potion, an intelligence raising potion, a werewolf potion, and all of these are even the improved editions. Tsk! Tsk! Tsk! Perhaps it's even possible to transform into a giant fox with nine tails with these." [2] 2

Although I had intended to make a big trade deal with them, as I had a huge order I intended to give to Olivia's workshop, I wasn't in a hurry. I decided to teach them a lesson first; otherwise, who knew what they could get up to in the future?

"I'm so glad I didn't choose to become an alchemist."

My retainer knight Kathleen was rather scared to see her senior turn red then turn green, then grow two rabbit ears, then grow a fox tail, then become furry all over, and then become hairless.

She was truly grateful that she chose to become a knight in the end. Otherwise, she would definitely have become a member of Olivia's team.

And my next target was the most critical point of this public morality improvement project. If those damned bastard artists and black-market book sellers were influencing even a Great Saint like Margaret into collecting dirty books, I absolutely had to stop this depravity.

I looked through the pile of books we confiscated, and randomly picked two to look at, and then…

Clap. I immediately shut the books.

"Is it really that interesting to draw two men hugging each other?"

"It's not interesting, but it's very profitable." This man named Tom was tall and seemed dull, and his appearance didn't seem like that of a black-market book seller at all. However, was, indeed, the largest black-market book seller in all of Diffindor. He currently seemed quite at ease even in front of my questions and authority.

"Then, do you have any other types, such as normal ones…"

"Yes, but not many. These are our main sources of revenue."

I felt that this was rather strange. Normally, men would want to buy some of these books as well, so why did Tom specifically sell mostly boys' love books?

"It's not like this year has been a major financial disaster. If men have needs, they'll think of other methods to take care of them, such as going out for some drinks. After all, that's not illegal. Besides, otakus' consumption habits are far lower than fujoshis'. Many major families' daughters appear to be quiet and ladylike on the surface, but will buy as many of these books as they can carry at one time. They're much bigger customers than men are. You see, I'm not selling products, I'm selling dreams. Everyone has their own needs, they—"

Suddenly, Tom revealed a depraved smile.

"If Milord wishes, I can even make specialized orders for you, and you can request just about anything—a male or female main character, brothers, parent and child, sisters, brother and sister… judging by your expression, you're not into incest, so how about gold-haired lolis or big-breasted mature women…?"

I silently put down the book in my hand and clapped my hands. After that, everyone

around me tossed the torches they were holding at the pile of books.

"My dream of conquering the world through porn books! My children! You're all murderers!"

Although the content of what Tom was shouting was somewhat strange, many people around him understood what he meant, as well as the crying that came from the bottom of his heart.

"So, he was yet another gentleman (pervert). We're going to have to keep a close watch on him in the future."

Hmph, did I look like someone who was so easy to bribe? If you want to bribe me, you'd have to do it privately. With so many people watching me at the time, if I nodded in agreement, wouldn't that be labeling myself as a pervert as well? Besides, just what status do you think I have? If I wanted such books, did I really need to go through a book seller?

And so, I activated my communication device.

"Adam, have you obtained them?"

"Yep, I've stockpiled plenty of precious books. I tossed all the female-oriented ones to Town Security, and made them burn those books. The male-oriented ones—we'll split them half each."

"70% for me, 30% for you. Otherwise, I'll tell Margaret on you. Oh, and let me pick first."

"You bastard, I—I…"

No matter how much he complained or threatened me, all I had to was keep saying "I'll tell Margaret," and Adam could only surrender. I had the advantage of being unmarried whereas he was terribly afraid of his sweetheart's wrath, so I successfully won this one on him. I suddenly was in a much better mood as I thought about how those confiscated books would soon belong to me.

But, before I even got to be happy for more than one minute, I suddenly heard Adam's cry of surprise.

"Margaret, Elisa! Why are you here? How did you find out…?"

Alright then, I didn't need to hear any more. Just from hearing these two names, I knew that Adam had made a mess of things again. Either he was followed, or someone told on him. In order to avoid getting dragged into the mess as well, I immediately turned off the communication device.

"Next criminal!"

Just thinking about the precious books that were leaving me without ever having belonged to me in the first place made me vent my rage from the bottom of my heart with an angry shout.

However, this next group brought before me gave me a big headache.

They had black hats, black robes, sickles, and wooden crosses along with burning torches. Wasn't this the standard equipment for some torchlight festival? However, the "FFF" written on all their robes' back explained everything.

"Your Highness, this is the evil cult organization FFF that we just investigated and rounded up. They were planning to execute a terrorist attack code named 'Single people should live forever, while damned couples should die.' They intended to indiscriminately attack couples on the Day of Peace."

"No, we weren't going to attack indiscriminately! We FFF members would only attack damned couples, and would never attack those in true love!"

"The difference between true love and damned couples? Can you even differentiate between those?"

"If the woman is scarily ugly, then that's true love, and if she's beautiful, they're a damned couple that deserves to die!"

Alright, their entire group angrily shouted in unison, their shouts piercing the skies. Their directness caused me to lose the courage to defend them, as their angry expressions showed that they truly believed this.

Yep, it was them. There were far more than just one before me. There were over 30 black-robed FFF high-ranked members sitting in front of me, and they definitely looked like members of a mega evil cult. This was even supposed to be the highest-

ranked members' conference, and their members had spread through all of Diffindor already. Should I be proud of myself for personally creating this abnormal group?

"Even if you punish us, the torches of the Holy War shall never be extinguished!"

"Our war is eternal, Valentine's Day is a barbeque, Lovers' Day is a day for the Holy War, Singles' Day is the day for all damned couples to go die, and Christmas is the date of the final battle! Our members come from the five lakes and the four seas!"

"Perhaps the short-term victory is yours, but eternal glory belongs to FFF! If you kill us, there's still more that will come after!"

"Idiots! Our beliefs are justice!"

Looking at these passionate, brave warriors, I couldn't help but be filled with warm tears. I wanted to just let them go, but the eyes upon my back felt like sharp swords; I probably had to punish them.

And, so, I did my best to come up with an idea on how they wouldn't have to suffer physically yet still receive a punishment that would please my subordinates.

"Tie them up in Ailia Park's forest—yep—the park that has the nickname of being the holy grounds for dating. Find some couples to intentionally display their lovey-doveyness in front of them, so that they can only watch…"

"Kill me now!"

"There's actually such a scary punishment in this world? You demon!"

Sigh, I was actually a good person. Why was it that nobody understood me?

[Achievement Unlocked: Black-Hearted King…]

"You shut up!"

Note:

1. There will be instances where "gentlemen" is synonymous to "pervert" and is used instead.

2. Naruto reference!

Chapter 246
The Beginning of a New Era

While the Northlands were still in the midst of frigid weather, the central plains of Eich were experiencing the warmth of spring.

Right now, in the Royal Palace of the Bardi Empire, the elderly emperor was in the garden, waiting for a scheduled visitor.

Emperor Orloss Mossivory Saint Milan was a silver-haired, elderly man with a kindly appearance. He was on the short side, and he never spoke loudly. He appeared to have a scholarly aura about him, which made him seem like an academic that would be easy to get along with, but within the Bardi Empire, he had the "glorious nickname" of "Sly Fox Scorpion Emperor." This referred to how he was vicious both domestically and internationally.

What? You're saying you don't understand what that meant? "As long as the result is good, the ends justify the means" was what he lived by, and he indeed always followed through with this.

Domestically, within the Bardi Empire, he used assassinations, set factions against each other, and framed and scammed others to centralize and solidify his authority. Internationally, he betrayed endless amounts of alliances and agreements for the Bardi Empire's benefit. This gave him another so-called "glorious nickname" of "Emperor of Zero Trustworthiness," making the current Bardi Empire lose every single one of its allies to the point that it had now zero remaining allies.

However, there were gains to be had in exchange for those losses. While he ruined the honor and trustworthiness that the Bardi Empire had accumulated over countless centuries, the Bardi Empire's national strength had indeed reached its greatest peak in history. Within the first fifty years of Orloss' reign, the Bardi Empire had conquered and assimilated seventeen different small and medium-sized countries, greatly expanding their borders and population.

"Ever since I ascended the throne, war has never stopped."

At first, this phrase said by Orloss was an exclamation at how helpless he was when he first came to power. However, as the years passed, it became his pride. He had won many wars without a single loss.

From another aspect, the continuous chain of victorious campaigns against other countries increased the royal authority. The major nobles within the Bardi Empire were extremely respectful of royal authority, and actually, all the major nobles would send extravagant presents to the elderly emperor every year for his birthday. Each domain lord's heir would even come to the capital to learn from the royalty (to be hostages).

Yep, the ones that refused to give hostages or show respect on the surface had all died; the domestic situation was thoroughly peaceful. This was most likely the greatest peak of royal authority in the Bardi Empire's history for at least the past three thousand years.

However, those were merely the achievements in his early and middle years. In his later years, he was even more incredible. He used only thirty years' time to accomplish what would typically take one hundred years.

He created a national military department that unified and centralized the system of command for all military affairs within the Bardi Empire. Every domain lord had to now be conscripted into the military to serve for a set period of time. Those who tried to escape the conscription would be executed. Any nobles who owed or paid taxes late would be executed.

The government took full control of salt, food, iron, and all important daily life and production products, and was the only organization allowed to sell them. Anyone caught smuggling or selling those products would be executed.

The government took control of civilian adventurers and job classes. Every job class must register themselves, and every adventurer's guild and adventurer had to swear fealty to the royalty. Every adventurer was considered the Bardi Empire's resource—they had to unconditionally accept the country's commands in emergency situations. Unlicensed adventurers were forbidden, including mages, and would be publicly executed.

It had to be admitted that Orloss ruled with an iron fist. He had ascended the throne during a period of extreme turmoil within the Bardi Empire, but he gave it his all and

helped the Bardi Empire to rise to its greatest apex in history, even if his personal reputation was in tatters and he was now infamous for being completely insincere and untrustworthy.

Countless numbers of people both within and outside the Bardi Empire wished for his death. Every year, the number of assassins aiming for his life were numerous enough to make a fixed schedule out of without a single break… But even those who hated him to death had to admit that he was indeed a strong ruler, who had helped the Bardi Empire become similarly strong.

The government's monopolization of important resources and control over the market had indeed caused a lot of hatred, but the current Bardi Empire's wealth was unimaginable. Every year, their allotted military expenditures were three times all the neighboring countries' military expenditures combined, but the national treasury wasn't even slightly burdened by this. It wasn't limited to that—the Bardi Empire hadn't experienced a large-scale famine due to food shortages in several decades, and its population and the flourishment of its cities had also reached the apex.

As for turning the originally neutral adventurers and mercenaries into national property? This had received a huge backlash at first, but because the royal authority and the military were backing this up, after the original generation died, all the waves had quieted down. The new generation of adventurers already believed that working for the country was only natural. Even the rarer job classes like mages would go and register of their own volition to become part of the government.

This was doubtlessly a declaration of war against the old systems, and it naturally angered many neutral organizations such as the adventurers' guilds, mercenary guilds, mage conferences, various churches, and so on. However, for Orloss Mossivory, resistance against his policies and attempted assassinations were a daily occurrence to him; it was as normal as eating a meal. His powerful personal guards, which nobody knew the identities of, had never disappointed him. Even SemiGod level assassins had fallen to his guards, and Orloss was never one to fear any enemy's challenge.

However, on the other hand of things, besides the Bardi Empire's flourishment, there were indeed numerous complaints piling up within the country. Countless wished him dead, and plenty wished for the Bardi Empire to return to its past ways. The way that schemers looked at things was that this seemingly powerful country still didn't have a solid foundation and was shaking in the rainstorm, its collapse only a matter of time.

The biggest and most foundational problem was that Orloss the Thirteenth didn't have a single descendant.

Perhaps it was because he was injured in his early years, or perhaps it was karma for his wicked ways. But no matter which description you believed, even though he had countless concubines, he had never begotten a single child. In fact, two of his concubines had gotten pregnant before, but he fed both of them to his dogs on the very next day. After that, rumors that the Bardi Emperor was infertile and that Orloss would never have a descendant began spreading everywhere.

Of course, he had tried to resolve this problem; he had taken in a large number of adopted sons and daughters. But as the years passed, his roughly forty adopted children only now had around twenty surviving. Due to Orloss's extremely paranoid personality, all the ones who were too strong or too smart would be executed, but it was unrealistic for any of the remaining survivors to be chosen as the successor as it would be too difficult to have all the factions accept that person.

The oldest adopted prince, Carlston, was already in his fifties, but he appeared even older than Emperor Orloss. The only reason he was able to survive until now was because he was basically useless; he did not possess the ambition of his fellow adopted princes, nor did he desire to become emperor while he was still alive.

In the mortal plane, there was an unspoken rule. Rulers would definitely be short-lived, as the Gods wouldn't permit an immortal ruler. If there was a ruler who lived to a hundred years and still grasped on tightly to his reins of power, then the punishment of the Gods would surely descend upon him.

"Orloss is over seventy years old, and he probably doesn't have much time left. Let's just wait for his death, and then…"

Plenty of those with ambition secretly gritted their teeth as they waited for this old emperor to die of old age. These people included not only the people outside his family, but also his own similarly elderly siblings, who had wanted him to die for so long. If the emperor died, then Bardi's territories would immediately be carved up and re-divided by all the factions.

"It won't be long now; it should be soon. He's never practiced any martial arts or magic before, so he's only hanging on with the help of medicine. Perhaps he'll even die tomorrow."

Yet today, this aging emperor, who seemed to others to be about to meet his end soon, had welcomed his guest that he had been waiting so long for. This person was wearing a black cape and was led into the old emperor's garden by the royal guards.

"Emperor Aso, your personal arrival is the honor of our entire Bardi Empire. Unfortunately, it's still not a suitable time to publicize the relationship between us, and I'm unable to welcome you with an abundant feast."

The elderly emperor stashed away his pride as a ruler and hurriedly rose to his feet to personally welcome this nighttime visitor. This was because the black-cloaked individual before him was an even more ancient, respected, and undying king.

However, Emperor Aso didn't intend to mince words despite Orloss' hearty welcome. Every minute in the mortal plane was painful for him, and he unhesitatingly began with the main topic.

"No need. We never cared about useless trifles like those to begin with. The only thing that could possibly motivate me to come here is concrete benefits. Now then, young ruler, have you made your decision? Will you decide to truly embrace death, and become one of us, thus obtaining true immortality?"

A sudden chilly breeze blew past and exposed the true face beneath that long cape and large hood. Or, perhaps it should be said that there was no face at all. The burning, green flames within that skull explained everything.

For an undead to be called an emperor could only mean one of those legendary Undead Emperors. In front of these ancient emperors from the Undead Plane, even the recent generation of Gods were nothing but their juniors.

Emperor Aso had placed countless chains and seals upon his own body, but even so, the bare hints of the power of death emanating from him were sufficient to cause black winds to roil up within the royal garden. Large amounts of plants instantly withered to death, and the earth began to be drained of life. Underneath the ground, faint signs of white bones started to animate themselves.

In front of something so fearsome that any hero would cower, Orloss, who was still a mere mortal, laughed.

"Of course! Everybody knows that I, Orloss, am the most trustworthy person around. Ever since you saved me thirty years ago, from the time that the ancient contract was

established, our agreement would be forever in effect."

Orloss the Thirteenth also opened up his extravagant clothing to reveal his upper body. Where his stomach should have been was a partially empty space; his heart was nothing more than pitch-black bones and rotten flesh, and even the most expensive silver rose perfume was unable to cover the stench of rotting flesh.

Despite the fact that his body was disgusting, Orloss's smile remained, as if he didn't feel any pain at all. Only the wrinkles around his eyes made him seem slightly grim.

"I've already been a living dead man for more than thirty years, so have I ever had any other choice since that day?"

…

Unlike the south, which had long hours of daylight, the Northlands' winter skies would always darken rather quickly, especially now that it was the end of winter. At the current moment, it was only six in the evening, but the entirety of Diffindor was in utter darkness.

The newest product of magical engineering, the magical lights, had already been given to every family as a new daily product for free. However, most families maintained their previous habits of eating dinner and going to their warm beds quite early in order to prepare to get up early the next morning.

The streets that had been so lively just a few hours ago were now practically empty. Either everyone was hiding in their warm homes or drinking themselves drunk in a bar or tavern. After all, even if it was already the end of winter, the night air was still fatally chilly. Although it was regrettable, there were always a few drunks that would be found frozen to death in the alleyways.

When the entire city was so quiet, in the southeast portion of Diffindor was an area containing a sealed-off three story building. In here, there was no difference between night and day, as it was always brightly lit and filled with clamors.

Boom! The most common would be various sounds of explosions. Judging by whether the ones flying through the air were goblin engineers or alchemists, one could easily tell which section was the alchemists' experimental laboratory and which section was the engineers' experimental laboratory.

In this sealed-off area's corner, there was a blacksmith facility, which never stopped its clinging and clanging no matter if it was night or day.

And, right now, I was here as well, checking out the progress of an important job.

"Orange head, how's the situation? What do you think of the quality of these mined materials? Is it sufficient?"

"These magical mined materials have a nice color to them. A few of our mines have also produced this type of top-level product. You probably purchased these from Auland, didn't you?"

Old Hoyle continued in satisfaction after seeing me silently nod my head.

"If you can keep up the supply, then the progress will be successful. But aren't you rushing it a little too much? With only three days' time, we'll only be able to produce a product that looks real on the surface. It'll be able to run, jump, and resemble the real thing, but it definitely won't be able to fight."

"A fake product is fine with me."

In order to show off our new weapons and equipment, what was most important was the design and the new technology within it. After all, our invited guests probably wouldn't recognize real from fake; as long as we fooled them into ordering and giving us money, I would be able to establish real production lines with that money.

"…"

The wintry winds made this dwarf's red nose even redder, but he swigged some alcohol with a dissatisfied expression and didn't respond. For him to have to work overtime on a low-quality product as a veteran armorer, he was filled with quite a lot of dissatisfaction.

"Was it worth it? In order to find me, you searched through the entire red-light district."

"Hmph! Don't think so highly of yourself. It was just two birds with one stone. If you stayed here obediently and worked, you'd save me so much trouble. Just take a guess—if I tell all those brothers of yours that they were all locked up because of you, how would they treat you?"

"Those heartless bastards would tear me apart. You sly, skinny, and tall human, always picking on Old Hoyle's weaknesses. Be careful your daughter won't grow a beard."

The dwarf puffed on his pipe as he cursed at me in dwarven fashion, before picking up his hammer and continuing his clinging and clanging.

Hoyle was a gray dwarf and master smith who was a specialist as an armorer. His nickname was Orange Head, and he was a member of the Gentlemen Alliance. He was the master smith that I trusted the most. After he started working together with the goblins, his techniques improved even further; if I had to assess his current armor smithing level, it had probably surpassed any mortal master's level, and was at a Legend's level.

Leveling up in daily life job classes was far more difficult than leveling up in combat job classes. Legend-ranked combat job classes had their own Soul Imprints and unique paths, while Legend-ranked blacksmiths also had their own paths.

Hoyle's path, however, was special, special to the point of being truly unique, special to the point where I really couldn't do without him.

Currently, Old Hoyle was working on a goblin mecha in his blacksmith workshop. This wasn't rare at all, since goblin bulldozers and mecha titans were already well-established engineering products, but the rare part about it was this mecha's size.

It was 2.4 meters high, and the mecha's weight was probably over 150 kilograms. If it wasn't for the "Olivia Magic Box" powering the engine that gave it its own source of energy, not even a beastman would have been able to wear such a heavy mecha armor.

Obsidian was embedded into the streamlined armor for protection. This special plating was for improving its defense and had a defense value well above a normal knight's armor. Even a small goblin cannon would be unable to do more than a scratch.

Yes, this wasn't a mechanical puppet; it was pure armor. Inside this would be a well-protected warrior, not a pilot controlling the mecha.

"Although this is a nice design, its problem is obvious. Without the ability to control the elements, you won't be able to activate its magical circuits. Even if I specially create magic-enchanted parts for it, this will be nothing more than a hunk of useless metal without sufficient mana."

"Relax! I have plenty under my command capable of controlling the elements. I'm giving you first priority for both funds and resources, so hurry up and finish the prototype. Make it capable of being mass-produced starting next month in the new year. I'll find some fools to become the sponsors and first testers, so bravely create something new as you wish. Those 'kind customers' of ours will use their lives to bring you data of all sorts on your new product."

Seeing how the old dwarf had fallen silent as he got into a working rhythm, I nodded in satisfaction. I touched this heavy armor's solid plating and steel body.

"With this, my Four Elemental Swordcasters will be able to fight at three times their strength… Should I paint this red and install some horns on it?"

What determined how far a job class could go was not only its strengths, but more so its weaknesses.

The weakest part about the Four Elemental Swordcasters was their defensive ability, which was only at the level of a mortal's. A fully matured Four Elemental Swordcaster would not only have to practice his magical swordsmanship, but he would have to work hard on learning to control the elements and studying sword seals and magical swordsmanship techniques. Expecting them to have the same physical melee combat ability as normal knights and warriors without relying on mana was unrealistic.

Their physical bodies' comparative weakness and requirement of using mana meant that they could only be equipped with light armor. Compared to the muscleheads that could still move about freely while wearing heavy armor weighing several tens of kilograms, it was an obvious shortcoming.

On the battlefield, a weak defense would be fatal. Bows and arrows were always the most cost-effective weapons to kill people, and just about every single battle would involve arrows and other projectiles filling the skies. For a magical swordsman, who was so difficult to raise, to die to a single stray arrow or stone would be such a bad deal.

"The first produced group of armor will have high defense and high strength increasing properties for the wearer and will be focused on melee combat and short-term explosive strength. I shall call them the 'Sith Warriors,' and provide them all to the Four Elemental Swordcaster Silver Cross Squadron. The second group of armor shall have high mobility and medium defense, and will focus on sustained combat

strength. I shall call them the 'Stormtroopers' [1] and provide them all to the magical ranged attackers and top-level hunters."

In my blueprint for a perfect future, this future armored army would become well-organized formations involving magical mecha dragons, huge metallic titans, and countless mecha-armored warriors as the main forces. They would accompany me down my path of slaying demons and Gods, chasing the demons back to the Chaos Abyss, and kicking the Undead Emperors back to the Undead Plane.

"There will also be a firepower edition that I'll call the 'Tauren Space Marine,' [2] and a Sword Saint specialized edition that I'll call 'Master of the Force.' [3] Haha! I can already imagine the perfect upgraded editions."

After the new generation's magical mecha army was completed, I would nicely teach all these ancient existences that still lived in the Middle Age what "the newest technology is combat strength," and "falling behind in technology means losing" really meant. But while I was busy with my imagination, someone's voice intentionally—and happily—woke me up from my dream.

"Stop dreaming! These things of yours require incredibly high-level parts, and I'm the only one you have that's capable of making them right now. Your local blacksmiths can't even make a high-quality vegetable knife. Even if I work my hardest for you at top speed, making one of these every three months is already quick, and besides, even if I was able to go faster, would you be able to supply enough mined materials? Just by relying on those barbarian tribes' scattered mines, you probably won't be able to obtain enough materials even if you had ten years. You can probably buy ordinary mined materials, but it's too hard to obtain magical mining materials. If you can't obtain high-level mined materials, your mecha army will be nothing more than easy targets for thunder magic."

I couldn't help but furrow my eyebrows upon hearing this. Although it was quite displeasing to be interrupted in the middle of my beautiful dream, what he was saying was the truth.

I had already begun developing our mining, but the combat situation had been taking up all of my attention, not to mention that the Northlands were cold and lacked large scale mining machinery. Just the simplest and most direct method of using explosions to obtain some resources laying out in the open was already the limits of what we could do, and higher-level mining techniques were still undeveloped.

"It seems that I need to go visit that place. One mining area isn't enough for us; we need to prepare some more. How about… I go extort more out of the Holy Church?"

Note:

1. Sith Warriors/Stormtroopers -> Star Wars reference.

2. This is a Starcraft 2 reference.

3. Master of the Force -> Star Wars reference.

Chapter 247
Play

The girl's exquisite face contained hints of anger, and under her bushy eyebrows were eyes that seemed to contain heroic spirit. Those sapphire blue eyes and baby pink skin made quite the excellent pair, and simply looking at her appearance, which resembled a drawing, would help the mind to calm down.

This twelve or thirteen-year-old girl didn't possess obvious curves yet, and her ponytail even made her appear boyish. Her pose seemed to possess a certain power to it, as if she had really received combat training before. The military atmosphere about her made her seem not as soft as her outer appearance would suggest.

She was wearing pink armor and a gem-studded fancy sword that obviously seemed precious. This rapier was obviously too exquisite and not suitable for the battlefield, and she had two battle flags seemingly randomly stuck behind her back. At the current moment, this girl in extravagant clothing was pouting with an expression filled with dissatisfaction.

"Ahaha! Roland, this looks great on you. You're acting as the beautiful Princess Peach. Hahaha!"

"The same goes for you, Adam. That dress looks wonderful on you, maid Annienie."

Currently, Adam was wearing black-and-white maid's dress, complete with a blonde wig. The dress seemed to cover his thick legs, but it was unable to complete cover up how muscular he was, not to mention that the rough makeup on him obviously made him even uglier.

After hurling insults at each other, Adam and I glared angrily as he whipped out his broom and I unsheathed my decorative rapier, about to vent our dissatisfaction upon each other in battle. It was then that an angry shout came from behind us.

"It's almost time to begin the play. If you tear your acting clothes, then you're going on stage as your real selves and real names."

The two of us exchanged glances filled with wry smiles and we lost all of our energy. Both of us were unlucky people being cooked on a fire, so why were we struggling with each other? Was there any meaning in the pot calling the kettle black?

"At the very least, I still have it better than you. With how I look, it's quite obvious that I'm a man who's dressed like this for comic purposes."

Alright then, it seemed that there was indeed someone who felt it was quite fun. Even though he was wearing maid attire and lipstick while showing off his muscles, he was still trying to display his so-called masculinity.

"Yep, be careful that you'll be recognized, which will be even more interesting. The headlines tomorrow will say, "What a shocker, the Red Lotus Sword Saint actually likes to wear female clothing!"

"Then we shall die together! I will tell everyone that the main actor of 'Princess Peach's Adventure In Another Dimension' is actually you, Roland!"

"Haha! Do you think that anyone will believe you?"

"Ha, do you think that anyone will believe that I'm like this?"

When I looked in the mirror, even I was scared by the beautiful girl I saw within it. But as I said so right now, I was actually dripping blood in my heart.

Right before us was Diffindor's largest auditorium plaza. In order to celebrate the Day of Peace, the royalty was going to put on a fantasy-themed large-scale performance, "Princess Peach's Adventure In Another Dimension," which any person in Diffindor could watch for free. After this news spread, the locals, who lacked entertainment options, were quite attracted by this thought and came flocking in droves.

Alright, I might as well tell the truth. Due to a certain reason involving an attempt to secretly stash some books, we accidentally caused everyone to be angry with us, and in the end, in order to appease everyone's anger, we were forced to put on acting costumes and become the main character and a side character of this play. Not to mention they were female…

"Why am I the female lead, while Adam is nothing but a side character in the background!? He barely has any lines at all! What's with this obvious difference in treatment!?"

"That's because we're supposed to be punishing him, not the audience. Just look at his appearance… As for you, that's because you're pretty much always the main perpetrator; also, did you really think that I didn't know about what you did in the Earth Elemental Plane? Did you think that spending a few extra days there would be enough for me to slowly calm down? Do a good job acting, otherwise… heh heh, you understand."

Elisa's cold chuckling was still in my ears, and what made her evil intentions all the more obvious was the fact that the person who wrote this play was Elisa. Perhaps she was already fully prepared to take revenge upon me, and not only that—she was even low enough to take hostages.

"Oh! No! Please let those children go! They're innocent!"

"That depends on your behavior. Hmph! I really don't understand why men like these things, even though they're clearly fake…"

"No, those aren't fake at all; it's true artwork. It's the perfect artistry that comes from life but is even better than reality; it's what countless men can only dream about obtaining. Do you know just how much effort I spent in obtaining all this art? It's the accumulation of over one hundred years, the culmination of countless master artists' painstaking efforts! It's a totally unique precious artwork in the world!"

Upon hearing this, Adam was evidently surprised as well.

"…No wonder it looked so familiar. Last time, when you shared the 'Perverted Earl and His 36 Concubines' with me, could have that been the work of the classical scenery artist from one hundred and seventy years ago? His style is truly too unique, and he actually began drawing people? Even a series of drawings!?"

"Ah, as expected, you understand. Back in the day, I spent more than two months in order to eliminate the bandits that had a grudge against him. Seeing how hard I worked for his sake, he agreed to make an exception for me. What do you think? It's awesome, right!"

"It's not only awesome! It's practically the best in the world! I never expected for the style of drawing scenery, when used on a beautiful woman's body, to have such an effect. He actually made 2-D appear 3-D—it looks so real! Margaret is one of his loyal fans; she's even collected two of his drawings. If she finds out that you actually made

a master artist draw these… for the sake of these children, we definitely can't allow her to find out!"

"Hmph! Art is supposed to be a reflection of reality. Those who think they're too high and mighty to draw such things are in the wrong. It's quite obvious that any works of art that are too abstract won't be liked by anyone, but they still get angry at the viewers and claim that they don't know how to appreciate art. How could that be explained except by having mush for brains?"

"I feel like you're mysteriously making fun of something again… Did you obtain all of your special collection like this?"

"Of course. Each and every work in my collection is a precious work of art that's passed the test of time, and they're all the crystallizations of the life work of master artists. I spent much effort in obtaining them all."

"Roland, you're a real man!"

I ignored Adam, who was making mountains out of molehills, and made a pleading expression towards Elisa. I was hoping that she would see how all these children of mine were the cream of the crop in the field of art, and that she would let them go.

"Please let these children go. They're even more important to me than my life; if there's anything you have against me, then come at *me* !"

However, the demon girl smiled. Her smile was quite sweet yet also cold.

"…Artwork? More important than your life? You deserve to be single for the rest of your life!"

Elisa then furiously left, leaving behind only one final threat.

"You want those things of yours back? Sure, but it depends on your acting performance. This is a script that I wrote specially for you, so make sure to enjoy it."

"Long, long ago, Demon King Shaba from the Demon Island took his demon soldiers and rampaged through the world. Meanwhile, our heroine, Princess Peach, was determined to defeat the Demon King as she embarked on a journey alone…"

Even though I was still filled with nervousness, the beginning of the narrator's speech

and everyone's applause were indicators of the fact that it was now time for me to go on stage.

I went over my lines one last time. This script seemed like it was a magical version of "Momotaro," [1] the fairy tale I had told the most to Elisa when she was younger. The lines seemed normal as well, and I thought about how nobody would likely want to destroy their own childhood dreams, and I managed to relax slightly.

"Wow! Such a beautiful little girl!"

"…She looks a little like Princess Reyne, but she's obviously younger. Is she Princess Reyne's distant relative?"

I took a deep breath and ignored the distractions before me as I unsheathed my ceremonial rapier and spoke the lines that I had previously memorized.

"Sigh. Demon King Shaba is far too strong, and I'll never be able to defeat him by myself. Are there no other brave warriors that are willing to help me?"

"…As long as you give me a colored flag, I'm willing to become your subordinate and fight the Demon King together with you!"

It was here. Based on the script, Princess Peach would gather three subordinates, a monkey, a dog, and a rooster. It seemed that Elisa didn't randomly modify the script after all. This was probably going to be the scheduled appearance of my first subordinate, the "monkey."

As I was sighing at having misinterpreted Elisa's intentions, I turned to look at the person who was speaking.

"Ptui!"

A tall figure blocked out even the sunlight above me. All I could see were golden muscles glistening with an oily sheen.

This was a super muscular man wearing nothing but a thong. Every one of his moves were calculated to show off his shiny muscles that were covered in sweat drops under the sunlight, making everyone feel like they were hot. Not only that, but his clean face currently had a mysterious red blush.

"Omar—Omar—Omar is so happy to be able to act together with father!"

This muscular man, who had such a brawny appearance and a delicate face, was so excited that he couldn't help but roar in a low voice. All his muscles were even twitching disgustingly. I silently backed up two spaces and drew my sword once more.

"Haha!"

Yep, the person before me who seemed like nothing more than a pervert was the highest-ranking authority of the Xiluo Empire. While I had indeed invited him to my celebration, I never expected him to give me such a "nice surprise."

There was a monkey tail added to the back of Omar's thong, and he was wearing a strange monkey ear hat. It seemed that he was the "monkey subordinate" in this play.

"Ahh! What is that!"

"Mommy, it's Superman!"

"Sweetie, behave! Don't point at him! That's not Superman; that's a pervert. Remember, if you ever meet him on the street, call Town Security."

"…I'm going blind! I guess it's true after all that nothing good comes free? Is there still time to run away now?"

Just Omar's appearance alone on stage along with the huge contrast between his muscular body and his beautiful face caused many pitiful wails from the audience.

I understood how it was now. Perhaps the script was normal, and the lines were normal as well, but if the performers were a group of gentlemen, then this play was never destined to be normal to begin with.

Now, however, it was too late for me to stop. I supposed I might as well grit my teeth and continue with this farce the best I could.

That was why, several minutes later, when I saw an archdruid transform into something resembling a rooster, I wasn't astonished at all.

"Isn't that Divine Bird Feifei? Alright then, at least he remembered to wear clothes this time. That's progress."

"No, father, take a closer look! His ‘shirt’ and ‘pants’ are all feathers that he transformed himself into. As expected of Ah Birdie, he actually dares to perform all naked on stage, and is even being accepted by everyone so naturally! As expected of a mega performer from the Wild Bull School!"

It was now that I finally empathized with what Elisa must have felt when I differed with her opinion of ‘artistry.’

Well, I could only helplessly follow the script. I took off my outer shirt and tossed it to this "rooster" as we continued on our journey to defeat the Demon King.

"Now that she’s gathered two companions, Princess Peach began fighting fiercely against the demons, but with only the three of them, their strength was still insufficient. However, when they were in the midst of their greatest frustrations, they met their most loyal retainer in a small village…”

I nodded when I heard this. Since there were already a monkey and rooster, there was a dog still remaining. I hoped that this time, the person who played the role of the ‘loyal dog’ wouldn’t be too ridiculous.

“…A Tauren Demon King from a different dimension!"

"Ptui!"

I still underestimated a certain person’s desire for revenge against me. Even though I had mentally prepared myself, the script went in an even more ridiculous direction than what I expected. The highest priest of the Church of Law put a bronze mask on his face as he appeared on the stage in a similar fashion to the two before him. At the very least, he remembered to wear a thong.

Bang!

The three pairs of large and meaty hands clutched on to each other, and their three pairs of eyes had passionate flames burning within them. However, all I could see in front of me were shiny muscles.

"Brothers!"

"Bros!"

"Muscles!"

And so, under the moonlight, the three gays—er—three good brothers reaffirmed their friendship. The burning passion of friendship was ignited within them, and the sweat flying off them possessed the smell of youth. Meanwhile, the people below the stage were already beginning to cry in despair and pitifully attempt to escape. Nobody would want to watch this type of drama where someone would have to be forced to watch in order to stay. Since it had already come to this point, everyone knew that whatever developments came next would be equally ridiculous.

"Cough! Cough!"

I did my best to suppress my urge to spit blood. Since it had already come to this, we might as well finish no matter how stupid it was.

"Muscle explosion!"

A certain muscular man jumped up and used his pectorals to explode a pitiful dragon knight actor (please forgive us, my royal knights who are acting in this play).

"Tauren hug!"

A certain naked-loving tauren furiously rushed towards the pitiful dragon knights B and C and hugged them. They, unfortunately, seemed like they were about to choke to death, and begged me with their expressions to save them, but the current me only wanted to hide in a corner of the stage and shiver.

"Feather shot!"

This "Divine Bird Feifei" was capable of using his own feathers as projectiles and was now even more naked. He smiled in even greater delight. His opponent was even happier as he rolled off the stage and celebrated his survival the moment he successfully escaped.

With these three gentlemen of the moon attacking, every demon, devil, and so on were instantly KO'd. The only side effect was that…

"All those demons are so pitiful…"

"The three perverts are too strong. Urgh! So disgusting."

"Middle-ranked sub-boss D, hurry up and surrender. It's not your fault for not working hard enough; your opponent is simply too ridiculous."

"Bastards! Let go of that poor demon!"

Alright, the remaining spectators had actually begun to take pity on the evil demon army. Under the best-effort performance of Princess Peach's three loyal subordinates, Princess Peach and her three servants had imperceptibly become the evil side.

"Ad… Annienie, it's time for your day of doom! Ha! Did you think that you could escape my all-seeing eye simply by disguising yourself as an ordinary maid? You evil demon army spy, I've long since seen through your identity!"

I angrily roared as I sliced towards the corner of the wall where a certain person was doing his best to reduce his own presence, pulling him out into the open.

Boom!

My sword clashed against his broom, but we were actually communicating our complaints against each other.

"Even though there's clearly no part for me here, you dared to change the lines? Isn't it enough for you to die out there by yourself? Why are you pulling me into it?!"

"You want to survive this by yourself? Don't even think about it!"

Alright then, the "Princess Peach" and the "maid spy" started practicing swordsmanship with each other for the first time in a long while, while the rooster, monkey, and cow trio continued abusing the poor demons and the spectators mysteriously began heating up passionately.

"Amazing swordsmanship!"

"Although I can't understand what I'm watching, it seems incredible and interesting!"

"Fight! Demon army, defeat those three perverts!"

"Maid, don't lose!"

Amongst all the chaos, the script kept continuing on. The major antagonist of the story,

Demon King Shaba arrived. The moment ‘he’ spoke, everything became quiet.

"Ah, as a proponent of peace, this scene before me is truly heartbreaking. Right, I have an idea that can resolve everything… My lovely Princess Peach, please marry me. I shall bring you bliss. As long as we become one family, then there shall be no more conflict."

"Elisa! What are you doing!"

Seeing the way Elisa wore a prince’s costume and demon horns as she stepped onto the stage, and the way she bowed as she proposed marriage to me scared me so much that I broke out into a cold sweat.

"I…”

My mind was already completely blank. Director, just what did you intend to do with this script?

How was I supposed to act now? Accept? Or follow the script and begin battling? Heavens, the script didn’t have this part.

"No, Princess Peach belongs to me, the necrophile prince!"

Alright, the newly arrived pumpkin carriage brought even more uncertainty. When Prince Amelia arrived clad in princely attire, there were countless shrieks of surprise, and when she also got on one knee and proposed to me, the black cat on her shoulder was already uncontrollably rolling around in laughter.

"No! Little Sister Peach belongs to me, Princess Apple! As long as true love exists, even if we’re blood related sisters, it doesn’t matter!"

"Reyne! You damned brat, why are you joining in as well!"

Note:

1. According to Wikipedia, Momotarō (桃太郎, "Peach Boy") is a popular hero of Japanese folklore originating from Okayama Prefecture.

Chapter 248
Difficult Decision

The extravagant and chaotic story met with a truly miraculous and unexpected turn of events. The sudden appearance and injection of many characters both served to shock the audience as well as push the chaotic story to its climax.

The silver-haired Demon King seemed devilish and charming, the blonde prince knight was handsome and attractive, while the green-haired magic prince had a casual air of mystery and naturalness. On the stage, these three cool-to-the-max princes simultaneously proposed marriage to the young and beautiful princess. This was something only seen in fairy tales.

Below the stage, everyone had begun shrieking and screaming. Although they didn't recognize the other two princes, everyone could clearly identify the Princess Knight, who was guest-starring in this play as the blonde prince knight. For even the respected Princess Reyne to act in this play meant that this would definitely become a hot topic of the celebration.

"I…"

Cold sweat was dripping down my back at a furious pace. My survival instinct told me that if I made the wrong decision here, I would be met with an instant death penalty.

"It was only supposed to be a play, so why am I suddenly making a life and death decision?!"

However, the laughter of a certain silly cat, which was enjoying the predicament I was in, transmitted itself to me through our soul connection.

"…Your instinct is pretty good, but you must take a closer look. This is no mere simple acting. Take a look at those girls' resolution. At the very least, you should reply to them seriously."

At the place where Elisa was standing, mana had started spreading across on the ground like magma, transforming into extravagant red runes and a spell array.

This was no effect for the play, nor was it any useless decoration. This was a demonic contract, and even if I was the one who taught her how to use demonic contracts, the Demon Marchioness had long since surpassed me in skill at making soul contracts.

Amelia didn't use any spells, but her words themselves had the power of spells to begin with. The force of her words already told me that the moment I agreed to her proposal, it would become an eternal contract.

And, Reyne who seemed to be joining in just for the fun of it, didn't use any particular magic, but judging from how her lips were so pale and how her tiny body was trembling, this young girl had worked up all of her courage. The young princess had finally worked up her courage in front of all our citizens.

"If I choose wrong…"

"…you'll die."

I didn't need that silly cat to remind me that I was currently at the brink of a crossroads.

However, judging by how resolute all three beauties appeared to be, I had to make a decision now. Many thoughts flashed through my mind, but some things weren't set from the very start. I took a deep breath and made up my mind.

"I…"

Boom!

Before I finished saying another word, a huge black shadow descended from the sky. The wings from that figure blocked all sunlight, and just the atmospheric pressure caused by the movement of its wings at such a low altitude caused the entire stage to collapse.

"My name is Deathwing, the heaven-sent destroyer, the ender of all. Nobody can stop me, and nobody can go against me."

The huge red dragon was actually quite dexterous for its size, and flames could be seen burning in its eyes. The dragon's roar scattered the clouds, and the dragon's breath scorched the skies. Meanwhile, the red-haired knight on the dragon's back read her lines in an exaggerated tone.

"Ah, I'm Prince Kasha from the Land of the Deep Canyons. Even though this is just our first meeting, Princess Peach's beauty has instantly shattered my ice-cold heart! I shall use my power to steal away my love. Let's go, Deathwing!"

Before I could react, the huge red dragon lunged towards me and grabbed me away in its claw. All that remained behind were the astonished actors and audience.

"Ahhh! A huge dragon!"

"Princess Peach has been kidnapped!"

There was yet another miraculous unexpected turn of events in the story, but since the main actor had been mysteriously kidnapped, how was the story supposed to go on?

A strange silence filled the air for several moments, causing anxiety and unrest to spread throughout the audience. Just as they were about to explode in dissatisfaction, somebody appeared to save the day.

At the same location where Princess Peach had been kidnapped, an originally rolling on the floor and laughing black cat suddenly transformed herself into an incredibly beautiful gold elf.

"Ah, the suddenly arrived prince of darkness and huge dragon have kidnapped the beautiful princess. The three princes have decided to team up and find the divine sword that can defeat that fearsome huge dragon in order to save their future fiancée."

After a pause, the gold elf, who had an astonishing Charisma stat, clapped her hands lightly, indicating for the curtains to be slowly closed. Her alluring smile seemed to reveal that the story still hadn't ended.

"This is the end of Princess Peach's different dimension adventure story, and I would like to thank everyone for your passionate support! We welcome everyone to pre-purchase tickets to see the next episode: 'The Three Princes Bravely Adventuring in the Life-Threatening Island!'"

"Ohhh! I'll definitely come for the next episode!"

It seemed that there was already a huge fan of this play.

"I'll come even if it isn't free next time."

“…So only the first part was free. Such a devious method to make money. But, for the cute Princess Peach, I'll definitely come for the next part as well!"

Alright then, let's not mention any more about this audience member's motives for wanting to come to the next part. This boy adjusted his eyeglasses and had an expression that seemed to say, "There's only one truth!" [1] 1

"My prince! Could you give me an autograph?"

"Your Highness, the silver-haired prince, please look in this direction!"

“…Is there a poster for this play? I want one of the three princes! I'll buy one no matter how expensive it is!"

It would seem that the three females acting as princes now had their own loyal fans as well.

But, after the curtains blocked everything off from sight, there were two of the princes that stood right where they were, exchanging cold glances with each other.

“…Perhaps the moment he agreed, your demonic contract would take effect. You really are Roland's student; you're just like he is. As long as you achieve your goal, it doesn't matter how underhanded or lacking-limits the techniques you use are. I heard that you became Roland's girlfriend under similar circumstances, forcing him to agree under the situation without giving Roland a chance to choose at all. Are you that afraid of Roland making a choice from the bottom of his heart?"

"Oh? So, Sister Amelia is all honest and open? I won't even mention how you suddenly put yourself into my script like that. Could you explain just what you meant by using the highest level of truth magic? Besides, I'm his girlfriend, and with his personality, he had a 99% probability of choosing me. Why would you kill off your own chances like that?"

"That might not be the case. Under the power of my ability, he would be unable to say anything but the 'truth' just now. What he said could only be the choice he wanted from the bottom of his heart. Sense of responsibility, reputation, the situation, and other such factors that could influence him into making some other decision would no longer take effect, and the only thing he could say would be the truth in his heart. In

that case, do you still have confidence that you would definitely win?"

"…"

Although Elisa fell silent, this was obvious evidence that she, indeed, wasn't fully confident.

The two "princes'" conversation caused the stage workers around them to shiver in fear… so what was the third prince doing at this moment?

"He actually glared at me…"

This pitiful "third prince" was sighing in complaint about how the "princess" had looked at the other two princes in hesitation and in astonishment, while the expression for her had been the anger and threatening attitude that a parent would have towards a child. She was also considering just what punishment she would receive since she had angered Roland so much.

"…Brother Roland seems to be really angry. He wouldn't spank me again, would he? Ahhh, I'm so pathetic! It's so embarrassing! Why did I rush out there like that, and even say such embarrassing words out loud?"

But even if Reyne was currently hiding in a corner behind the stage, demonic temptations would always come looking at just the right time.

"Haha, oh man! I was able to watch something fun as well. That was truly amusing. Would you like to hear my recommendation? After all, I'm still his twin brother, and we actually have rather similar interests. If you listen to my advice, he probably won't be able to resist against you, you just have to do this…"

As expected of a resident of the Chaos Abyss. The ability to take advantage of someone while they were weak was basically an instinct to Karwenz. However, judging by how Reyne kept nodding, she was obviously taking Karwenz's words seriously. Yet if she really did follow his advice, perhaps the result wouldn't be as simple as a butt spanking anymore.

Perhaps, only Adam, who was doing his very best to reduce his presence as he felt the tense atmosphere around him and fireworks about to explode, was truly worried about his bro.

"Roland, for the time being, you definitely can't return! You'll die! You'll definitely die!"

"Ah, Little Red, Annie, thank you so much. If it weren't for you guys, I probably would have died for sure. Come, I'll treat you two tonight! Cheers!"

In a small bar that was quite well-known in the north of town, I was currently thanking my two saviors.

I was well aware that for Little Red, any words of thanks were meaningless, and couldn't compare to alcohol, which was far more practical and useful for her. This was why I instantly had the bar bring us their best alcohol the moment we arrived.

“…This beer tastes pretty good, and the grape wine is nice as well. Let's have another extra twenty barrels of each."

Little Red wasn't using anything as small as a wine flagon, instead downing alcohol by the barrel. Even with alcohol continuously pouring down her throat, not a single drop landed on the ground; it all was sucked down by those lusciously red lips.

Even though she clearly had the figure of a thin and beautiful woman, the "bold and forthright" manner in which she drank barrels at a time was so shocking that other customers in the bar kept cheering her on.

Meanwhile, sitting at another small table, Annie was pouting with her tiny mouth at the apple juice and milk set out before her.

"I'm not little anymore! Annie can drink alcohol as well…”

"Huh?" This was from Little Red, who had only ordered apple juice for Annie.

"What?" This was from me, who had only ordered milk for Annie.

Her two elders glanced sidelong at her and the mutual condescension that came from them without even prior arrangement caused Annie to helplessly lower her head and continue sipping on her apple juice.

It seemed that Annie still had a long way to go before she would be able to stand up tall in front of Roland and Little Red who had watched her grow up, even though she was already an incredible Underground Lord.

"Roland, I don't wish to bring up your affairs anymore. Humans are a rare type of creature that are capable of being in heat all year round, so it seems only natural for them to have rather chaotic relationships. That seems to be a tradition of your race. Just don't get my little Annie involved."

The new Dragon Queen's first sentence to me was an immediate direct cannon attack, but I was unable to deny my own wrongdoings when faced with my old friend's mysterious dissatisfaction towards me. What else could I do besides smile wryly?

“…It's such a rare chance that we get to drink together; why don't we talk about something happy?"

"Alright, I've brought all the resources and people that you wanted, but you can't give me even one less gold piece than what you promised. You have to pay up first. Even if we're friends, you have to pay and be in the clear first. Nobody is allowed to owe a dragon money."

Even though Little Red's tone was filled with dissatisfaction and even seemed to be complaining, I was still delighted to hear what she just said.

"Of course, I know about your difficulties. Even if you are the Dragon Queen, it's astonishing that you were able to do so much. As for the agreed upon price? Is gold fine? But if the quantity's too large, won't it be difficult to take with you?"

"Not at all. I brought many laborers with me, and they'll take it back for me."

She pointed at the group of black-clothed red and black dragons, which were silently sitting in their human forms. Dragons had sharp hearing, and if they heard anyone else describing the venerable dragon race as laborers, it would definitely be a huge insult, but when they heard their master saying this, they all could only smile helplessly.

“…Forget it. I still have a few secret treasure vaults in the Underground World, accumulated from the previous generations. I'll give them to you and you can have others dig them up. If it's worth less than what I promised you, I'll give the difference to you next time. If it's worth more than what I promised you, just treat it as a free present. How about it?"

My request for her had been somewhat ridiculous to begin with, and it was already difficult for the dragons to not treat my request as an insult. Without Little Red applying pressure, this ridiculous request could never have been realized no matter

how much of a price in gold I paid. I owed her significantly for this.

"That's more like it. Come, cheers."

Little Red finally nodded in satisfaction after she heard me say this and followed this up by continually trying to get me to drink along with her.

For people with bodies like ours, unless we purposefully inhibited our own body's functions, it was quite difficult to become drunk. However, as I watched the forty barrels being delivered to us, I felt that before considering how much it would take to get drunk, we should first consider how much our stomachs were capable of holding.

There was a saying that meeting an old friend over drinks would make even a thousand cups seem short, and we were old drinking friends to begin with. When Little Red went all out with drinking, she ended only when she finished off all the alcohol reserves in this entire bar.

And, when we walked out of the bar, the moon and stars had already come out and were shining brightly. Little Red was in a great mood and even revealed her dragon wings and began dancing in the streets, while I had to take on the responsibility of the troubles she stirred up from this and try to look for a new bar for her.

Finally, after she finished all the alcohol reserves of the fourth bar we went to, Little Red was satisfied, and she seemingly casually mentioned her own objective as well.

"Do you still remember Molly?"

"Of course. She's the previous Dragon Queen. I heard that she's already come to the surface, and even caused a bunch of trouble, getting onto that messy and random Calamity Rankings or something."

"Two days ago, I received a letter that actually came from her. Can you believe it? She, the Ancient Red Dragon Molly, actually asked me, the current Dragon Queen who drove her out, for help. It's probably because she's truly been forced to the brink."

“…It wouldn't be a trap, would it?"

I couldn't help but begin worrying as I remembered that sly red dragon.

"This is where you're wrong because you don't know her well enough. Although she

doesn't care at all about what tactics she'll stoop to, she was the one who taught me about the pride of dragons. For her to lower her head to me, that's even more difficult to accomplish than killing her."

"Where is she right now?"

"The Kasomali area. Oh, I think you humans call it the Bar-something—right—the Bardi Empire."

…

When I returned, the first thing I did was deal with a certain naughty child who would demolish the house if not spanked for three days. However, when I took off her skirt and began spanking her butt, I noticed that something was wrong about the situation.

Yep, this was our family's tradition, an especially effective punishment for naughty children—spanking the butt, which would give a sufficient amount of punishment without truly hurting them.

However, something was obviously different this time. Not only did I instantly catch Reyne so easily, her past wailing and crying and pretending to be pitiful were all gone, and the sounds of her reaction to the spanking became stranger and stranger, sounding more and more like the sounds that one would hear in a certain type of "artistic video."

Her watery and beautiful eyes kept looking back at me, and her breathing kept getting deeper and deeper instead of screaming about how much it hurt. Not only that, with her reddening all the way to the tips of her ears, as well as the strange sensation on my hand, I was unable to take it anymore before I even finished punishing her and had to stop early.

“…Do you still dare to play jokes on adults anymore?"

"I don't. I definitely won't do it again!"

A naughty child's promise was never trustworthy. Their promises were only good for as long as their butt hurt, but I was quite satisfied when I received her answer. However, when I asked about the others, I received an unexpected reply.

"Sister Amelia? She just left. She returned to the Mage Country. Apparently, the Cloud

Tower was looking for her, saying it's an emergency. Originally, she had been ignoring them, but it seems like it can't wait anymore. Right, Sister Lilith went with her as well, and it seems to have something to do with the Bardi Empire."

Note:

1. This is a Detective Conan reference.

Chapter 249
Military Parade (Part 1 of 2)

The celebration began quite early; the sky hadn't even brightened yet. With its main magical light, the Borealis illuminated the ground, dispelling the loneliness of the dark night. The hubbub of people caused this city to wake up earlier than usual from its nightly dream.

When the first ceremonial cannons were fired, eagles, which were painted white to represent peace, were released (all the doves purchased from the south had frozen to death in Diffindor), and they started flying in circles above the city. The celebrations for the Day of Peace had now commenced for the entire city and were to last for one week.

In every street and alleyway, both real undead and people dressed as undead could be seen roaming around, dressed in pumpkin heads and monster masks. They performed their own programs and held their own events, adding a festive air to the celebration. Bards performed together in bands, and various street stalls and stores wouldn't miss this great opportunity to make money, either.

In the plaza in front of the Royal Palace—yep, it should currently be called the Day of Peace Plaza—citizens wrapped in thick clothing were anxiously waiting. It was fairly cold outside as the sun hadn't even arisen, and people's breaths were clearly visible as they exhaled. Although their faces were all red from the cold, not a single one of them complained because the most important program of the festival was about to begin.

"Day of Peace, Military Parade—begin!"

The magical announcement caused this sleeping city to no longer remain silent. With a fierce aura about them, the newly born military squads had finished their arrangements, while the invited guests waiting in the temporarily constructed observation towers were filled with expectations for the upcoming performance. After all, it was possible to gain concrete benefits here, and this was their goal to begin with.

As for me? I was filled with various emotions. All of this was what I had accumulated

after so long and so much work, as well as my hope for the future. It sure wasn't easy to reach this step.

When the utterly silent snow-white soul knights entered the field in an orderly formation, everyone inhaled the cold air in exclamation.

On top of their snow-white soul combat steeds, the Frigid Nightmares, were snow-covered knights wearing the most antique style of royal knight armor, with the familiar combat flag of the Mist behind them.

Their Frigid Nightmares chose the form of flying unicorns, and their armor crafted from cold ice was incredibly sturdy, not to mention that they were also equipped with incredibly sharp ice swords, ice javelins, and ice dragonspears.

Just like how the records stated, the Aurora Knights were the most well-rounded knights of all. They were a knight order termed as "unstoppable" whenever they exceeded one hundred in number. However, what appeared in front of everyone was more than five hundred Aurora Knights!

This legendary knight order that had once vanished in the pages of history had now reappeared. When they waved their Aurora Knights flag in the air above the plaza, everyone was already boiling with excitement.

And, when they approached the main podium, they all spread out, revealing fifty-four knights among them. These knights had sturdy ice armor and sharp ice spears like all the others, but their physical bodies and families had all vanished in the long pages of history, not leaving even their names behind.

Yet even if they had nothing more than their bones and souls left, as long as the People of the Mist still required their assistance, these old soldiers wouldn't retire. At the current moment, their snow-white soul steeds still carried them into the battlefield once more.

"Everyone! Bow!"

The Aurora Knights held their swords horizontally, which was a knight gesture that signified humility and justice. They drummed on their shields, which signified protection and courage. They wielded their battle flags, which was a knight gesture that signified loyalty and justice. The scene before me seemed to have passed through the long rivers of time; it was a familiar scene that had finally appeared before me once

again, after the passage of countless years.

"Aurora!"

"Forever!"

Only they had the right to walk at the very forefront, and only these old soldiers who had protected the Mist for more than three hundred years had the right to be the representative guardians of this ancient kingdom in accepting the citizens' cheers and trust.

However, this time, they were no longer a lonesome small knight order surrounded by enemy forces that outnumbered them by hundreds of times their number. This time, they were surrounded by several hundred younger Aurora Knights, who were looking at their teachers with reverence and trust.

My planted seeds had already sprouted, and each seed received ten seeds' worth of harvest. These newly-born Aurora Knights not only received their seniors' armor and weapons; the countless years of military souls and traditions had never been broken. The Northlands' strongest and most glorious knight order was still alive. This most trusted guardian group of the Mist Kingdom still existed.

The cheers in the plaza shook the skies, and the spectators from all the other countries were filled with shock. The Aurora Knights were all Gold-ranked or higher and had been famous for the past thousands of years in Eich. Now that this legendary knight order, which was rumored to never be able to surpass one hundred members, actually had five hundred and four members appearing in front of them, how could they easily accept this shocking event?

"Milord, will you sell them? As long as you name the price… Ah!"

It was obvious that these strong knights caused Earl Habo from the Rhodes Kingdom to be moved, but the moment he spoke, he discovered that he was no longer able to move, as if he was a frog being stared at by a snake.

A silver sword tip was already at his neck, and his breath was freezing into ice as he exhaled. His guards didn't even have the time to react.

Then, although the sword vanished, Earl Habo discovered that his over one-hundred-kilogram body was suddenly lifted up. Before him was a pair of angry eyes that burned

with cold flames, along with a deathly cold grip on his neck.

“…If there’s a next time, I’ll treat it as an insult to the entirety of East Mist. Only war and death shall greet you."

And then, I casually tossed him aside, took out a handkerchief, and patiently wiped my hands clean, as if I had accidentally touched a piece of filthy garbage.

Earl Habo gasped for air while at the same time, the other Northlands royals and nobles discussed this scene amongst themselves.

"How foolish! Why did the Rhodes Kingdom send someone so stupid? Hasn’t he ever read a single history book? Doesn’t he know what the Aurora Knights mean to East Mist? He actually dared to ask whether he could buy one? This is basically no different from asking someone to his face how much he would sell his own children for."

“…Haha! Habo, will you sell your own head? With how suicidal you are, does your king who sent you know about it?"

Apart from the person himself, who laid there collapsed on the ground for quite a while without being able to stand up, such a small matter was quickly forgotten because the military squad that gave people an even deeper impression arrived.

They wore plain and ordinary old armor, with a mixture of wooden and steel swords. Even their horses were mostly on the small and weak side, and they didn’t have the obvious pressure and magic power that the Aurora Knights did, nor did they have extravagant looking armor and weapons. However, when these poor-seeming knights arrived, they received an even warmer welcome from the audience.

"Royal knights! East Mist, forever!"

"East Mist royal knights, our knights, banzai!"

Yep, those weak-seeming knights before everyone were the knights under the royalty’s direct command, the royal knights. They were the newly established royal knights modeled on Diffindor’s royal knights that had perished already.

In every country, the royal knights would forever be the most elite knights, as well as the royalty’s personal army. They would receive the best treatment, the best equipment, and they would also naturally possess the strongest combat strength in

the country. They would be required to undertake the most important and dangerous tasks. Just their existence and reputation alone would constitute the pride and honor of any country.

In most countries, each military personnel would treat being able to join the royal knights as the greatest honor. All the at the minimum silver-ranked members of the White Wolf squadron in the Auland Empire was a perfect example of this. This was also true of the Mist Kingdom in the past.

Yet even though the Mist Kingdom had revived, things were different now. East Mist's royalty was quite poor, and the royal knights were even poorer. The royal knights' payment wasn't even as good as what some domain lords' private armies would receive. Their tasks also wouldn't be anything like taking part in glorious battles or protecting the royalty; instead, they would be spending most of their time in the poorest and most undeveloped areas, performing small tasks that even mercenaries would deem unprofitable such as disaster relief and getting rid of local dangerous beasts.

Perhaps their military skills weren't all that high, and their equipment was nothing but hand-me-downs from their ancestors' ancestors; in fact, the domain lords' private soldiers would often laugh at them for being good-for-nothings. However, compared to other countries' royal knights, there was one thing in common.

"For glory and loyalty!"

"We fight for the royalty, we fight for the citizens!"

Yep, after so many years, they never betrayed their own oaths. They had always been protecting the royalty that they swore fealty to and acted as the royalty's most trusted arms.

When winter arrived, and wild beasts spread everywhere in search of food, they would rush to the forefront. When facing against foreign invaders, they would always sacrifice themselves for the sake of the country, and they had never failed to live up to the emblems of "Fortress of the Mist" on their shoulders.

Two years ago, when the beastmen armies were invading, this ancient royal knight order that was long since outdated and fatigued transformed into the sharpest sword of all under Reyne's command. Although they were able to beat back the strong enemy,

the royal knights lost seventy percent of their members, which was almost no different from having perished entirely. Even if many commoners joined in again as knights and warriors, there was no way for them to recover their combat strength in a short period of time, so they could only helplessly become a backline army and a disaster relief squad.

Reyne was vigorously waving her hand at those knights that had pledged loyalty to her; she hadn't forgotten about her loyal knights. Nor would I forget about them.

However, the next military squad that appeared caused everyone to fall silent.

"…"

This was a squad of knights that was even more tattered than the royal knights of moments ago. Their swords were blunt, their dragonspears were bent, and their battle flags were already nothing more than tattered cloth. They walked along silently without making a single sound, while the audience all inhaled breaths of cold air and instinctively retreated. That was the instinctive fear that the living would have of the undead.

The silent black-clothed knights walked together without a single command or any hesitation. They had no fear and even no hatred. They merely walked forward silently, as if nothing in the world mattered, which made people think about a procession of shinigamis. [1] 1

They were similarly glorious knights comparable to the royal knights, and when they walked across the podium, they only silently glanced over at me. They had long since stopped needing any commands, and their stubbornness and loyalty had already been proved by the heavens and earth. They didn't need to care about what others thought of them at all… For the past three hundred plus years, I believed in them, and they swore loyalty to me—and that was enough.

"You don't like us?"

"Come at us!"

Alright, my description was obviously a tad too premature. Judging by the two signs that the undead knights had suddenly put up, and their expressions, which were filled with distaste towards certain people, it was evident that they weren't so uncaring after all.

"Damned undead!"

"Bastards!"

They were targeting the members of the Holy Church, who were cursing them from behind me. When I turned around and saw that the young female Holy Knight Aivla was angered to the point that she was jumping up and down, I smiled in satisfaction.

There was a reason for these two royal knight groups from different generations to have come together.

East Mist's royal knight order had lost its chain of succession and its core combat strength and future prospects. And, although the Mist Kingdom's undead royal knight order was powerful, it lacked the ability to add fresh blood. Without this as the foundation, both royal knight orders were lacking in a different area, which was why I decided to put them together.

They could finally put down the heavy responsibilities that they shouldn't have been bearing. Tasks such as city defense and disaster relief would be given over to my future Town Security knights, while the future royal knight order would be led and taught by the Great Sword Saint Fayde and other such veteran royal knights in its reorganization.

The total number after reorganization was projected to be approximately five thousand, and all of them were the Mist Kingdom's ace soldiers and elite knights. Perhaps it would take a while longer for them to mature, but they would eventually become just like other countries' royal knights—the guardians of the royalty as well as the top-class soldiers who would be able to determine the combat situation on the battlefield.

"May the Holy Light cleanse all those damned undead!"

"I've lived for so long, and it's the first time seeing so many undead daring to come out into the open."

I glanced over at all the Holy Church members who were filled with righteous anger, and I shrugged my shoulders uncaringly. It was their fault for always looking for trouble these days, and it was already quite a lot of self-restraint on my knights' part to not go looking for them for trouble.

Perhaps this royal knight order composed of both the living and the dead would

attract unnecessary attention and controversy, and perhaps it would cause that title of Saint of Holy Light to disappear from my hands before I even received it, but I one hundred percent agreed with yet another sign that my undead knights raised.

"The bald monk likes the nun, but what does that have to do with the Daoist? We're right here in front of you, but what the hell does it have to do with the Holy Church? You don't like us? Go ahead and come fight us!"

Note:

1. According to Wikipedia, Shinigami (死神, "god of death" or "death spirit") are gods or supernatural spirits that invite humans toward death, and can be seen to be present or interpreted to be present in certain aspects of Japanese religion and culture.

Chapter 250
Military Parade (Part 2 of 2)

Before the first rays of sunlight streaked across the sky, pitch-black dark elves appeared before the humans, as if they were messengers of the night.

When everyone present noticed that the group that had appeared next consisted of dark elves, their expressions were filled with shock and surprise. After all, in most situations, their species were the representation of evil. Perhaps it were only the demons and devils from the Chaos Abyss who had a worse reputation. Even the undead were better received than they were.

The ones in front of the audience, however, were doubtlessly an abnormality among dark elves. They were dark elf knights clad in golden heavy armor, and this was the first time they had revealed themselves on the surface of the mortal plane. Orderly and unhurriedly, they proceeded forward. Other dark elves were known to be skilled at using daggers and poisons, but these wielded glorious sacred swords and sturdy tower shields. Most importantly, they wore crosses, which were enveloped in Holy Light. Even the knights themselves were surrounded by Holy Light, which caused the human Holy Knights witnessing this spectacle to be the most astonished of all.

"Dark elves are capable of becoming Holy Knights?"

"How is this possible!? How can the evil dark elves possibly receive the blessing of Holy Light!?"

"Because your God of Holy Light is an idiot."

Of course, I didn't say my line of thought aloud, as that would definitely brand me as a heretic. However, I didn't have any intentions of hiding the fact that I was filled with negative intentions, and I sarcastically made fun of them.

"Heh heh, I have a friend who's a dark elf Legend-ranked Holy Knight. Not only that, she has the possibility of reaching Saint rank. Sigh. A pity that she's not here right now."

Some of the Holy Knights were filled with disbelief, while some nodded with shocked expressions. I didn't make any attempt to conceal my insulting laughter, which earned me an angry glare from Aivla. Ever since she had gone back with Estrada and learned that Holy Knight Rolo's real identity was me, she became hostile and unfriendly. It would seem that I had accidentally made her feel greatly pissed off at me.

The emblem of the dark elf Town Security Knights was a tightly clenched golden fist, which represented the spirit of teamwork and cooperation. Stuck above the fist was also a blunt sword, which represented the usage of violence only to a necessary degree—yep—it definitely didn't represent anything else, especially not my personal complaints against a certain Riot Games company, which had a fist as its emblem… Irelia was so cute, so why did they always nerf her? They should have been focusing on Teemo who was always polluting the environment with his explosive mushrooms instead. [1] 1

Cough, I should stop getting sidetracked with topics from my original world. Let's return to the main topic at hand.

Unlike formal knight orders, which had actual combat as their main tasks, the Town Security Knights' most important tasks were doubtlessly smaller-scale battles like suppressing riots, bandit groups, and wild beasts. In order to make it more convenient for them to separate and battle in different locations, they were all mainly separated into small teams.

Each small team's captain and vice-captain were dark elf knights that came from the Underground. It was still the classical method of veterans leading the novices. While the members were of a large variety, but most of them were still knight type job classes that had tough skin and high endurance, or they were youngsters that had decided to become knights.

The reason for that? Indeed, thief job classes were agile and dexterous, while warrior job classes were much more flexible. Mages were even more adaptable and seemed to be quite appropriate for working within a city like this, but when you looked at the overall reputations of these three main and common job classes, none of them were that good.

Everyone knew that thieves would get up to no good and only work for money, while the warriors had the image of being barbaric and violent to the point of only talking with their fists; this was apparent to everyone. The mage job class was also seen by

everyone as connected to evil and untrustworthy. While mages could easily obtain respect and fear, they definitely couldn't obtain trust; they had far worse of a reputation than Holy Knights, Knights of Justice, or even just regular knights.

Holy Knights needed to obey the teachings of the Holy Light, Knights of Justice needed to follow the law, and normal knights needed to follow the knightly code of chivalry and swear loyalty to their lord and king; reputation and honor were more important to them than their lives. In order to obtain the people's trust and internally obtain the newcomers' trust of the Town Security Knights themselves, almost all the small teams' leaders were of knight job classes.

To use a certain person's quote, "Although tin cans mostly have empty air for brains, but they can all survive based on their handsome faces…" Yep, that was a certain quote said by someone when he was still a Holy Knight, but he had ended up getting beaten up by all his comrades. Fine, I'll be honest; apart from someone like me, a grand master at shooting oneself in the foot, who else could have said something so ridiculous?

The future Town Security Knights spent most of their time performing tasks within the city, and they had special intelligence, logistics, and magic support squads of their own. Whether or not their work would be a success here depended more than anything on whether they would be able to create a trustworthy and fair impression of themselves, which was why choosing these knights that had "tin cans for brains" was the best choice. It had already been proven back in Sulfur Mountain City.

Each small team consisted of ten to twelve members, and would be led by an elite dark elf knight. They had top-level equipment, and any criminal would get a headache just looking at them. The Town Security Knights were planned to number 14,000 in the end, which would be more than sufficient to deal with the protection of multiple cities at once.

As for why I had to begin the military parade so early before the sun even rose? It was also out of consideration for these dark elves, who weren't suited for appearing under the sunlight. For the time being, they would also have to mainly work during the night, but when their specialized equipment was completed, they would be able to move about normally during the day as well.

What was their specialized equipment? Momo here was wearing the prototype.

The main reason the dark elves feared the sunlight was that their pupils and skin

couldn't bear the sunlight. It wasn't as bad for their skin, although they would begin to suffer from severe sunburn if they stayed out in the sun for too long, but their weak pupils couldn't tolerate any sunlight at all… actually, this wasn't something unresolvable.

They would wear black gnomish anti-wind glasses with dark green tree resin lenses. They would have water element top-level hydra skin crafted into cool jackets, leather gloves, and black collars. They would wear high-heeled boots and long socks on their long, beautiful legs, plus purple eyeshadow and lipstick, which would give them a rebellious sense of beauty that seemed out of this world…

As for whether or not I copied elements from a certain special job from my previous world, a dominatrix—cough—cough—at the very least, I wasn't crazy enough to give them leather whips. Of course, some dark elves with special interests already had this type of item on their own, such as a certain crazy dog named Momo, who was currently—and happily—giving a whipping performance that caused various exclamations from the citizens… let us just ignore those perverts who had voluntarily came up for whippings.

With such top-level water element equipment provided to them, and when you add on the fact that they would put on Olivia's specially made sunscreen lotion for the skin that they revealed, they would basically be entirely protected from the sunlight so that they wouldn't have to imitate other dark elves on the surface—they wouldn't have to wear pitch-black capes and only dare to move about at night.

With such equipment, their anti-sunlight resistance rose greatly. Some dark elves had already volunteered to experiment for me, and, with the help of this water equipment and sunscreen lotion, they were able to normally move about under the sunlight for approximately five hours. As their bodies gradually got used to the sunlight, even increasing the time to eight hours under the sun per day was acceptable. When a gray elf like Momo put on this equipment, she was practically able to ignore any negative effects the sunlight would have on her.

To be honest, based on the Underground dark elves' level of magic, finding a way to deal with the sunlight wasn't something impossible to begin with. However, under their society where Lorci had controlled everything, anyone that researched this topic was basically declaring their intentions to go against Lorci.

"What? You're researching a method to deal with the sunlight? You intend to betray

Lorci and escape to the aboveground world?"

Now that Lorci was dead, I figured that the dark elves would eventually come up with new ways to deal with the sun on their own.

Of course, even now, these equipment sets for them weren't cheap. The gnomish protective glasses originally used gemstone lenses which still let in too much sunlight for the dark elves, so I recommended Amelia's specially-produced tree resin lenses which were a big success, but it still wasn't easy to mass produce them.

Although there was already a mother tree, I had to wait until Amelia's magical tree grew into a forest before I would be able to have the tree resin lenses mass produced. And even though I had plenty of hydra skin on my hands, it was still rather precious, and using it only to block the sun seemed like a waste.

Hydra skin which was impenetrable by ordinary weapons and had defense equal to or surpassing that of steel armor, but I didn't have any top-level smiths that were able to make use of such a high-quality material. In order to avoid wasting any hydra skin, I only had very small and simple modifications done to them, without even having them enchanted with any spells or runes.

Although the defense value was only the hydra skin's natural defense value alone, that was already significant. The magic resistance properties of hydra skin added with the fact that the dark elves already had a talent for magic resistance helped them completely ignore any magic spells that were below Gold-rank. This made them into true mage killers.

I nodded in satisfaction as I watched them pass by. Not only were they the future Town Security and the backup knights for our main forces, but they were also specialized anti-mage troops. Of course, if it was necessary, I would have them truly act the part as mage killers.

And after this "Riot Company" squad finished walking past us, the next group was rather unexpected.

The one at the forefront was a certain tall and strong tauren who was smiling in an honest and direct fashion as he continuously waved to people on both sides of the road. Xueti's name was quite famous, after all.

However, due to some special reasons and some rather extreme quotes of his, such as

"Why does a good man have to cover up?" or "What's wrong with a man being perverted?" he obtained the extreme disgust of a large majority of females as well as the support of a large majority of males. Of course, there were also some females who were into extreme things that supported him.

After this highest priest walked past us while enjoying both cheers and boos, the well-equipped Church of Law members showed up behind him in all their might.

This was a group of black-robed judges, but they were also Law Incanters, Judgementors, and Knights of Justice. They weren't many, nor was their procession very orderly. However, the pride of the strong was as bright as daylight in the eyes of those that recognized their power.

"How is it possible that they have so many Gold ranks?"

"Gold ranks? Take a closer look, there are actually so many Legends among them."

“…The rumors about the Underground were actually true? Legends are everywhere, liches are like dogs, and randomly tossing a brick can kill two SemiGod Liches?"

I viciously glared at the fool who had compared liches to dogs and even intended to kill SemiGod Liches with bricks, before returning my focus to the procession.

I was quite satisfied with their appearance. These old guys from the Church of Law were, at the very weakest, of the Gold rank, and all of them were those who could be judges. They were the true power of the Church of Law, accumulated over the past hundred years.

236 Gold ranks, 46 Legend ranks, and 4 Saint ranks. This was combat strength that was more than sufficient to rule over the Underground, and this military parade was a way to let everyone witness the true power of the Church of Law. It was also precisely because of their existence that Diffindor could be termed "Infallible."

Just thinking about it, if Diffindor really was attacked, I could activate "Great Judgement" here. Just what would happen after all the Law job classes were raised one rank? There would be 236 Legend ranks, 46 Saint ranks, and 4 Myth ranks… While this may still be insufficient to slay a God, killing off an army of over 100,000 would be an effortless task.

As an independent organization belonging to the Church of Law rather than the

military, they originally shouldn't have appeared in East Mist's military parade, but due to our unique organizational structure and relationship, it was time to have them come out and scare some people.

Of course, compared to other True Gods' churches that had SemiGod members as their aces, the Church of Law would still seem weaker, but even the power that they now displayed would be enough to have the other churches reassess this new church's power and potential. After all, the Law God ascended to Godhood just a little less than two years ago, but this system of Law had already matured to such an extent.

The Town Security and these strong members of the Church of Law were all part of the Law system that I had created to begin with, and what I imagined was that the Church of Law would eventually spread to become the national church of the entire Mist Alliance. Each city would construct their own courts, helping spread the seeds of its existence.

A judge that was able to control the situation would be the leader, with roughly ten or so assistants or acolytes as the core members helping out. The small teams of Town Security that finished their training would be the executors of the Law. When all the public courts that also served simultaneously as Churches of Law opened up and became operational, each city would begin changing, and the number of Law job classes would continue increasing…

"Hmph! In my blueprint for the future, there are no such things as foolish antiquated nobles and a feudal system."

They were the greatest treasure that I had accumulated over the years, and the most important part of whether my plan would succeed. After all, individual strength was limited. Without their assistance, I wouldn't be able to realize my goal.

If the Town Security and Church of Law members represented the current changes ongoing in this country, the next group to appear probably represented the potential future that still needed hard work and effort to reach.

"Look! It's the battle flag of the Silver Cross! My nephew's joined them as well."

“…It's the Silver Cross! That combat squadron which obtained accolades in the war against the beastmen."

When talking about popularity, this newly rising combat squadron, which had most of

its members consisting of locals, was actually the most popular, especially after they racked up achievements during the war against the beastmen. They also became a hot topic in all the streets and alleyways.

"They're our children, and our heroes."

When the combat flag of the Silver Cross could be seen in the distance, the visitors from the Holy Church finally showed some smiles. The Silver Cross typically was related to the Holy Light, so it seemed that there was finally something acceptable to them. After all, judging by how the citizens were so excited, it seemed that the Silver Cross had an excellent reputation.

But soon, the Holy Church members' smiles froze on their faces. The undead knights Fanderk and Lani were the commander and sub-commander of this combat squadron, so of course they walked at the forefront. The Holy Church members were soon able to see up close what was really on the Silver Cross's combat flag—a sword which represented physical might overlapped with a staff representing magical power, which was something completely separate from a real cross that could be used to pray to the Holy Light.

The Four Elemental Swordcasters, who used the power of the elements, also greatly ticked off some of the Holy Church members. After all, in the eyes of some extremists of the believers of the Holy Light, even elemental powers needed to be cleansed. However, they couldn't do anything about it, since nobody had made a rule saying that silver crosses were the intellectual property of the Holy Church.

Meanwhile, the other guests weren't thinking so much about all this at all. The newly-created single soldier mecha walking at the forefront attracted all their attention.

"This is the single soldier combat mecha Sith #0. It has a completely metallic outer shell and obsidian protective covering. Its highest speed is 30 kilometers per hour, so it can easily keep up with a knights' procession. Its armor thickness and utility can be modified based on the desired cost of production, and if magical metals are used in its construction, it's also simple to make it immune to Silver-ranked attacks and below."

Seeing how everyone's attention was fully on me, I paused for a moment before tossing out a megaton bomb with my next words.

"Although its defense is excellent, wearing it won't affect the casting of spells at all.

This is doubtlessly the best equipment for any archmage in the future. Although controlling this mecha requires the ability to control the elements, we also sell Secret Silver Spirit Swords to control these mechas that even an ordinary person can use. Only this magical sword is required to control it… Which means to say, even a ruler with no magical or physical prowess whatsoever can instantly possess, at the minimum, Silver-ranked combat strength through this mecha. They will also be able to obtain a Secret Silver Spirit Sword, which will give them the ability to somewhat control the elements."

As I waved in indication, the warrior in the mecha opened up part of the outer shell. The elemental power around him could be ignored, while that Secret Silver Spirit Sword that was also red and black was obviously the core part of the mecha. This phenomenon seemed to break all common sense and caused a commotion from all the spectators.

Secret Silver Spirit Sword? It was actually a magical sword modified through magical engineering. Originally, I named it the "Silver Sword," but since everyone strongly objected to it, I could only helplessly add two more words to its name.

As for the so-called "Secret Silver?" Well, gold watches, gold pens, and gold teeth might not necessarily be made of real gold, and a gold-colored canister of milk powder would definitely not have any gold inside at all. A silver computer or car wouldn't have real silver either, and if someone had silver in their brain, that meant it was time to sue a merchant for metallic poisoning. That was just how merchants' advertising worked; everybody understood how it was.

"How much? How many mechas do you have? We Rhodes Kingdom will buy them all!"

"You dare to try stealing them from us, San Antonio? Give them all to us! We'll trade high-quality gold for them."

"…So what if we steal them?!! You think you're the only ones with money? Our Kasolan has plenty of money, too! Why don't you try declaring war against us? As long as you can defeat all fifteen of our countries, we'll surrender them to you."

Even if none of them truly saw the military potential in these mechas, just the idea of allowing ordinary people to possess Silver-ranked combat strength was a temptation that no human ruler would be able to resist. Judging from how these emissaries seemed as if they were about to start fighting over the mechas, perhaps they had all

received direct orders from their rulers that they would be forced to carry out.

It would seem that leaking information on the mechas I was planning to sell beforehand was the correct decision. In fact, even the Holy Church was tempted and sent out their professional negotiator.

"May the Holy Light watch over you. We can feel that Your Highness still has the faint power of Holy Light, so it's fortunate that the mundane and busy affairs of the world haven't obstructed your search for the path of Holy Light. May the justice of knights forever watch over you."

Alright, it looked like even the Holy Church was playing this game. If it was someone else, they probably wouldn't understand these words, but this type of thing was a daily occurrence for me in the past. This was what he really meant:

"Hey, brat, we're all members of the Holy Light, so don't jack up the prices too much. Otherwise, if you do, be careful that our big boss the God of Holy Light will have a reckoning with you."

"Even so, I've already begun following the path of Law. I hope that the Holy Light will watch over you as well, even in the darkest and blackest of nights, so that it can illuminate the path before you. (Translation: You pauper! My boss is now Wumianzhe, so if you don't have money, get out of here, and go back to where you came from.)"

"Ah, my young brother who follows both the path of Holy Light and the path of Law… (Translation: You fool! Your magnanimous stinginess and bravery in shooting yourself in the foot like this have caused me to be scared into receiving a message from the God of Holy Light…)"

Alright, it was nostalgic to meet someone who understood these code words, and I actually got interested in the process, as we kept speaking in code and began negotiating.

While I was having fun chatting with this Holy Knight negotiator in code, everyone else had utterly confused expressions—even my teacher, who had the nickname of the "Strongest Holy Knight." After all, Estrada had zero experience with the ceremonial speech required for diplomacy, and in their eyes, we kept respectfully talking to each other endlessly in circles with no meaningful content whatsoever. In truth, we had been negotiating for over ten rounds back and forth already.

By now, the "Sith #0" was far off into the distance, and no price was set for its sale yet, but I had already reached my goal. This was only a display, and how could I sell it so easily… I still needed time to add in the missing parts and make it really working! You over there, hurry up and pick up and reinstall its left arm that fell off! It'll be really bad if someone sees that!

"There are only two Sith mechas in total, and the other one is still currently under construction. In one month's time, both of them will be auctioned, while the next batch will have to wait until at least one year later. If someone buys both of them at once during the auction, we'll even throw in the method for how to create the Secret Silver Spirit Swords. We accept gold, and God Equipment is fine as well for payment."

The additional throw-in was far more valuable than the mechas itself, but in order to successfully purchase both mechas at an auction, the amount to be paid would have to at the very least be more than twice the upper limits of what other countries were willing to pay. This method of selling was filled with obvious greed, but it also gave everyone plenty of time to obtain permission from their rulers and prepare as much funds as possible. Judging by how all the emissaries had grim and hostile expressions towards each other, they would probably be unable to come to a secret agreement regarding the price amongst themselves, and I would profit greatly this time.

As for why I was willing to give away the method to create the Secret Silver Spirit Swords? Actually, spreading magical engineering technology was one of my important strategic goals to begin with. In the future that I could foresee, all the human kingdoms would have to stand united, and I couldn't have them being too much of a burden.

Anyways, it would likely spread sooner or later; spreading this technology to the entire world earlier would be even better if I could profit at the same time.

Not only that, but our ability to perform research was limited in personnel and resources. Compared to guarding the treasure trove and starving to death, it was better to sell this off and obtain seeds that could be harvested in the future and improve the overall strength of humans.

As for whether or not I left backdoors and Trojan Horses that were capable of stealing the other side's technology as well… This question was a pointless one, as in that original world of mine, weren't there always backdoors and additional add-ons in all the top-level applications and software?

Of course, in order to not make them so tempted that they would attempt to try taking my mechas by force rather than purchasing them, the next one up would be the most expensive product for sale of all. It would be the trump card to suppress anyone with such thoughts.

"Mizar, it's time for your appearance."

Note:

1. League of Legends reference!

Chapter 251
Auction

The military parade was at its climax, and the appetizers had already been served—it was only natural that now would be the main course.

The dragonbone airship pierced through the clouds in the air. As it arrived, it was accompanied with a pitch-black mist and the shock of the members of the audience.

What surrounded this gigantic dragonbone airship weren't clouds but the pure magic power of death. Unlike the Borealis, which was purely constructed of metals on the surface, its dragonbone and the power of death gathered in the black mist was the best evidence of its identity—an Undead Battleship.

Its sails were constructed with skeletal bone bodies and pitch-black magic, and they were both important characteristics of Undead Battleships and Soul Battleships.

Compared to the Borealis, which had its own system and only used an undead system to reinforce and control it, the Mizar used a similar design and technology. Undead magic would simply replace any places where engineering and technology standards weren't up to par.

There weren't enough specialized alloys that were specially suitable for floating airships? Let's just use dragonbone instead, which was sturdy, long-lasting, and an excellent medium for undead magic. Although its outer appearance was a little scary, wasn't all this white dragonbone beautiful in its own special way…? However, I knew that most mortals wouldn't appreciate it like I did.

Not enough resources to construct the mana pools and mage towers of a floating battleship? Actually, ghost towers and soul towers weren't bad either; it was just that there were a few too many souls. All the mana produced would be for undead magic, and it would be a fatal amount of undead energy for any living person… Yet since the Mizar ran off of undead magic and living personnel were unusable, let's just use undead personnel, instead.

The energy sources let off black smoke and fire? Polluting even the skies that they

passed by? That was correct—why would an undead magic powered airship produce any other color? As for the soul mast on the deck and the shades blowing at the soul mast… it was all too normal—that was the typical method an undead battleship would use to increase its speed.

It naturally had its own corrosive domain and aura of fear? It was an undead battleship made of dragonbone to begin with; activating these two racial talents was perfectly normal. As it didn't possess a draconic aura, the Mizar could be considered to be a little lacking, but they were positive effects that were useful on the battlefield.

Perhaps, in the eyes of normal people, the only difference between the Mizar and a certain legendary ghost ship on the seas was that the Mizar was made of higher-quality materials and was able to fly. [1] 1

Thanks to a certain person's terrible hobbies, the completed form of the Mizar resembled a tremendous flying bone dragon. Its vicious appearance was especially enhanced, making it appear to be the personal battleship of some demon king.

At this moment, this several-hundred-meter-long dragonbone airship covered the sky, and brought a dark wind with it. Dark clouds gathered, and when it fully appeared in front of everyone, it brought both fear and shock.

The visitors from the Holy Church had the biggest reactions. They had always viewed the undead as their mortal enemies, so the ones equipped with swords instantly drew them, while the priests raised their staves and prepared Divine Arts. Even Estrada himself put his hand on his mace and seemed to be considering an attack.

"This is the Borealis squad, second battleship: Mizar. Everyone already knows the #1 battleship Borealis already, but our industrial level is rather low in East Mist, which is why we had to use some small tricks to make up for what we lacked."

“…You evil undead mages…”

One Holy Knight couldn't bear it anymore and angrily started shouting but was suppressed by his comrades. This was obviously no time for them to turn on me, but all the priests and Holy Knights had unpleasant expressions. This was an evil representation of undead magic and was obviously beyond the limits of their tolerance.

In fact, if it wasn't for the Crimeless City repeatedly "emphasizing" that these high-

level undead were harmless, and also for Cardinal Soros repeatedly emphasizing the importance of what they were here to accomplish, a conflict—or even all-out battle—would have erupted.

"Hmph."

But this was exactly the effect I wanted. I had long since viewed the Holy Church with displeasure, and since it wasn't convenient to fight with them out in the open, let's just ignore them for now.

There was only one Borealis, and due to certain rumors that the origin of the Borealis wasn't proper, no country would conduct business with us regarding battleships; they would all hesitate. But don't look at how repulsed they all seemed to be on the surface after I displayed the Mizar; as long as I truly proved that we had the ability to produce medium to large airships, the orders would come to us on their own.

"Although we still haven't mastered the techniques to create large-scale airships, and must use some replacement materials, we've already mastered small-scale airships. Everyone, take a look. Those snow-white painted small airships are our newest 'Snow Eagle' cannon airships."

The Mizar opened up its hatch to reveal a squadron of new Snow Eagle cannon airships that flew out from within. They flew circles in the skies, which caused various exclamations.

They had been painted snow-white, and only their heads were painted with the sign of a white eagle.

We were pressed for time and we also lacked technicians, so we were unable to change the technology. The only difference of the Snow Eagle cannon airships from the Auland Vulture ambush airships was probably the color of the paint on the outer shell. The most pitiful part of all was that I had originally wanted to name them "Snowstorm" cannon airships, but it was rejected because "your name sounds like it will bring a curse of catastrophic bad luck."

"The Snow Eagle cannon airship typically requires four people to operate: a pilot, a cannoneer, a commander, and a messenger. This number can be adjusted based on the situation; for example, an extra cannoneer or a mage can be added, and each Snow Eagle cannon airship can maintain combat for sixteen hours. At this auction, we shall

sell two Snow Eagle cannon airships. Afterwards, we'll still accept orders, but as we still need to obtain various rare materials, not only will we require that you pay seventy percent upfront, delivery may be somewhat delayed."

Not only would delivery be somewhat delayed, but we would have to take care of numerous requirements first, such as obtaining materials and upgrading the industrial level to be able to mass produce them. Plus, we had to fill our own needs and the Mist Alliance member countries' orders first, so even if everything was super successful, the first batch of cannon airships wouldn't be shipped out to other countries for at least one or two years. And, by that time, all the airships I needed for my Borealis squadron would be complete.

As for requiring seventy percent upfront… considering that these prices were inflated even further because this was an auction, that would be no small number. If we obtained more than ten countries' orders at once, even if we didn't do anything at all for the entirety of next year, we wouldn't have to worry about not having enough money to supply food for East Mist for the next several years.

However, despite the fact that everyone was getting passionate about this, someone surprisingly expressed their dissatisfaction directly.

"Hmph! What's so incredible about that? Isn't it merely the ability to fly? In front of we Holy Blade Knights, what do those puny airships matter?"

Aivla had an immensely dissatisfied expression; she made it seem like floating battleships were nothing before her at all. However, I knew that what she said was indeed the truth. The Holy Blade Knights had a special squadron that consisted of solely Holy Knights with the bloodline of angels.

In front of high-level Holy Knights with the ability to fly, these small airships indeed didn't amount to much. Even if I estimated conservatively, these Snow Eagle cannon airships would be nothing more than floating targets for any Holy Knights at Saint rank or above.

However, untimely bragging would always attract lots of enmity. I didn't pay any heed to Aivla, while everyone else was already glaring at the idiot that she was. They didn't say it out loud, but what they were thinking was obvious: "You members of the Holy Church have a huge organization and so many strong members, so you don't think floating battleships are important. But that doesn't mean everyone else can be like

you."

Aivla seemed like she still wanted to say something else, but the sudden huge shadows that descended from the skies shut her up. Or, more accurately, perhaps I should say that she was scared to the point that she couldn't even close her mouth anymore.

Those shadows belonged to thirteen huge dragons; they consisted of eight red and five black dragons. Although most of them were rather young dragons that lacked experience, dragon knights were an exceedingly rare job class in this current generation. Many dragons acting together was a rare sight in the past several hundred years, and this definitely shocked the world.

"I have a pretty good relationship with the new Dragon Queen of the Underground World, so she rented out some of her dragons to me. Although the rent is unbelievably expensive, it's indeed an excellent combination with our aerial battleship. Don't you agree?"

This was a naked display of our military might. No matter how strong your angel bloodline Holy Knights are, could they compete with dragons? Only with Elder Dragons protecting these large airships would they be able to operate at full power, and the reverse was true as well. With such an excellent platform like a huge aerial battleship backing them up, the dragons would be able to be at their mightiest as well.

On the surface, the various gem dragons and colored dragons typically each had their own individual territories and very little contact between themselves. They had basically no mortal enemies, and "dragonslayer heroes" were typically just a synonym for "idiots." Only in the Underground World where high-ranked strength was so common did dragons form a large family and support system for themselves, which was how Little Red had such strong power to command them.

Unlike the Underground World, where they would be limited in their ability to fly around, these huge dragons could instantly vanish in a flash on the surface. Unless they were willing to risk ambush attacks on their capital once every two or three days, even the human mega-empires wouldn't dare to make an enemy out of a dragon.

Of course, even if they were only young dragons, making dragons listen to a human's orders was doubtlessly "an insult to dragon pride." Even though Little Red was now the Dragon Queen, she had spent so much effort and compromises on my behalf in order to accomplish my request, successfully allowing me to "rent" them.

And, it was precisely the appearance of the dragons that made all those who intended to obtain our products via either force or other means to cancel their plans.

“…Is this the legendary Roland? He actually has a connection to the Dragon Queen, and can even get dragons to listen to his orders? It would seem that applying pressure or threatening him won't be able to succeed."

In order to be a successful arms merchant, apart from the ability to obtain excellent products, what was more important was enough power backing the merchant up so that they would not have to fear underhanded means.

Of course, when using force or threats wouldn't help them obtain what they wanted, they would naturally have to pay up in gold and silver.

Perhaps they wouldn't be able to analyze any useful technology by just obtaining one small airship, but the long-term abilities to scout or ferry important personages were quite valuable and difficult to obtain from a strategic standpoint.

The dragons were merely the background to the Snow Eagle cannon airships' performance, but everyone's faces had paled. Even under the Dragon Queen's command, the prideful dragons weren't very obedient. They were quite displeased at how they had to perform in front of ordinary humans and be stared at by everyone, so they merely circled around twice before they left.

However, everyone was already in a hubbub.

"Can you clarify just how long of a delay there will be in delivering goods? Can they be delivered within three years? Do you take pre-order payments right now?"

"Considering the relationship between our countries, could you give us extra orders? We can give your country the absolute best prices on all the materials that you need."

"Your Highness, this seems like it has a small conflict with our private agreement. If you're in need of gold, the Auland Empire can…”

Many advantageous conditions were set in front of me. It seemed that this bait was sufficient enough that they were willing to pay anything in order to purchase an aerial battleship.

“…Could I ask if you accept even higher-level orders? Such as for that Mizar up above.

San Antonio is willing to trade for it with equal-level technology…”

There were even those that had their sights set on the Mizar. However, this was obviously beyond a certain group of people's ability to handle.

"Athlod! You dare to get involved with undead magic!?"

This time, Cardinal Soros was the one who roared out in anger. However, San Antonio was a country that had already obtained firsthand information on the Borealis' capabilities at Red Maple Castle. How could they back off so easily from the chance to obtain a national treasure level weapon simply because of pressure from a cardinal?

"Cardinal Soros, this is just a misunderstanding. We simply seek to purchase large-scale aerial battleships. Since you seem to object, we shall temporarily set this matter aside."

Although it seemed that Athlod had given up on the surface and that he was obviously preventing a clash with Cardinal Soros, judging by that passion burning in Athlod's eyes, he wasn't even slightly intending on giving up. He probably simply intended to not have a conflict with Cardinal Soros in the open, and would contact me again secretly.

Of course, the higher-ups of the Holy Church also saw through the fact that various countries' representatives were only paying them lip service. But what could they do about it? Not interfering in other countries' domestic affairs was one of the most basic rules of all the Gods' churches, yet simply watching undead technology spread like this was nothing but an insult to the teachings of the Holy Light.

However, since even the True God Wumianzhe had recognized the right of these undead to be here, they couldn't possibly use this excuse to start a conflict.

"Roland! Your lies to me before were an insult against my personal honor! In order to protect my personal honor, I challenge you to a duel! If you lose, you have to give up spreading these evil things."

The white-winged angel half-blood Aivla stood up and intended on using my previous making a fool out of her as an excuse to challenge me to a duel. Amongst the nobles, these types of duels for various mysteriously small issues over honor were quite common, and anyone that didn't accept would be looked down upon. However, I merely shrugged and smiled as I looked back down at everyone below the stage.

Although I did this action with no obvious fireworks, "intentional ignoring" was always even more insulting than condescension. What I didn't say out loud was quite obvious to everyone, and the spectators around us were already beginning to secretly laugh.

"Who do you think you are? You have the right to challenge me?"

"I…"

Aivla was angered to the point that her entire face reddened, and was about to explode on the spot when Estrada stopped her with a wry smile. The "Strongest Holy Knight" lifted his mace which was surrounded by Holy Light.

"Roland, I should be more than enough for you. Perhaps today is a good day to clear out what we owe each other. But, I will only challenge you to a duel between teacher and student, not a battle to the death. If you lose, please promise to abandon selling undead airships. This is too unacceptable, too evil."

Without realizing it, Aivla had helped him out greatly. I had been hiding from him all these days, and today was our first meeting since he arrived. There were so many things that needed to be discussed.

And, if it wasn't for this somewhat hot-tempered and rash female Holy Knight, he wouldn't be able to ask for a duel so conveniently. For Estrada, the spreading of undead technology was actually something insignificant, and protecting the honor of the Holy Church was just an aside for him. Using this chance to uncover Roland's ace cards and motive was most important.

"Undead are considered evil? Who made that rule? The God of Holy Light? Or you yourselves, the Holy Church?!"

Note:

1. Although I'm not sure, this may be a reference to the Flying Dutchman.

Chapter 252
Holy Light?

For the teachings of the Holy Light and the Holy Church to have been successful, it was only natural for them to have their good points as well. The purest light was also a representation of the purest Order.

The most original teachings of the Holy Light were to illuminate the dark world with Holy Light and protect people by dispelling the darkness and those corrupted by Chaos.

If Chaos was a power that distorted Order, then the Holy Light was the power to erase the distortion and return it to the void. That's right—not to undistort but to completely destroy it.

I had once fervently believed in the Holy Light as well, believing that it was capable of saving everything, believing the teachings of the Holy Light that Order would finally defeat Chaos.

The Holy Church treated everyone as either allies or enemies, viewing the world as black and white. This was quite refreshing and enjoyable for its believers, but only seeing the world this way wasn't enough…

The Goddess of Creation Eich had two daughters that inherited her powers of creation, but those powers were divided into Order and Chaos. That already explained everything—both Order and Chaos were the foundational pillars of the world of Eich, and neither could be without the other.

"If the distorted Order is also a necessary part of this world, with orderly Order and chaotic Chaos both being foundational pillars of this world, wiping out some Chaos is probably no different from removing a spoonful of water from the ocean. It will only make the wave that comes in to replenish what was lost even more vicious. Perhaps this is the true reason why the Holy War will never end."

A world without Chaos was a world that would seem heavy and dead. This world would lack competition, elements of chance, or any desire for self-improvement,

which meant it would lack the ability to evolve and change. And a world without Order where every factor and choice became random was probably one where nobody would be able to survive in. After all, even the wild beasts in the forests had their own laws of the jungle that they lived by.

Order had Chaos among it, and Chaos had Order as well. Even the purest representatives of Chaos, the demons, obeyed the concept of ranks among them, and the Order side's purest representatives, the angels, who were often made fun of as outdated artifacts, had their own desires and goals as well.

Purely using violence against violence might have an effect, but the prerequisite was to be able to completely suppress the loser or even destroy the loser entirely. And, in this world, that was obviously impossible.

Yep, in my eyes, the Holy Light was nothing more than a type of violence: "If you don't obey my commands, I shall destroy you." What could this be other than violence?

So that was why even though I still believed in the original intentions of the Holy Light, I also spat upon it as I used it. I merely treated it as a useful tool, just like how I used elemental magic or undead magic.

"Undead are considered evil? Who made that rule? The God of Holy Light? Or you yourselves, the Holy Church?! Ha! Foolish! From the very start, the Holy Light and the God of Holy Light were in the wrong."

My voice wasn't loud, nor was I using a sarcastic tone. I was merely stating the truth as I saw it, but in the eyes of any Holy Light believer, I was doubting and desecrating the nature of Holy Light, which made me a heretic among heretics.

"Roland! You dare!"

Estrada was no longer able to tolerate this as his angry roar caused a gust of wind that blew away the clouds, along with a blinding pillar of light that reached the skies. His Holy Light Domain was now taking form and suppressing the entire area, with the land itself trembling in fear at Estrada's anger. Perhaps Estrada was indeed the strongest user of Holy Light in the world.

In my current condition, if I fought with Estrada who was incredibly furious… I would probably be defeated by a single swing of his mace.

However, I laughed. I laughed out loud, as if there was something hilarious. After all, even if he was ridiculously strong, that wouldn't change the fact that he was a fool.

"This is so funny. Just what generation is it already!? Why are you so foolish? That's why you've been a confused and pitiful fool for your entire life, only being ordered about by others and watching so many tragedies occur. Right now, you probably view me as a heretic who abandoned the Holy Light. In that case, my venerable teacher, could I ask you what this is in my hands?"

On my index finger was a golden glow that was as light as a firefly's. It whirled around my fingers, but only those who truly understood the teachings of the Holy Light would be able to recognize that this was the purest Holy Light of all, a power that only those who had received the most favored blessings of the Holy Light could use.

All their eyes were filled with disbelief. How could this heretic, who said something so blasphemous, still be able to use the Holy Light? Not to mention the highest-quality Holy Light?

"I was once the Holy Light's Son, the Son of Light…"

I activated my War Angel bloodline, opening up a pair of snow-white wings, and showing a divine side of me in front of everyone. With the golden Holy Light of angels covering me, another pillar of light belonging to me added itself to the sky.

Perhaps it was much smaller than Estrada's pillar of light, but if we compared the pillars of light's power to pierce through darkness and illuminate the land, Estrada's light was nothing more than a slightly strong light bulb in front of this true Holy Light.

The one with the biggest reaction was actually that little half-angel, Aivla. She was trembling all over, and could only give in to her instinct and kneel in front of me.

Her angel bloodline kept continuously telling her that the man in front of her was using the purest Holy Light and was a high-ranked angel many ranks above her. The angels were the representation of Order and were the species that viewed rank as more important than anyone. In front of me, who had transformed into an ancient War Angel, she could only submit and be humble.

"…I once believed that the light would dispel the darkness. However, I soon found out that it wasn't enough. Light and shadow would forever be twins, and pure light would never be able to destroy the shadow. Rather, it's the opposite: pure light will actually

create even purer darkness. So, I made my choice…"

A pitch-black flame was now burning on my left hand. No, it wasn't actually burning; all the flames were actually the crying of souls. That was the purest power of death magic.

"Ha! Don't you always say that Holy Light and Chaos are mortal enemies? Then, how do you explain the fact that a heretic like me can simultaneously use the powers of Holy Light and death magic? Just try explaining it with your teachings of Holy Light, and allow me to hear just what drivel your God of Holy Light made up!"

All the Holy Light job class members had disbelief on their faces—it was as if the very sky had collapsed. According to their common sense and their belief system, destroying Chaos was the natural job of the Holy Light, and Holy Light and the undead were incompatible. The moment they came into contact, there would be a need to be a battle to the death, but this War Angel before them was simultaneously using the powers of Holy Light and death magic.

"Aivla, persist! Don't think too much into it, and maintain your sense of self! You're a child of the Holy Light!"

Cardinal Soros' angry roar attracted my attention. The kneeling white-winged half-angel Aivla was soaked in sweat, and the tips of her wings were actually beginning to blacken.

"Ha! Child, are you that afraid of knowing the truth? Your belief is actually shaken, and you're starting to become a fallen angel. Hehehe, a fallen angel! That's a really rare species. In that case, allow me to help firm your resolution. Come, take a look, child. This is the truth that the Gods don't dare to tell you."

I laughed maniacally as I combined the purest Holy Light with the flames of death. Estrada had already guessed that something was happening and finally took action. He was unable to simply watch all this unfold before him because he had lived through too many tragedies already.

"ROLAND!"

Clang!

His mace that was ignited with holy flames was blocked by a familiar silver Roland

Sacred Sword. It was only that this time, the sword wielder was no longer me, but instead a face that greatly resembled mine. It even had a similarly devilish smile, but with more innocence and the gentleness that females would have.

At this moment, Estrada felt like he had returned to the past, when a young and innocent boy who seemed like he wasn't afraid of anything, always smiling ever so similarly, would call him "teacher" and ask him about the teachings of the Holy Light.

"Brother Roland's teacher, please don't interrupt Brother Roland. He only wishes to show you the hidden truth. If you aren't afraid of the truth, then watch him."

Estrada didn't take action, but it wasn't because of Reyne's clumsy attempt at convincing him. Instead, the faintly opened dimensional portal behind Reyne gave him a tremendous amount of pressure. He sensed the power of a Divine Sin that even the Gods would fear, and he had no confidence that he would easily be able to break past.

With Estrada's slight delay, my task was at its end. I melded the pitch-black flame with the golden light, but the explosive collision that everyone expected didn't occur.

Instead, the pitch-black flame and golden light combined, and they kept interacting with each other and complementing each other, until…

"Ahhh!"

Aivla didn't even wait to see the result. The purer someone was, the easier they would be tainted. She floated in midair and large amounts of her white feathers began to turn black. Just as how the Holy Light could only destroy the undead and demons, it was unable to turn the undead or demons back. She had already begun the process of becoming fallen, so it was destined that she would be unable to stop.

"Look, this is the truth."

The black and golden colors had dissolved already, and what remained was only pure white. When the colors finished disappearing, what remained in my hand was only a white dove.

Although it was only about one-tenth the size of a real dove, and although it was so weak that it was unable to fly, it was already the best evidence—it was alive!

From emptiness to existence, the artificial creation of life was the life goal of countless

alchemists and mages. However, not a single individual had ever made any discoveries in this field. After all, this was within the domain of the Gods, and not just any God—it belonged to the domain that only the Goddess of Creation could achieve!

"Why did the Goddess of Creation's daughters separately inherit the powers of Order and Chaos? That's because only the two powers combined can make the power of Creation. The light is supposed to destroy the darkness? Haha! How much longer will you tell such a ridiculous lie? As long as there is light, there will be darkness, and light and darkness need each other to exist. Pure darkness can transform into light as well, while the end of light can transform into darkness… Take a look! Isn't the evidence right in front of your eyes?"

The black-winged fallen angel looked at me coldly, without a shred of emotion within her now black eyes. The pure Holy Light within her had already transformed into pure darkness, so there was no better evidence than this.

"Estrada! As the strongest wielder of Holy Light, don't tell me that you've never noticed anything! Do you dare to swear in the name of the Holy Light that you've never noticed the truth at all? Perhaps you've already discovered some clues more than three hundred years ago. You were just forcing yourself to avoid the truth!"

"I…"

This strongest fool and coward hesitated and didn't dare to say anything, but his hesitation was already a tacit admittance that caused a fearsome chain reaction.

"If you don't dare, I do! I, Roland Mist, swear in the name of the Holy Light, that the Holy Light can never completely destroy Chaos. Holy Light can only cause new Chaos to be born and make the Holy War fiercer and fiercer. If anything about what I say is false, may I be stripped of the powers of Holy Light!"

I made that oath using the powers of Holy Light in front of everyone, but my pillar of Holy Light still remained around me. This was doubtlessly the best evidence of the veracity of my words.

"Ahhh!"

There were numerous Holy Light job class members that were shouting pitifully. One of the teachings of the Holy Light was that "those who waver in their beliefs will lose the powers of the Holy Light." And, in just an instant, more than twenty Holy Light job

class members lost their powers, including every single one of the young ones. More than half of the entire envoy group became former Holy Knights and former priests. Only the oldest ones among them that had cultivated for over one hundred years were able to maintain their faiths.

"This incident today can never be revealed! Otherwise, it'll enormously shake the foundations of the entire Holy Church. Estrada, kill everyone here!"

When faced with the brink, Cardinal Soros finally tore off his gentle kindly mask that he preferred to use in front of everyone. He was extremely decisive about this. Everyone here had witnessed an angel becoming fallen, and all these countries' envoys had also witnessed the Divine Miracle of creation using Order and Chaos. He couldn't allow a single person here to live.

"Estrada! Do you know just what will happen if word of this gets out!?"

The Holy Church was always used to claiming themselves to be the protectors of Order and humanity. If this spread out, even the foundations of the Holy Church and the teachings of the Holy Light would be shaken. In Cardinal Soros' mind, Estrada was someone peerless who would easily be able to slaughter everybody here. He was also continually praying to the God of Holy Light, but in this sanctuary of the Law God, how could he possibly get through?

When he saw that Estrada did not move for quite a while, Soros became anxious. Finally, that seemingly young ancient Holy Knight lifted his head, but his face was now unrecognizable. Estrada now had gray-white hair, and a face filled with wrinkles. He had instantly aged several decades in appearance.

"I have no guarantee of winning here. In fact, I might not even be able to take on this young princess. I'm unable to do it, nor do I want to do it anymore."

Soros who had turned utterly pale turned around to leave. However, I blocked him.

"Hey—hey—hey! Do you want to leave so easily? At the very least, you should complete your mission here. You should tell me the divine message from the God of Holy Light, as I think he probably has a message for me. Is this how you run errands for your God?"

Cardinal Soros would have killed me right on the spot via glaring if he could, but he had to complete his God's task, even though he didn't want to see the person before

him for another second. He could only gnash his teeth as he told me the divine message from the God of Holy Light.

"'I hope to ally with you against the Chaos. After the Holy War, we shall become the twin pillars of Order.' Are you satisfied now!? Saint Roland!"

I understood immediately. This divine message was doubtlessly an alliance invitation to the Law God from the God of Holy Light who had discovered the truth about Wumianzhe. As for that so-called promise to become the twin pillars of Order after the Holy War, it was enough just to hear it, but if I really believed it, I would be a huge fool. Also, that Saint of Holy Light title was just an appetizer for the alliance, but although I knew all this, others wouldn't.

The moment that Cardinal Soros said this, all the other countries' envoys that had just escaped death by Estrada's hands were scared once more. The content of this divine message was shocking enough to everyone, but that tone of the divine message, which sounded like it was between equals, was even scarier to them.

"This force of a divine message, and this tone—is Roland actually an existence equal to the God of Holy Light? The God of Holy Light is actually requesting an alliance with Roland and will become the twin pillars of Order together with him? Is Roland's power so strong that the God of Holy Light has to compromise to such a degree?"

Many thoughts flashed through everyone's minds. Once this news spread, everyone was going to have to reassess this wintry northern country and its prince.

As for me, I nodded in satisfaction.

"Yep, sounds sincere to me. I agree to this alliance. Send a message for me to the God of Holy Light: I, Roland, agree to your alliance. As for that Saint of Holy Light title? Heh heh, you can keep it and have fun for yourselves. Hahaha! In that case, please take good care of me in the future, my dear allies!"

I took one final glance at Soros' expression which was filled with a mix of extreme rage, fear and anxiety, and continued laughing out loudly as I took my leave.

I had received a plentiful harvest already. Besides, after forcefully using the powers of my "Frigidwinter Earth" to create life, I would have collapsed there on the spot if I didn't leave soon.

After that crazed Prince Roland left, what remained in Soros' eyes were nothing but tatters.

All the other countries' envoys left so quickly that you would think they were avoiding the plague. When Soros looked around, only his group was around him, and all the former Holy Light job class members who had lost their powers were still collapsed on the ground in despair. Estrada, who had aged several decades, had his head lowered and was sighing helplessly, and fallen angel Aivla, who nobody knew what she was thinking, had already left. As Soros thought about the frightful future and tempest that awaited him, the elderly cardinal could only helplessly collapse on the ground as well.

Although Roland had agreed to the alliance, he still didn't know if his mission was considered a success or a failure. But there was one thing that he knew for sure.

"It's over! It's all over! Everything is over!"

Chapter 253
Memorial Tablets

Henceforth, the God of Law and the God of Holy Light were allies; congratulations, felicitations, congratulations… *fine* , at the very least we were quite happy with the results. Whatever the Holy Church thought wasn't important to us.

What the Holy Church thought was unimportant—the important part was what the God of Holy Light intended to do…

From the very start, it had been part of my overall plan to use the power of Law to replace the power of Holy Light. It would obviously be necessary to challenge the old leader for a new God to rise above the rest. Or else how would the rest of the pack admit a new leader?

Even if it was true that the God of Holy Light had lost his sense of self, he would still follow basic logical reasoning and come to the conclusion that the power of Law was a future enemy. But if he and Law were destined to become future enemies to begin with, why would he still want to be allies?

It was because we were at the onset of the Holy War. It was time to ally together against greater enemies.

Yes. With the arrival of the Holy War, the True Gods and the churches of the Order Faction had to band together. The God of Holy Light was the leader of the Order Gods and had to set an example for the rest, else he wouldn't be able to lead by example.

"Since we can't be enemies for the time being, let's temporarily become allies."

The God of Holy Light had nothing more than the thinking capacity of a machine; he could only process things with inflexible logic. He would never be able to spout anything like "In order to defeat the enemy, we must first settle our internal differences." In that case, he would definitely request to ally with the new Order God Wumianzhe to deal with him. I had expected this from the beginning itself.

As for whether or not we'd turn on each other after the Holy War? Heh heh, weren't

things obvious? If we lost the Holy War, there'd be no more future. But if we won, whoever remained would obviously be of the strongest, and the God most supported would become the new leader of the Order Gods. All alliances and agreements would mean nothing more than rubbish.

"Allies? Of course we'll agree. Why wouldn't we agree? If we're as intimate as family, we'd call them allies, and even if we stab each other in the back we'd still call them allies. And, of course, we're destined to become the latter."

No matter what, the Holy Church was the main church of human society. When dealing with a powerful external enemy, it was practically set in stone that the largest and strongest faction would end up as cannon fodder—er—the foundation. As the God of Holy Light had obtained his position and power in the previous Holy War, for him to lose it in this one could be only considered normal.

Actually, those with secret ambitions weren't limited to only the us with the power of Law. All the Guardian Gods of the various races, the new War Gods, Smithing Gods, Merchant Gods, Luck Gods and so on—wouldn't they be ambitious as well?

The God of Holy Light was far too powerful. He enjoyed more than half of all the faith and territory of the Order Faction combined. In a way, he had become the "biggest enemy" of both the factions. In such a situation, if he declared war against any of the Order Gods, he would definitely set off a huge wave.

"The twin pillars of Order? I'd be such a fool if I really believed that."

And that was why I was over ninety percent confident that no matter how furious the Holy Church was with me, the God of Holy Light would still send a divine message and suppress them in the end. After all, we were now allies, and until the Holy War ended and the God of Holy Light truly declared war against us, they would have to restrain themselves… Heh heh! How hilarious for the living to be controlled by a Divine Concept that had lost its own sense of self. They even treated the Holy Light as the highest-level existence.

Even if something went wrong with the God of Holy Light, and he disregarded any consequences and declared us to be heretics, I, of course, had a backup plan. Even if that meant we would completely turn on each other.

However, based on historical events, I believed that no matter how much they were

willing to sacrifice, they would still not be able to conquer the Northlands. After all, even last time, the armies of the Holy Church had not obtained victory in the end. They had to also consider the consequences of forcing me to the very brink. Another Yongye Calamity would be quite possible.

Yet yesterday afternoon, I heard a piece of news that led me to completely abandon the possibility that the Holy Church would turn on me.

"The Bardi Empire has begun to exile the Holy Church and Holy Light job class members from within its borders? Haha! I don't know whether I should be angry or happy."

Judging by the information I had on hand, the Bardi Empire possessed a major problem.

However, the most anxious would probably be the Holy Church. Any single human mega-empire was a foundational pillar of human society. Even if they lost the entire Northlands, which was so small to begin with, it would be an insignificant loss. At the very least, the Bardi Empire would become the Holy Church's focus for the time being.

Of course, if word of the conversation between me and the Holy Church envoy group spread, it would definitely shake the very foundation of the Holy Church and might even cause the formation of internal factions, such as an Orthodox Sect or a Protestant Sect. It was just like how the young Holy Knights lost their powers when I showed them the truth. The younger they were, the more easily their faith would be shaken and the more of an impact they would receive… Perhaps I should try expanding my Nanxiang Law Schools across all the countries and add more classes to help Holy Knights change their job to Knights of Justice. Yep, for the first batch of students, let's recruit those unfortunate youngsters.

For a top-level company to have a massive internal problem with its system and morale, the happiest would be another company in the same line of business. It would be unavoidable for there to be a massive loss of elite members, with many jumping ship to other companies… Yet to prevent a declaration of war before the commencement of the Holy War, I might as well take things slow.

Perhaps the most unfortunate of all was the envoy group that the Holy Church had sent me. As the leader of the envoy group, Cardinal Soros was sure to shoulder the blame for such a massive misstep.

Upon returning, it would be practically impossible for him to ever be promoted; it would be considered the lightest punishment possible if he would never be assigned to anything of importance. I felt that there was a high probability that he would be assigned to copy records in the archives for the rest of his life.

If rumors were slow poison, then the fact that Aivla had become a fallen angel could be considered as the most critical damage that he would be unable to not take responsibility for. The Holy Church particularly viewed half-blood angels as valuable, not to mention that Aivla was a well-known Holy Knight above the Legend rank. In addition, she was young and attractive; she was someone with both beauty and power. Naturally, she became one of the living advertisements and spokespersons for the Holy Church.

In past advertisements, Aivla was praised as an epic hero. It was possible for ordinary people to not be aware of Estrada, but everybody knew who "Red-Winged Griffin" Aivla was. After all, she was one of the most famous Holy Knights of the current generation. Her heroic deeds were long since made into stories and sung by bards, having spread everywhere.

Yet the higher one was regarded as, the worse the fall would be. The purer and holier her image as a holy half-angel, the larger the negative influence on the Holy Church after she became fallen.

And, right now, the Holy Church's huge problem had become a small problem of my own.

"Why are you following me around?"

"…I have nowhere to go."

Becoming fallen was the same as becoming demonized; although one's species and power would undergo a change, it wasn't brainwashing. One's memories would be perfectly preserved, and it was only natural for one to remain the same as they were before.

The current Aivla seemed to have less of a thorny aura, and she no longer looked at me with enmity. It was obvious that her personality and powers had vastly changed, but she was still that stubborn female knight.

Looking at this black-winged fallen angel who was filled with confusion and was

unrecognizable as her former self, I didn't know what to say, either.

Ever since she had believed my words so easily and even revealed a bunch of secrets to me on that day, I knew that she was probably the same type as Diana: an idiot who fought for the sake of her own beliefs. For these muscleheads, who added all their bonus points to Strength and Constitution, it was perfectly understandable that their Intelligence would be a little low.

At least she wasn't foolish to the extreme. She knew that she had become a living stain upon the Holy Church. However, as long as she didn't commit any crimes, even a fallen angel would receive equal protection by the Crimeless City. The members of the Holy Church would likely be unable to do anything to her for the time being. Yet the moment she left, she would be met with nothing but assassination attempts.

Having her leave together with the members of the Holy Church would be no different from sending her off to be executed. It was possible that even Estrada would personally deal with her immediately if she left this city. It would be a matter of time before she died.

Aivla, too, had a bitter expression on her face. It had only been less than a day since she lost her faith and became fallen, and her heart was probably in utter chaos. She followed me only because she instinctively wanted someone to rely on.

I had a headache. Although this fallen angel following me around made for great eye candy, I felt like if I foolishly brought her home like this, nothing but misfortune would await me. If this fallen angel had a significant amount of combat strength, it would be even more trouble.

"…Since the Holy Light is unable to stop the warfare, then what can you do? Don't you have any ideas? Do you only know how to raise questions but not solve problems? How irresponsible."

Not long ago, I learned that Aivla's parents had both died at the hands of undead mages. Her parents' bodies had been defiled as well, which was why she had an almost fanatical hatred of the undead and was one of the Holy Light's most fervent believers.

"Wait a little bit, and I'll write a recommendation letter for you. Go learn Nanxiang Law for about two months, and you'll understand everything. We even help you find a job after graduation."

Alright, nobody laughed at my joke. This fallen angel only kept her unhappy expression as she silently followed me around.

Today my schedule was packed full, so if she wanted to follow me, then that was fine. I just had to find some place to give her something to do later.

I put on a black hood that I had prepared beforehand and tossed one to Aivla as well. If I appeared before everyone with my real appearance in such a lively festival, it would be impossible for me to accomplish anything.

My first stop was the central area of this Day of Peace Plaza. At this location, there were a series of stone signs, and all the members of the military parade passing by had to stop here and pay their respects. Now that the military parade was over, this place was crowded with people.

I merely watched for a while without a sound, then I intended to make my leave.

"What are those undead doing?"

When she saw those living people together with the undead—even having fun together—not to mention that these people were ordinary people with no powers whatsoever, Aivla was filled with disbelief. This was despite the fact that this was not her first time witnessing such an event.

In the middle of the spectators was a group of high-level undead. They were currently competing with each other as they scribbled on the stone signs; it appeared that they were inscribing something.

"Those are memorial tablets that record the names of all the brave warriors that have sacrificed themselves for our country. Over the past three hundred years, including the Mist Kingdom and East Mist, there are quite the number of names. In the end, with everyone trying to recall names, they still haven't finished even up until now."

However, a voice informed me of what the truth really was.

"No, they've actually finished the task of recalling the fallen already. Currently, they've been competing for several dozen rounds on who gets to inscribe their name in front of the others."

A mysterious connection between us helped a certain hound discover me, but Ah Bas'

explanation astonished me.

What, was there something about the undead carving their own names onto memorial tablets? Yep—although it seemed a little strange, it seemed like the right thing to do in its own way as well. They were heroes; they had indeed fought to their deaths for our country. It was only natural that they had the right to carve their own names.

However, right now, these lively undead were nothing more than hoodlums who were fighting with each other in order to have their names carved into the first row. Why did I feel like this was all so awkward? This was no different from the dead crawling out of their own graves to write their own epitaphs!

"Why didn't they inscribe their own names before? Didn't they have plenty of time?"

"You know how the military parade had a ceremonial part of giving respect to the memorials? Everyone said that they felt it would be strange to pay respects to themselves, so they delayed it until after the military parade."

"Isn't inscribing their own names on a memorial even stranger?"

I felt rather helpless as I looked over at the horde of undead crowded around the obsidian memorial tablets.

Originally, I had intended to imitate memorials from my previous world and use one large tablet for everyone, but when Timier had, immediately afterwards, read out the entire aerial cavalry squad's names and stared at me with an imploring expression, I discovered that merely one tablet probably wasn't going to be enough.

In the end, as expected, all the high-level undead did their best to recall all their friends' names, and more and more names were inscribed. There were already thirty seven memorial tablets over ten meters tall that had been erected, but judging by the situation, that still probably wasn't enough.

"Why are they fighting over being in the front?" Perhaps it was because Aivla had changed species, as this was the first time she had ever expressed curiosity about the undead.

Bastian glanced confusedly at the black-clad person before him, but at my indication, he still answered.

"That’s for the honor of a warrior. Nobody wants to be at the end."

"Then why don’t they just carve their names at the very forefront?"

"That’s also for the honor of a warrior. Compared to the brave warriors that are truly resting forever, we’re already so fortunate. How could we possibly want to compete with them?"

A long silence followed his words. However, Ah Bas seemed to recall something as he added as an afterthought:

"Relax! No matter how much they fight over it, we left the first position open for you. Only you are suitable for the highest position."

Alright, I now knew what was more ridiculous than a dead person writing his own epitaph—it was a living person writing his own epitaph!

"Hey, I’m still living! That’s not necessary!"

Chapter 254
Floats

As I hid my identity and wandered amongst the crowds of people, I could see everyone around us celebrating joyously and consuming alcohol. I felt myself being affected by this festive atmosphere, and this imperceptibly raised my spirits.

I had already sent Aivla off. It was rare for me to be in such a great mood, and I definitely did not intend to waste my time with someone like her, someone who I barely knew. Angels were all of the ridiculously stubborn-type, anyways, and it was impossible for me to teach her anything at the moment. So I sent her away to learn Nanxiang Law for a few months.

I soon arrived at the Wood District, the most flourishing business district in Diffindor. Right now, various stalls decorated the roadside, selling snacks, accessories and even war memorabilia.

Yet just as I entered this business district, a cute, blonde-haired little girl appeared beside me. She maniacally charged towards the stalls, in search of new snacks to taste.

Her long, blonde hair almost brushed the ground. Harloys, who had gotten hungrier and hungrier, had some barbequed meat in one hand and smoked fish in the other, along with a chicken leg hanging from her mouth. The cute and respectable princess had now become a greasy little rag, her red little face soiled with stains.

Ever since Harloys had reobtained her ability to eat and her sensation of taste, she seemed to have evolved into a mega-foodie. Luckily, most of the time she was only tasting the flavor of the snacks. Although she didn't stop her mouth at all, she didn't eat much of anything; it was fortunate that the silly cat that always claimed my head as her perch wasn't getting fatter.

"Humph! No matter how much I eat, I won't get fat. After all, I can just give the fat to my Greed bodies; they'll just become fat in my place. I'm always going to be a magical beauty whose age is in the single digits… Ah! Roland! Look over there! What is that?!"

As Harloys said something that would make just about any woman feel jealous, she

hopped up and down and pointed down the street. The slowly progressing float parade [1] [1] seemed to be finishing its first cycle around the city.

Float parades were a tradition in all human countries. The rich countries of the central plains would decorate their floats with fresh flowers, gold, beautiful women and artwork. But the floats of the Northlands didn't have flowers or anything like that.

We were, however, the lands with the highest level of ice sculpting techniques. Legends, epics, heroes, and even real-life people could transform into miraculous works of ice and snow. With the addition of some colored lights, the colorless sculptures of ice would metamorphose into vivid works of art thanks to the refraction of light. The characters would appear to come alive.

Of course, this alone would seem too simple. Each float would have their own unique specialties and functions.

For example, the largest bakery chain in the city, The Asa Bakery, sculpted various desserts, which seemed exceedingly tantalizing to the viewers. They were even people throwing around discount vouchers as a way of advertising their bakery to the masses.

"Sweets! Confectioneries! Banana boats! Strawberry sundaes! Orange custard! Sugar bread rolls…"

Alright, I could only smile wryly as I watched the Banshee Queen steal as many vouchers as she could. It seemed that my home would soon be littered with innumerable dessert crumbs.

The Phillip Carriage Company's float was a pumpkin carriage that appeared to come straight out of a fairy tale, and it was pulled by a majestic stallion, decorated as a rat. Yet the outer shell of the carved pumpkin along with its decorations were far more exquisite than a real carriage. As it crawled forward steadily, the gigantic pumpkin carriage didn't shake even a bit, a testament to the astonishing craftsmanship it was made with.

The Golden Peak Tailor Shop's float had become a platform for models to show off the newest line of clothing. However, I felt only pity for those poor girls; they had to freeze in this manner, their faces pale in this cold, wintry weather. They were working hard at showing how little they were wearing.

Even if it was the new year, this place would remain cold and silent in the past. But

with the revival of the East Mist, more and more people chose to return to the city, and many major merchants had invested in this place. The three examples I had just given were all merchants that weren't originally from the East Mist; they were using this celebration as an opportunity to advertise their businesses.

Even the recently formed Town Security didn't let go of the excellent opportunity. On their float, Momo showed off their new uniform as she cracked her whip loudly in the air. The snow sculpture that represented a criminal was whipped; snow and ice shards flew everywhere. It did appear rater painful… but what was with those strange people following that float around?

With such a large number of floats, there would, of course, be some that were incredibly strange. For example, the ones from a certain Gentlemen Alliance with too much energy, or from the goblin engineers who similarly had too much energy to spare…

"One, two, three! If you want to learn bulldozing, come to West Town Mechanical Engineering School!"

On top of a large goblin mechanical reaper, they were showing off their newest product—the "Safety-brand" bulldozer.

Boom!

Alright, it was probably more of a "Safety-brand" explosive. Both the audience and the goblins themselves were used to their contraptions exploding. The goblins simply got back up and sent the unlucky goblin who had gotten burnt to find a priest. Meanwhile, the other goblins began rummaging for parts that could still be salvaged, showing off their excellent technical skills right on the spot.

It was then that from amongst the rubble of oil and scrap parts, a cool-looking motorcycle appeared on the goblin's float. That bulldozer mechanic from earlier was now seated atop the motorcycle, showing off different tricks, his driving skills, and the excellent horsepower of the motorcycle… was it really true that one could drive anything after learning how to drive a bulldozer?

"One, two, three! If you want to learn motorcycling techniques, come to West Town Mechanical Engineering School!"

Alright, that was even met with some scattered applause from the audience. To them,

this was much more enjoyable to watch than the other performances.

From a certain standpoint, if the goblins didn't have personalities that viewed explosions as daily occurrences and, more importantly, the survivability of a cockroach, they wouldn't have been able to reach such heights in the realm of goblin engineering. In that case, for their persistence and shamelessness, I should give them thirty-two likes… I might as well notify Town Security later than I normally did for their usage of the "Safety brand." At the very least, their spirit of "never giving up" was something worthy of appreciation.

"You're so reckless; watching them from so close! Didn't you hear? At first, they had been giving a performance regarding a mecha made from the combination of five smaller mechas, taller than even the city walls. By now, so many explosions have occurred that they only have a bulldozer remaining, which was actually the previous mecha's right hand. You still dare to watch them from such a close range?"

Boom!

The explosion and the following fire behind me constituted the best evidence of that kind-hearted person's words. Everyone instantly backed up, leaving a wide swath of space around the goblins' float.

Yet the same miraculous performance occurred again. Despite the fact that the majority of the parts had been rendered into useless pieces of scrap metal, the goblin engineers didn't give up. They worked with their tools and grease, and a goblin mechanical saw was soon put together in front of us.

The goblin mechanic got back on his feet and immediately used the loud saw to chop off a piece of wood. And, once again, I heard that familiar goblin advertisement.

"Three, two, one! Learn wood-cutting! Come to West Town Mechanical Engineering School!"

“…From a huge combination mecha to a bulldozer, then to a motorcycle and finally a saw. It's like a dissection; from a person, to becoming a right hand, and then the index finger, and finally a fingernail… Let that poor saw be! It's the only remaining survivor in its entire family; so pitiful!"

Alright, for the sake of that pitiful survivor, I immediately requested assistance.

"Hey—hey—hey! Elisa, help me contact Town Security! Tell them that the 'Safety brand' is doing a float…”

There was no need for me to say anything else. Two dark elf knights appeared in no time, leading a Town Security team. The goblins, upon noticing this, didn't say another word and picked up their spare parts before fleeing the scene.

That was how the first empty float appeared. The strange part, however, was that many people began tossing snow-white stones onto the goblin's float.

"What's this?"

"The voting for the best float. Every citizen received three white stones, and if they like a certain float, they can toss them onto the float. After the float parade is over, the float with the most votes will be the winner. The prize for first place is quite abundant."

Elisa's familiar voice spoke from behind me. I hadn't realized that she had arrived, and when I looked around, I saw many small white stones on many other floats as well.

"Ah, so they're sympathy votes. In that case, who's currently in first?"

“…From what I know, one of the Gentlemen Alliance's floats is currently in the top three. It's that one; take a look."

Alright, I could discern what was happening with a single look. That float was a simple one; it only had a huge sign that stated, "If you want revenge, take revenge. If you don't have a grudge against them and simply don't like them, feel free to vent on them as well."

Under that sign, several unlucky gentlemen were tied up.

"Clothes-Slicing Demon!"

"Naked Eagle King!"

"Seller of Fake Medicine!"

"Explosives Maniac!"

"Professional Dine and Dasher…”

These unlucky gentlemen had been sold out by their own companions. They had ridiculously high "popularity," and were currently "enjoying" the warm welcome that the citizens were giving them. Yet, taking into consideration the fact that they were all at the minimum of the Gold rank, if not the Legend rank, their cries of agony were likely fake as to lure more people into attacking them with stones—the stones that were actually votes.

One party was willing to take the blows, while the other party happily attacked them. The gentlemen were willing to take the blows, and were even happy about it… Well, let's just pretend that they were happy about it, since the speed at which they accumulated stones was astonishing.

Crack!

"Hahaha! Look, Elisa! See that unlucky fellow? Who would be so bad as to smash a bottle of ink on Yingou's [2] 2 head?"

The original plan was for the Gentlemen Alliance to join the military parade as well, but I had reconsidered; I needed them to maintain their neutral image as mercenaries for my future plans, which were currently in development. It wouldn't be appropriate for them to appear to be closely tied to the government, and that was why I had them not join the military parade. But I had indeed never expected them to pull off something like this.

"Whose idea was it? It's so evil."

After I finally finished laughing, I decided to casually ask that question.

"It wasn't anyone in particular. I heard that when they were discussing what to do for the float parade, Kasio said, 'If only Big Bro Beifeng was here. All he has to do is walk around, and with his popularity, we'd easily win.' They actually calculated things, and, with his current reputation, they really did have a chance of winning in popularity as long as he wasn't beaten to death. Then they figured that since Beifeng wasn't here, they could make things up with quantity. And, so, those unlucky gentlemen were sent out on the parade, and the effect is surprisingly good."

However, my attention was no longer on the gentlemen's float. Not far away, there was a float by unknown makers that actually had sculptures of me and Karwenz. Many people even silently placed their voting stones on that float, and judging by the

mountainous pile on top of it, it seemed like it was even more popular than the Gentlemen Alliance's float for venting on their own members.

"The royalty made this float. I heard that Princess Reyne personally made those sculptures."

Seeing those twin sculptures approach closer and closer, I couldn't help but sink into nostalgia. For once, Harloys even worried about me.

"…Oh, today's your birthday, so it's Karwenz's birthday as well, right? But, a tightly wound string will always snap in the end, so just forget everything and have plenty of fun today."

Hearing this, I couldn't help but laugh.

"You're thinking too much into it. I was just thinking that between us two brothers, I'm the more handsome one… but why is it that there's such a huge difference between our popularity with women?"

Yep, of course I didn't say something as embarrassing as the second half of that sentence out loud, but it seemed that just the first half alone caused me to receive much condescension from Elisa and Harloys. And, so, I looked around for a different topic to talk about.

"Right, since that Gentlemen Alliance float is in the top three, and the royalty's float is most likely in the top three as well, what's the other one?"

Upon hearing this, Elisa's expression became rather strange.

"Take a look for yourself. It's that one in the southwest direction—yep—the Xiluo Empire undead float. In a way, it's the same type as the Gentlemen Alliance's float."

"Love, courage, and hope!"

"Love and peace!"

Even though I glanced over it for a split second, I was almost blinded by those oily and shiny muscles. Omar's body was getting buffer and buffer, but… at the very least, shouldn't you wear some more clothes? You're not one of Eaglestorm's believers, are you?

And, when I discovered that the rhythm accompanying Omar's dance was Gria's abnormally scary, piercing singing, I didn't say another word. I turned and ran away.

"For the sake of everyone's lives, they can have the number one prize!"

Note:

1. If you don't know what floats are, do check this link out: https://google.com/search?q=float+parade&tbm=isch

2. To those who don't remember, Yingou is the younger of the Beyar Brothers. (Source: Chapter 4)

Chapter 255
Behind the Scenes Considerations

It was now noon on the second day of the celebration, and all the activities had already been arranged. However, I had just woken up.

After having fun all through last night, I had been called by Little Red and Adam to drink alcohol together, and in the end we had spent an all-nighter. Thanks to my hangover, plus the fact that I hadn't slept the whole night, I currently had a huge headache.

Unfortunately, as the overall planner of this situation, the documents on my desk were piled up into mountains. I was even unable to escape as Elisa caught me red-handed.

The float parade, which had been more like a competition of who could attract the most condescension, had ended. The winner was the Xiluo Empire's random entry. The combination of a muscular performance and deathly singing blew all competition out of the water, and by the time their float arrived at the finishing point, it had practically become a moving mountain of stones. It was impossible to even see them anymore.

"So many people actually enjoyed my singing! As I expected, true music isn't separated by species or countries, and my last performance was definitely because of my nervousness before singing. Yep, let's do another public performance next week in the plaza."

"Truly—truly—so passionate! I—I—I'm so moved! I've decided, every day while I'm in Diffindor, Omar's workout gyms are all free of cost to use. Anyone who wants to learn bodybuilding or dancing from me can come meet me tomorrow at 6:00 a.m. at the Day of Peace Plaza."

When news of this spread, it took only one afternoon for all the housing prices near the plaza to lose 33% of their value. It seemed that public dancing and singing was unpopular with the residents in any world.

Afterwards, I received a mountain of complaints. "Hurry up and stop that evil singing!

Ahhh! My head!" "Ahhh! My eyes are going blind—blind!" "Burn all damned couples to death, but not true love!" "Ah, to tell the truth, Gria and Omar are such an excellent pairing! Hurry up and make them into a couple, so that they can stop coming out and harming everyone else!" "My hand, I want to chop off my hand!"

…It would seem that some strange messages were mixed in among the complaints. Yep, let's not think too much into it.

Although there was a huge pile of complaints, there were also some interesting reports. "Those undead were so interesting, they even know how to fly!" (With Omar's muscular strength, tossing undead up into the air and catching them would be rather easy. It was quite a simple matter for an undead to fly several tens of meters in the air, but according to reports, many children's parents had been quite scared by the sight). "Not a single note she sang was in tune. This was the first time I was ever ashamed to be an elf, so can we please request an Undead Lord to stop her from ruining the reputation of the elves with her singing" "It was quite interesting, and I hope that next year will have a similar activity. I'm already planning out my float for next year."

Despite the large number of complaints, there were some benefits as well. This celebration had made the high-level undead seem more humanlike and have a closer relationship to actual humans, as high-level undead typically retained the personality traits and defects that they had during their lives.

But, right now, I didn't have the free time to worry about such things because there was a new trouble in front of me.

"Because of a certain person's willfulness in adding an Undead Royal Crown Amusement Park, an eating competition along with twenty similar programs, every activity for this celebration has surpassed our expectations. The number of people surpassed our expectations as well! The result, however, is that although it is only the middle of the second day, our budget has reached the red zone. We've gone over budget by one million and two hundred thousand gold coins. Unless you think of something soon, we'll probably have to use the funds that we had set aside for next year's spring city construction, or the funds for the government workers' salaries… I personally recommend that you reduce the number of activities during the celebration! That would be the best way to resolve this issue!"

Ah, that familiar cold glare through those gold-rimmed eyeglasses… she seemed to be as saying, 'That's enough; stop making new programs. Your birthday party is already

annoying enough. Let's have some rest.'

Elisa had directly told me her opinion, but although what she said sounded quite reasonable…

"That's fine and all, but… it's all meaningless! Don't even think about it! Nobody can stop me from having my vacation! I've already scheduled activities until the end of this month!"

I grit my teeth as I resolutely stood by my opinion and waited for Elisa's fierce rebuttal. However, this demon girl adjusted her eyeglasses and defrosted as she exited her "demonic scolding" form. And then, she actually nodded.

"Fine, then let's think together of ideas to balance the budget. At the very least, we need to have a clear idea of the celebration's recent expenditures."

"…Why are you suddenly being so nice? Is there a plot behind it all? By the way, I currently have an undying body, so could you not use anything like exploding toilets or needles in my shoes?"

I definitely wouldn't be fooled again. Every time Elisa got angry to the point of exploding, she would act nicer to me in order to lower my guard. The gentler she was, the worse her revenge would be.

When she heard this, Elisa fell silent. She merely looked at me for quite a while, which scared me significantly. She then began:

"…I think that not all things are your fault. In the past, I may have gone overboard. No, since I was personally taught by you, it's still your fault; everything is your fault. But this time, relax. I don't intend to do anything—yep—at least for the time being…"

Elisa shook her head, hesitating.

"I'm sorry. Although I don't know how I made you angry, it's all my fault! Please release those children of mine you're still holding hostage."

Since she wasn't directly making trouble for me, she would definitely take revenge upon me in some other fashion. Thinking about how my treasured artworks were still in her demonic possession, I instantly decided to surrender.

"No, it seems like I'm the one who needs to self-reflect… I finally recall now, every year, around this time, you'd always go out by yourself to make mischief and finally return home by yourself in the middle of the night, and even make trouble after you return. Was this all your method to celebrate your own birthday? Making others unhappy for your own temporary happiness—are you that lonely? I ignored your feelings in the past. I'm truly sorry."

"Ahhh! That's not it at all, there's no need to apologize, nor is there any need to look at me with such sympathy! I'm definitely not some lonely old man that people dislike and forgot about his birthday! I definitely wouldn't eat a birthday cake all by myself, lighting up the candles personally, nor would I ever take it out on others just because everybody forgot my birthday."

This time, it was Elisa who had an expression filled with surprise. She had just been guessing, but she was actually on the mark.

"So it was true? You're so childish!"

"You fooled the truth out of me!"

After some chaotic discussion between us, we finally calmed down and began discussing serious matters again. The lack of money was a huge problem.

"How about I try scamming some money out of the Holy Church? No matter what, I'm supposed to be allied with their big boss God, and they even intended to give me the title of Saint of Holy Light. It shouldn't be that difficult to exchange for some money."

"…Do you really not know or are you just pretending to not know? Your current reputation amongst all Holy Light job class members is at such a level that you can just randomly go to any Holy Light Church and say 'Roland's here,' and several tens of priests and Holy Knights would come out to beat you up. Besides, the grand event of you rejecting the Saint of Holy Light title from the Holy Church has already spread throughout the entire city, and most people are saying that you don't know what's good for yourself, wasting such an excellent opportunity."

As Elisa spoke that last sentence, she even nodded in satisfaction. It would appear that Elisa agreed with the public opinion. If I had the title of Saint of Holy Knight, many things would become much more convenient for me. However, she was also aware that I was calm, cool and collected most of the time but whenever I crossed paths with the

Holy Church, I would overheat. Now, what was done was done, and it was impossible to take it back.

"There's no point crying over spilled milk, so let's look to the future, instead." That was what Elisa said. "However, some people are admiring your bravery in daring to say that right to the Holy Church's face. You want to turn around and go looking for the Holy Church? Are you intending to lower your head and apologize, or challenge them? If it's the former, we've already gotten used to how shameless you are, so please stop refreshing our lack of knowledge on how few limits you have. If it's the latter, why don't you just declare war instead? So, I ask you not to stir up any more trouble."

I opened my mouth but nothing came out. If I could obtain money simply by lowering my head, I definitely wouldn't mind. Yet due to my own understanding of how easy it was for me to attract ill will, no matter what I originally intended, there was a 99% chance that things would become the latter.

"What about the weapons sales? Wasn't that very successful?"

"The auction won't happen for a while, and unless we make them filled with anticipation, how could we possibly sell the weapons for a good price? Everyone's spies are probably in Diffindor right now, and when they find out that they can only obtain a few clues but no real useful information, that's when we name our price."

"You aren't afraid that they'll really secretly obtain our technology?"

"That's basically impossible. I'm having Bastian personally guard the technicians' area, and all personnel entering and leaving that area needs approval. Outsiders will find it impossible to enter, and if they try to find any real products, well, I can't find any myself; how could they possibly find any?"

It wasn't that I didn't want to show off the newest magical engineering products in the military parade, but most of them had been destroyed in the previous battle. All the Roland Titans had been wrecked, although they did have brilliant self-destructions in the end. The Train King had also self-destructed, killing many beastmen with it, and the small combat airships didn't return intact, either… Since they all seemed to end in explosions, should I say as expected of anything that the goblins were involved with??

"Next time, let's not install self-destruct mechanisms. I feel like as long as there's such a device within them, it'll be used sooner or later. Just like the last time; saying

something like 'although our opponents are strong, at least we can die together' sounds too unlucky. Anyone that says this will immediately go from a side character into becoming cannon fodder, and will probably die in an explosion."

The more I talked, the more I felt it was true. "There's only one truth… okay, fine; I just wanted to say that out loud. [1] [1] Alright, let's be more serious and analyze it from a psychological standpoint. There's a red button sitting in front of you every day, and even though it's clearly marked with a label to not push it, the more you're not allowed to do something, the more you'll want to do it. Finally, when you can't resist the temptation anymore… you'll push it, with both your hands, as forcefully as possible."

"…Please don't treat your brave warriors as people with the same bad habits as you. If those hard-working engineers and pilots working overtime heard you say something like that, they would all definitely go on strike, together. We'd have to increase their salaries if that happens, which would be quite troublesome. Oh, right, where's my salary? I feel like I've never received any salary from you."

A good boss needed to know how to act dumb about unimportant matters and at least learn how to ignore their subordinates' complaints and emotions, which was why I took a sip of my tea and looked elsewhere.

"Elisa, your black tea-making skills have gotten better and better. The weather is quite nice today, isn't it?"

"Thanks for your praise… but this is green tea that I made for you, not black. Also, the weather isn't good at all. It's raining plus snowing right now. Even if you're just being insincere, there has to be a limit."

Well, since we were unable to resolve the money problem at the moment, we decided to leave it for later.

"Ohh, I just remembered. Adam said that he was going to go play tennis today. It's almost time, so I have to get going soon."

"That doubles tennis competition where you have to find a teammate beforehand? I heard that your partner is a beauty who admires you, and her three sizes are 110, 80, and 100, with large breasts, a large butt, and a nice figure, far surpassing someone like me who's as flat as a line all over."

Fine. It was now that I faintly understood why I had been dragged out of my bed so

early in the morning. That familiar chilly look in her eyes made it obvious that she was about to explode.

"Cough! Cough! Don't make stuff up! How could that be? I am a good person, so who could possibly be spreading rumors about me? That person is definitely a lying bastard."

"Yep, you lying bastard, yesterday you drank too much alcohol and bragged about it to me all night. You don't remember this at all? Roland, you're quite lucky with women, aren't you?"

I widened my mouth, but recalling the description Adam gave me yesterday of the tennis partner he'd helped me find, how could I possibly let go of such a chance? And, so, the very next moment I instantly stood up, finished all my black tea, and ran off. Even if I was going to die, I was going to play as much as I wanted before I died!

"I'm going out, and you don't need to wait for me for dinner."

Seeing how Elisa didn't follow me, I heaved a breath of relief. However, without me realizing it, Elisa was smiling coldly behind me.

"Hmph! Looks like he still hasn't woken up completely yet. He drank so much yesterday that he was even foolish enough to believe someone like Adam. Just make each other suffer until you both die."

Soon, at the newly-constructed tennis courts, I met that so-called legendary beauty.

"Adam, this is the beauty that you were talking about?!"

"Of course! Look at that face! Nice and cute, with sweet red lips and a clear appearance. Of course it's a beauty's face."

"What about the large breasts, large butt, and excellent figure?"

"Of course, look at those curves—nice and plump on both the chest and the buttocks. Those three sizes are no lie; just look at those muscles, which are so perfectly firm. See? Those bulging pectorals are basically the most perfect sculpted body."

Alright, I had now understood what was going on. Adam had laid a pitfall for me again, and Little Red, who was watching, was laughing so hard that she couldn't stand up

straight anymore. Even Margaret seemed to be snickering.

"Just continue lying to my face. What about admiring me?"

"Of course, is there any son that doesn't admire his dad? Yep, all I forgot to say was that it was a him, not a her."

Indeed, the "beauty" tennis partner in front of me was Xiluo's current leader, yet right now, he was wearing a laughable white miniskirt and curiously twirling around his tennis racket.

Seeing that I had arrived, Omar was delighted, but he soon calmed down.

"Father! I was looking for a chance to talk to you one on one. It's not only about Xiluo, but also the Undead Plane."

Note:

1. Yet another Detective Conan reference!

Chapter 256
Revealed Secret

While I was busy, frustrated about how to communicate with my very own "child," someone else was feeling conflicted about another matter.

“…Hey, Harloys, do you know how Roland would have answered at that time?"

"What time?"

"The time he was forced to the brink by us on that performance stage. If it weren’t for Little Red saving him, what would he have answered?"

"How would I know…”

"I refuse to believe that he can hide anything he’s thinking from you; there is a soul connection between you and him as a magical pet and master. If you tell me, I’ll give you one hundred royally-backed free meal tickets that will allow you to eat as much as you want at any major restaurant or confectionery store. Also, I’ll give you a three month supply of desserts specially made by our royal chefs. And, if you need, I’ll even give you cat toys, yarn balls, and even cat litter…”

"Who are you treating me as? I don’t need cat litter, but I want some custom-flavored candies and sweets. All made by the royal chefs! *Meow* !"

Did that mean that Harloys was going to accept the cat toys and yarn balls? Elisa was speechless as she looked at the black cat, who was currently licking her front paw. The saying that a physical body would affect the soul had some truth to it, but for the proud, solitary Banshee Queen to become so similar to a normal house cat… perhaps only Roland could have pulled it off.

However, never try and rely on a magical pet cat to be loyal to you. With sufficient temptation, these elegant little furry cuties had no loyalty whatsoever, and could easily sell out their master in front of a sufficient amount of canned cat food.

" *Meow* ! Actually, I think it’s better for you not to know. Or, I should say that you’ve

probably guessed it already."

"As expected, it was that answer, after all…"

"Yes. Originally, he was going to choose you, but after Amelia cast her truth magic, he changed what he was about to say… He was debating between 'everyone is my most trusted companion and intimate family' and 'I'm not in love with any of you.' Which do you think is easier to accept?"

"There's nothing difficult to accept about it, as I had long since expected it. Of course it would be the same result as two years ago. I've already been with Roland for the past hundred plus years, so how could I not know?"

As she coldly said that she didn't mind, tears imperceptibly rolled down her face. It would seem that logic and reason were separate from what Elisa felt in her inner heart.

The furious demon girl stroked the magical ruby in her hand. It ignited a fire in a distant warehouse, causing some "precious" artwork to burn to a crisp. If a certain someone learned about this, they would likely cry tears of regret as well.

"No! Those children are innocent!" Alright, it sounded as if that certain person's howls had the ability to surpass the limits of time and space.

"Roland was right after all. When you're unhappy, you should make others unhappy as well, as misery loves company. This really improved my mood."

She lightly wiped her tears and put her glasses back on. The forever calm Elisa had returned once more.

It was simply zero progress and definitely wasn't the worst possible result. Didn't she just have to wait? Who was afraid of that? The undying had plenty of time. Margaret had waited for over one hundred years; so what if she had to wait two hundred years?

"Isn't it simply two hundred years? I can wait! I should say that it's to be expected of Adam's close bro. Adam's an idiot who doesn't know how to change his way of thinking, while Roland's a dense block of wood."

As she listened to Elisa's complaints, which were obviously forced out of her mouth, Harloys transformed into a golden elf. From her pocket, she brought out a lollipop to

suck on, but she seemed to be hesitating about something. In the end, however, she spoke.

"Elisa, what do you think a SemiGod is?"

"The strongest possible pinnacle that a mortal can achieve that's not at the level of a God."

"An interesting description. Roland probably taught you that. No need to tell me anything more, because this wasn't a question that I believed you could answer in the first place. Even if your true abilities have already reached a God's level, you're actually like a natural combination of an Elemental God and a Demon God. Your path was set for you from your birth, and you probably know quite little about the way mortals separate the power levels."

Elisa remained silent. Although she rose up high, becoming a Demon Lord, she had taken the path typical to all demons; she relied on devouring others and her own instinctive evolution. She didn't have a deep understanding of step-by-step personal cultivation, and knew quite little about the Saint rank and above.

"All of the ranks represent progress made in a certain area. That's why for a Saint-rank warrior to lose to a Legend-rank mage is something ordinary. The difficulty in making progress between warriors and mages is utterly incomparable, and for a Saint-ranked dragon to kill a newly ranked SemiGod human is perfectly normal as well, as they increase their powers in different ways. However, for SemiGods…"

After a pause, Harloys still decided to tell Elisa.

"This concept of SemiGods didn't exist to begin with. It could be said that there are actually no SemiGods in the world."

This would cause quite some controversy if heard by others, but Elisa nodded. After all, Roland had said something similar in the past.

"Every rank has their own special characteristics. The Gold rank is about finding your own path, the Legend rank is about carving one's own path into a Soul Imprint, while the Saint rank represents that one has surpassed the limits of mortals, connecting their Soul Imprints to the world and possessing the ability to change the world around them. The stronger Saint ranks can even create their own small worlds—Soul Worlds."

Although Elisa didn't know why Harloys was bringing this up, she had heard Roland talking about this subject in the past. She noiselessly listened to Harloys.

"Above the Saint rank is the so-called 'Myth' rank. At this level, one has already obtained clear ideas of 'Concepts' from their Soul Imprints and has added these Concepts to their own personal development. Concepts are difficult to explain, but you can think of it as natural talent abilities like your absolute control over flames. A Concept is the purer form of a Soul Imprint, but is more convenient to use and transform into practical combat power. Some existences are capable of overlapping their Concepts onto their own bodies, transforming their physical bodies into independent small worlds that won't be destroyed even if ten thousand years of time pass. Adam is an example of this type. Some have wide-open Soul Worlds that can infect reality and create something out of nothingness. Roland is probably this type. Some can even materialize solid matter, transforming it into a personal top-quality weapon. Many Legend and Myth-rank weapons have come into existence via this method."

Actually, in order to better research and control their personal Concepts, most Myth-ranked individuals would all imagine and materialize their Concepts on the personal weapons that they were familiar with. As a result, many ordinary weapons would transform into Legend or Myth-rank weapons. [1] 1

Stories about Myth-ranked weapons were typically brought about by the owners of said Myth-ranked weapons, but they were merely leftovers after their original owners had died in battle. They were without the full power of the original Concept and were far weaker than when used by the original owner.

"There are thousands of paths and thousands of choices. Human strength is limited, and just how far humans can go in the end is probably predetermined by the individual. Since the Myth rank is far too long of a process, there are three smaller subsections of the Myth rank, which are also called the 'Three Heavy Doors' of the Myth rank. Every door is difficult to pass through. And, the so-called SemiGods are existences that have passed through the third door. To be honest, it's already meaningless to divide up the ranks any further at such a level, since these individuals have already made their 'Concepts' as strong as the level of Gods. So, if you don't count those cheat-like abilities of the True Gods, SemiGods aren't actually all that weaker than True Gods. However, unless you separate the power levels even further, there are still huge differences even within the SemiGod rank. Margaret and Adam, for example, could easily defeat and kill Marsolit [2] 2 , while Roland in his prime could have easily

defeated and killed Margaret and Adam together."

As she talked about this, Harloys revealed a nostalgic expression; she recalled how back in the day she had been stuck at the third door of the Myth rank for so long, limited by her undead body and unable to reach the peak for countless years.

"While it's difficult to say what each person's choices can lead to according to their limits, if an individual chose a road that didn't have a finishing point to begin with, no matter how much effort that individual made, there wouldn't be any progress. As far as I know, the reason why there are no SemiGod rank existences within the undead is that in the recent generation of low magic, the 'Concepts' that the undead could choose from didn't include anything that would be able to take them to a higher level. Undead are dead, so all the Concepts that they could choose had to be compatible with their physical bodies. 99% percent of the Concepts would have to do with death in some way. In order to break through the third and final door of the Myth rank into the SemiGod rank, an undead would likely have to use plagues and a sufficient amount of death to destroy numerous countries. They would have to use an endless amount of corpses to walk down the path of death, creating one's personal road of development."

Elisa nodded upon hearing this. In the Chaos Abyss's records, the appearance of an ancient Undead Emperor was synonymous with an endless Undead Calamity.

"Yet, in comparison, this current era is relatively peaceful. If someone dared to do such a thing, the Gods would directly intervene. Plus, the low magic generation created this current era of progressing in rank slowly. In recent times, it's now been considered normal that there won't be any more Undead Emperors… But, there's always an exception to everything. There was one person who forcibly found a path when there was none to be found."

Should it be said that Harloys definitely lived up to her nickname of "All-Knowing?" When everyone was treating it as a matter of common sense that undead wouldn't be able to progress to the SemiGod rank, she even figured out the precise reason behind it.

"Are you talking about Roland? But isn't he basically cheating with that whatever System of his?"

"Heh heh, looks like you don't know, then. I know more about that System: it's something similar to an equivalent exchange mechanism for 'wishing.' It has its own

rules that must be followed, and everything that it does must be capable of being done by the world's natural laws. You can even treat it as Roland's personal talent ability. If Roland didn't have the true foundational strength required to be at the SemiGod rank, he probably would have instantly fallen the moment he reached that rank. Probably, due to his reliance on his System, he still doesn't even understand his own Concept. In the past, I was quite curious how he confusingly managed to reach SemiGod rank, but only when I witnessed his newly created world of snow and ice did I realize that his personal Concept was one that had probably never ever existed for anyone else in this world—Creation."

Upon hearing this, Elisa instantly understood. As seekers of truth, the way for mages to improve their own power levels was to learn and understand magical knowledge and formulas. They would create new possibilities through their own research and make progress in their own field. All top-level archmages would be peerless experts in their own specialties.

"Roland's elemental sensing ability is negative, and while his undead magic is pretty good, what he's accumulated over time is still just so-so in the grand scheme of things. With just that, he'd be nothing more than a Saint rank. What he can truly be proud about is that wondrous field of his, the ability to create something from nothingness—undead construction. This was the ability that helped him surpass the 'Three Heavy Doors' and reach the realm of SemiGods."

"The Seven Deadly Sins…"

"Yes, the Seven Deadly Sins, the most perfect undead constructs of all. They have their own independent wills and thoughts, and are individual existences that even possess desires just like the living. The most important of all is that they're even capable of not being entirely controlled by their master, and they can evolve their power on their own. If my calculations are correct, once the Seven Deadly Sins evolve to their utmost limits, each and every one of them will be a match for a True God! This isn't even undead anymore; apart from the fact that they haven't broken the barriers between life and death, this is basically no different from creating an all-new, Gold-ranked species. And, recently, he really did break the barriers between life and death for me. Roland already possesses the ability to break the boundaries between life and death, and he's already evolved his Concept of Creation into the extent where he can 'Create a World.'"

By now, Elisa had guessed at why Harloys was telling her all this.

"How—how is this possible!?"

"How is it not possible? Gluttony, Ah Dang, is the most obvious example. A weak and small Abomination like Ah Dang took only three hundred years to reach the level of being able to defeat and kill a SemiGod. Omar, who was born only a few years ago, already has plenty of power to be proud about even in front of the Gods. And they still haven't evolved to their fullest limits. Yet behind any miracle is a heavy price to be paid. The heavy price required for the Seven Deadly Sins is a price that only their creator can bear."

Harloys was rather frustrated, as she was now talking about something that involved herself.

"Why are there only Seven Deadly Sins? That's because each and every Sin is a part of Roland. While he's creating and naming these Sins, he has to unknowingly bestow a part of his own soul to each of the Seven Deadly Sins. Roland's hatred and anger from his country being destroyed created the furious Bastian. His desires for food and strength created the gluttonous Ah Dang. His desire for Order and authority created the undead leader Omar."

Elisa revealed a contemplative expression. Finally, as the evidence all matched up, she could only nod helplessly.

"I pretty much understand now. But some things, once lost, may not be obtainable again. The current Roland views taking revenge as meaningless, he doesn't have too many expectations for becoming stronger, and he views status and authority as a joke. Perhaps he's being influenced by them taking his desires."

"Yes, it's the same for my and Envy's 'births' as well. Perhaps Roland himself has noticed it, too, as he didn't directly create us; instead, he had used pre-existing 'materials' as the foundation, which also lessened the burden on him. It's absolutely correct for Omar to view Roland as his father, from a logical standpoint. But don't ever expect that I'm going to view Roland as my father, and I'm definitely never going to call him that."

Harloys had a bitter expression. She had only recently come to this conclusion, but suddenly becoming lesser in seniority instead of greater in seniority compared to Roland made her not know what to do. She didn't even tell Roland about this.

All the Seven Deadly Sins originated from Roland. If Roland became a Main God, the Seven Deadly Sins, which were intimately connected to him, were basically like his Follower Gods or Children Gods. And since there were only Seven Deadly Sins, with Roland only possessing Seven Original Sins, he could only use up seven pieces of his soul!

As for why that mysterious System kept warning Roland not to make any more undead creations, it had probably noticed this as well.

"Roland and all of his Seven Deadly Sins constitute his true SemiGod rank strength. In his prime, even True Gods would fear him, but definitely not because of his personal combat strength. By now, you probably understand why I'm telling you all this, right?"

"Lust?"

"Lust can be called 'an overabundance of love' as well. Although I don't know whether Roland truly created Lust, nor do I know whether Lust is a person or an object if it exists, but if Lust really does exist, then it's definitely the oldest of the Seven Deadly Sins that Roland created. And, no matter how skilled Roland is with his Concept of Creation, back in the day he was probably nothing more than a Legend, tops. To create a miracle-like existence such as Lust that even SemiGods wouldn't be able to accomplish with only a Legend's power level, he probably had to pay even more of a price."

More of a price? If he gave up all his love and lust, wouldn't he become an existence that was completely incapable of understanding love? Elisa was left speechless, as that would mean no matter how hard she worked, Roland would still remain a dense block of wood.

"That idiot!"

Yep, apart from idiot, how else could she describe me? From a certain standpoint, this had been a classic example of a mage's experiment—although I succeeded in creating what I wanted, I paid far more than what I realized. It was a definite loss for me when I created Lust back then.

"Can't he reobtain his desire for love?"

"I personally feel that it's possible. I can tell through our soul connection that as long as the Seven Deadly Sins are by his side, they'll instinctually give their overflowing Sin

that they represent back to him, which will help balance and steady his personality. And, I heard a piece of news, that, at the very least, in Roland's second life he had a lover…"

Elisa was so shocked that her mouth fell open, wide agape.

"How come Roland never mentioned this whatsoever!? If it was true, he should have been bragging to everyone about it."

"I heard about her from Amelia. Amelia just heard only a little about it, and apparently Roland broke up with whoever-she-was in the end, and it's even rumored that his second death had to do with her. I also tried bringing it up with Roland in a roundabout fashion, but he seems to have lost all relevant memories. Even his memory library doesn't have any records. Perhaps, when he was creating Lust, he sealed his own memories and feelings into it."

"It's also possible that he intentionally wanted to forget what happened, so he created Lust."

"If it was an incredible failed first love, I think that's definitely something an idiot like Roland is capable of doing."

"It's also possible that he was under the impression that love would distract him from his motivation in taking revenge and becoming stronger."

Elisa and Harloys exchanged glances, and they both sighed helplessly.

"That idiot is unsalvageable."

"That idiot makes others worry so much."

Note:

1. The Myth rank is equivalent to the mentions of the Epic rank. They are one and the same, only different ways of referring to the same thing.

2. To those who don't remember, Marsolit is the name of Envy of the Seven Deadly Sins.

Chapter 257
Plot

"A person who is truly insane will never be aware of their insanity. They will not believe that they are the ones abnormal; instead, they prefer to believe that the entire world is crazy while they're the only ones sane and normal."—Roland Mist.

The formal discussion with the envoys from Xiluo was ongoing in the royal palace. Yet important affairs would always be discussed in private. The various complex details and hidden trades would have to be made under the cover of night.

The Xiluo Empire was the only undead country in this world; I had long expected them to join the Mist Alliance. And this was critically important; just joining in name only would be meaningless. The alliance would have to deepen the relationship between both sides. Yet exactly how, by how much, and in what aspects this relationship must be deepened were all various complex details that the core personnel of both countries had to meet personally to discuss.

Business, trade, diplomacy, military alliances, and thirty-ish other various such contracts were signed. But this was only the beginning.

Without making everything uniform between us for convenience, and without the will to truly do everything together, how could it possibly be called an alliance?

The future Mist Alliance would be quite large, but that didn't mean that all the allied countries would truly think the same way. After all, each individual country would have their own needs, and in the end, the right to make decisions would still be in the hands of a few major countries of the alliance.

I figured that it would just be like my previous world. Even if the former Soviet Union or the European Union had rules on the surface that stated how every country would be equal regardless of size or anything else, the true right to make decisions would always be held by just one or two countries.

In my mind, the Mist Alliance needed to ally with countries to begin with, and the Xiluo Empire was probably the most trustworthy country alongside the Sleuweir Kingdom

and the Eastern Mist Communal Country.

That's right. I had very little trust in the Northlands' human kingdoms. Some reasons included the fact that humans were short-lived and rulers would change quickly, but the worst of all was still the obvious fact that human rulers would easily backstab their allies; the majority of nobles and royals lacked morals.

This time, I represented not only East Mist, but also Sleuweir and even the entire People of the Mist. My goal in these detailed alliance discussions with Xiluo was to come to an accord with the mega-country in all aspects. I also wanted to form a small private circle of my own within the Mist Alliance that possessed the true ability to call the shots.

"Then, after I return, the entire Xiluo Empire shall announce that Wumianzhe's Church of Law is its national church… For undead to worship a God and even receive divine powers, does this mean that it's even possible for undead Holy Knights to exist in the future? This truly feels strange."

Cough. I coughed lightly in displeasure. What was wrong with undead Holy Knights? Was this an accidental jab at me?

"My apologies, Your Majesty. It wasn't that I have any objections against you."

Lionheart shook his head, not knowing whether to laugh or cry. The main negotiator for the Xiluo Empire was him, since Omar… played around for a while, got bored listening to our discussion, and decided on his own to go to sleep. He was currently hugging his little teddy bear in a deep asleep.

"…Omar had lots of fun these past few days. By the way, Your Majesty, don't you intend to return? If you retake your position as emperor, even Omar would listen to you."

"I'm not interested, as I'm now a living person. How could I possibly rule an undead kingdom? Besides, with you guys around, there's no need to go through that much trouble… Yep, I'm definitely alive. Even though there's a memorial tablet with my name on it, I'm definitely still alive! That's right!"

"In that case, let's discuss the next topic, slavery…"

Due to our special relationship, East Mist, Sleuweir, and the Xiluo Empire were all actually one big family. In addition, the Xiluo Empire had the special political structure

of a one hundred percent dictatorship; as long as we made our agreements in private right here, things would be settled. The discussions were so smooth that it seemed like a casual conversation over dinner.

But even if we agreed on everything, truly putting it into action would be quite troublesome.

For example, the severe inequality in society. As we were all going to be believers of the God of Law, then, at the very least, we had to make everyone truly be considered equal in the eyes of the law. Although I had avoided adding combative words like "all individuals are considered equal" or "defeat the rotten nobility" into our church's teachings to prevent being instantly ganged up on by all of nobility, all non-criminals were supposed to have equal rights and status according to Wumianzhe's teachings. That meant that something akin to slavery shouldn't exist in my planned society.

Get rid of slavery? That was something I definitely intended to accomplish, but the problem was with the upper level of Xiluo Empire's society, the high-level undead. The living were actually their slaves and main armies, and most high-level undead treated the living as toys or experimental subjects. Getting rid of slavery would mean a massive upheaval in their society. A huge number of those considered low-class would shift to the middle class, which we had to be cautious about.

Most high-level undead definitely wouldn't be like my knights or my Four Heavenly Kings. From a certain standpoint, the Holy Church wasn't wrong about the undead since creating death and pain for the living was one of their few joys. Getting joy from others' misery was part of the nature of the undead, and the oldest, high-level undead even treated the torturing of the living's physical bodies as a form of art; they truly enjoyed the process. Attempting to change their way of thinking would be no different from killing them.

However, precisely the fact that the Xiluo Empire was a pure dictatorship would actually make some things much easier.

“…Then let's begin the process. There's plenty of time anyways, and you can take it slow. Of course, if they still can't accept getting rid of slavery in the end, then just make them cannon fodder. With Omar around, I refuse to believe that any of them can do anything about it."

With Omar's soul net connections, any undead units under him would be unable to

resist his commands. Back in the day, I had to consider that the Undead Emperors would be incredibly difficult to deal with. My new empire had to be a complete dictatorship so that my successor would have the ability to be a perfect dictator.

I made that my design goal when I created Omar, but that relied too much on his natural ability, and the situation and my way of thinking changed later into believing that a pure dictatorship wouldn't be the most appropriate path. Instead, I left Omar aside. As a newly-born who was still sensitive, he had probably noticed his "father's" dislike and abandonment, which was why he had rioted.

The ironic part was that after everything was over, it all went back to the starting point. This young ruler became the emperor in the end, and I still needed to rely on his power to realize my goals. When I thought of this, I looked at the "big boy" who was drooling while he slept on the table with his teddy bear. I felt I should treat him better in the future.

"Ah, father, why are you so weak and thin? Did you not eat your meals properly? Come and exercise together with Omar. Come here, you little apple!"

Alright, his sleep talking made me instantly retract my rare good intention towards him. I really wanted to wake him up with a brick. I had enough of public dances and singing, after all.

Well, there would be no end to this if I kept complaining, so I did my best to concentrate on the serious matters at hand.

"Now, the next topic is regarding the transportation between our two countries."

Of course, problems would easily appear on matters that not only pertained to social issues. There was a huge geographic barrier between us even if we were to become true allies. The long distance between the two countries rendered transportation between them inconvenient. However, I had already prepared a plan to deal with this.

"How's the progress on Alkaid?"

Lionheart became quite excited when I mentioned the airship Alkaid. After seeing that huge aerial combat behemoth that was evidence of a new generation, he had become more and more impressed but didn't show it. In this area, Roland was truly far ahead of the current generation.

"I just received a message from Xiluo. With Mizar's technology, in addition to a plentiful supply of materials in Xiluo, Alkaid [NG1] should have its mainframe completed within three months as long as we successfully deal with all technical difficulties. Its main weapons and outer shell should be completed in six months, and it should be ready for its first flight within one year."

Perhaps I was overly influenced by my knowledge of the impact of aerial combat strength in large-scale battles from Earth. In this world, airships were primarily used to transport soldiers, but my special love for aerial squadrons remained. In my mind, it wasn't very meaningful to have just a single floating battleship. Without enough functional aerial battleships to form an aerial fleet, Borealis wouldn't be able to display the true power of Envy. It would be unable to function at its fullest.

The North Star aerial battleship brigade was my first planned aerial squadron for the future East Mist, as well as the Mist Alliance. Its flagship would be the Borealis, and the squadron beneath it would consist of seven large-scale aerial battleships named after the stars of the Big Dipper—Alkaid, Mizar, Alioth, Megrez, Phecda, Dubhe, and Merak.[NG2] They would be of different sizes and have different functions. The Alkaid, which was number one in the order, had its construction handed over to the Xiluo Empire. However, progress in its construction could only be somewhat counted as successful. It took much longer than the number two aerial battleship, Mizar, which had its construction rushed in order to be ready for the military parade.

Of course, the current condition of the Mizar was just a scary-looking empty shell. Its side weapons, personnel, equipment and so on would require at least another half a year to reach top condition.

Actually, this could be considered quite quick already. After all, large-scale combat weapons weren't like lettuce, easily made in a short time. In order to obtain an elite knight order, it would take most countries half a century.

What? You want to know why the Borealis was capable of being sent out in combat immediately? The Auland Empire was truly a mega-empire, and several generations had worked tirelessly on the only mega combat airship that remained. All of its weapons, equipment, personnel system, command system, and parts were just about ready, not to mention Envy helped to transform it with undead power, which improved the overall capabilities of the airship and gave it the ability to be used.

By the time I obtained it, it was already over ninety percent complete. All that

remained was to give it personnel so that these novices could become more and more experienced under the command of the Borealis. Yep, although it sounded rather strange, the Borealis' own understanding of its body far surpassed that of any engineer. Anything that it needed would be supplied to it, any resources at all. Of course it would quickly be able to be used in actual combat.

Despite the fact that we were now on the second and third airships, they were still far from being mature although we had the technology. We could only continue progressing as we figured things out on our own.

"It'll be ready for its first flight within one year? That's already quicker than I expected. Hmm, in that case, we'll start the construction on Alioth and Megrez, while you can begin it on Phecda and Dubhe. We'll leave the last one, Merak, for later. The goal is to finish this entire North Star aerial fleet within three years."

"Yep, as long as nothing big occurs, this should be achievable. I should say that as long as no new battles occur, it might even be finished before then."

Lionheart thought about the situation in Xiluo and made that promise to me.

"In that case, let's temporarily use the Mizar for transportation between Diffindor and Xiluo, while the Borealis will be used for other transportation-related needs. It's fine to use Undead Battleships as large merchant airships for carrying goods, but transporting the living might be problematic. How about we try having the goblins sell insurance to the passengers? We might even make a huge profit."

"Right, where's Ah Dang? I need to go on a faraway trip soon, and I want to take him with me. You all want to go as well? You can't; I'm going to a human mega empire, and they're very sensitive about undead there. I think that only Ah Dang can perfectly manage to pass as a living being…"

"The second—the former Second Senator Feyman is back? That's to be expected. If he joined an Undead Emperor in the Undead Plane, who else would be better than him to lead the way for an invasion? If I was an Undead Emperor, I would definitely send him to be cannon fodder—I mean the vanguard, to test everyone's reactions."

"The first Senator Gricasio? It's perfectly normal to not have any news about it. Its' power is unfathomably vast, and I only had a cooperative relationship with it. Don't

look at how lazy it was. It actually has a fierce personality and has a high opinion of itself, so I doubt it will obediently listen to any Undead Emperor."

"The Undead Plane is becoming more and more active? That's also within expectations. But, be careful not to have too much contact. The Undead Emperors are incredibly difficult to deal with, and even you guys shouldn't directly fight with them right now."

After taking care of all the details at once, it was almost midnight when I was finally finished.

What, there's a silver-haired female elf right behind me who's inviting me to a singing performance? The weather was quite nice today, and I couldn't see or hear anything at all.

As I gazed at the weather outside, I stretched lazily. If I returned at this time, I figured I would likely have to listen to a certain person's continuous complaints. As I was hesitating whether or not to find some place to pull an all-nighter or go find Adam for drinks again, a tall and strong figure appeared before me.

"Estrada?"

"You're in big trouble."

When Estrada greeted me with this sentence, I wasn't surprised in the least. After all, I knew that I probably made the Holy Church really angry.

"I'm not here to fight you. It's just for a discussion."

Yet since he told me from the very start that he was here to talk and not fight, I relaxed. At the very least, I stopped using the powers of my Frigidwinter Earth, and its abnormal ice disappeared without a single trace, just like how it arrived, without a single sign.

"The new pope was so angered by you that he fainted on the spot, and he almost returned to the God of Holy Light's embrace…"

"There's no need to waste words. Estrada, someone like you probably doesn't have

that much free time."

“…Since the path of Holy Light is unable to save the world, how do you intend to do it?"

I hesitated somewhat as I looked at the man before me who had aged in appearance by several decades. For him, his belief in the Holy Light was akin to instinct, and I was unsure why he was here.

Finally, I ended up nodding.

"In that case, I'll recommend a school to you, called the Nanxiang… what? Relax, it's not a bulldozing school… I don't need a bulldozer to steal elites from other companies."

I never thought that I would be giving this old and stubborn teacher of mine a recommendation letter to one of my schools.

"You were already prepared? You knew that I would come looking for you?"

"Of course… not. It's just that recently, there has been many Holy Knights secretly coming to me, so I wrote extra recommendation letters and have been keeping them on me. Right, Aivla is there as well, and you can have a talk with her. But when you go there, it's best if you disguise yourself. Otherwise, if your pope hears about it and really has a heart attack and dies, it'll become an even bigger trouble for me. Oh, and your Cardinal Soros is a bit too old, so let's not tell him either. I'd feel bad if something happens to him. What? He's already been demoted from cardinal and has returned home to become a farmer? Ah, how pitiful (I'm so happy!)

Chapter 258
Visitors from the Earth Elemental Plane

[Child.]

[On the day you were born, the entire dragon valley reverberated with the whispers of the name that the Beast Gods bestowed upon you—Beifeng Herault.]

[My child, I proudly watched you grow up into the messenger of love. You should always remember that our family has used only justice and love to rule this country. You, too, should carefully use your powerful ability, your divine power that stems from true love.]

[But, you must remember that true victory never comes from power…]

[My child, personal strength is limited. What you need to do is encourage your citizens and increase their morale; they should always stand by your side. I'm telling you all this because when my life ends…]

[You shall be king!]

The dawn was accompanied by a tall, heroic figure, while, in the background, my shameless System refreshed my knowledge of its lack of limits. It was giving that silhouette its own background music and fake introduction scene.

This man, who had his own background music and introduction announcement, had his back to the sun; he seemed to be glowing valiantly. His crown-shaped horns blinded me even further and gave him the appearance of a pay-to-win player.

"I have returned!"

[System Notification: As the current King of All Gentlemen, how can you allow yourself to be surpassed by a junior? Isn't it just some background music and an introduction? Come, from now on, every time Princess Peach arrives, I'll give her a Swan Lake ballet dance introduction! From today onwards, I shall address you as the man who has his own accompanying dancers and ballet shoes!]

"That's enough out of you! System, get the hell out in front of me! I promise I won't kill you on the first blow!"

If the System was capable of materializing a physical form, I definitely wouldn't kill her on the first blow. No, definitely not. How could I possibly vent if I really did kill her with my first blow? I had suffered all this time; I would definitely abuse her for at least one month!

"Your Highness, I have returned."

Didn't he notice that I was talking to my System? Have a clue! I glared at him, filled with dissatisfaction.

"Yeah, got it. What, is something the matter?"

The honest and dull-seeming dracon's face was covered with dust and dirt, resembling an old farmer who had just finished planting trees in the desert. He seemed fatigued and hesitant as he looked towards me.

"Oh, right, where were you? Why did you skip out on work for no reason for so long? Hah, forget it! I'm in a good mood today so I don't care."

When I saw my subordinates work so hard, as a good and magnanimous boss I had to of course be considerate and console them. However, my causal question caused Beifeng's expression to change, and he now looked as if he didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

He sweated profusely as his large, draconic eyes opened to the maximum. He stared at me.

"Your Highness, didn't you request me to stay in the Earth Elemental Plane and be the vanguard for our development? You said that at the slowest, someone would come to take my place in three days. Yet I waited for so long and still didn't see anyone arrive to take my place as you said. It couldn't be that you forgot all about me!?"

Alright, it was now my turn to begin sweating profusely. I recalled that I really did promise him such a thing. Originally, I had intended to send a team over to talk to Beifeng about taking over his job, and I was even going to have Karo City assist them.

However, I had so many things keeping me busy here, and since I was having such a

fun time on my birthday, I really did forget about him. No, my memory was always excellent—perhaps I should say that I unconsciously ignored him; I did not want him to make trouble for me when I was having so much fun.

"No wonder; when Yawen had made her report to me yesterday, she said the pressures of work were much less than expected by more than a half. The Town Security even began handing out many vacations… Could it be that this bastard can create more than half of all the chaos in the city by himself? I had unintentionally done such a great deed for everyone's sakes."

I thought about how those Town Security girls would take days off and even have fun shopping; they were no different to human girls when they toured the night markets and would truly take pleasure in shopping. I suddenly felt like forgetting about Beifeng's downsides.

To be honest, Beifeng by himself wasn't ridiculous to the extent where he would be the cause of half of all chaos within the city. However, he was the vice-commander of the Absolute Gentlemen Alliance and was missing in action. The fact that the Beyar Brothers, Pier, and other higher-ups had been forced into helping out with the Mizar and other physical labor led the Gentle Alliance to halt the organization of any activities. And it wasn't limited to that; the dark elves now had many new, novice Town Security members, which had disrupted the balance between them and had given the Town Security the most relaxing time of their lives.

Alright, I also recalled that it was I who had drummed up their morale. Some things were better left unsaid. After all, I did feel slightly guilty about it.

"Yep, thanks for your hard work. Because of some special reasons, we temporarily placed our emphasis on preparing for the military parade and weapons auction, so we slowed down the work on developing a base in the Earth Elemental Plane. You've worked hard, and you've completed your task quite well. I'll remember this. As for now, go back and take a good rest, take a shower, and go to sleep. You must be tired. When you're feeling refreshed tomorrow, I'll discuss more serious matters with you."

The strange thing was that even after saying all this, Beifeng still didn't leave. He actually had quite a good temper and would almost never get angry. However, he was currently looking at me with an awkward expression on his face.

"Hmm? Do you need something else?

"Um, actually, some of my companions came back here together with me. They've decided to join the large family of our Gentlemen Alliance. But, it seems that in order to become a member of our mercenary group, as stated in the mercenary guild's rules, they must first obtain humanality[NG1]."

There was indeed such a rule about nationality, but who was I? I was the ancestor of the leaders of this country. Giving them nationalities would be too easy. All I had to do was tell Kelly and the others.

"That's simple. It's such a small matter; isn't it just nationality? You just have to take them later to our new Department of Civil Affairs, and I'll—wait a moment, did you say humanality, not nationality?"

A sudden ominous premonition led me to discover that something was wrong.

"Awesome! You agreed?"

The sly Beifeng caught my verbal misstep and celebrated by shouting out loudly.

"Number Four, Number Five, Number Six, Number Seven—everyone, come in!"

Alright then. A sandstorm arose outside the castle gate, as if an entire army was passing by. But when the visitors approached and I could make them out through the sandstorm, I discovered that they were, in fact, several huge individuals.

"A desert magical scorpion king?"

It was a massive magical scorpion, whose weight definitely exceeded a hundred tons. Despite the fact that it was only of the height of about three humans, its tremendous weight would cause the ground to crack wherever it passed by. As it gradually approached me, the cracks continuously appeared in the ground but were mended by magic again.

"Number Four, be careful. Don't break the castle door! We can't afford to pay for it."

How could such a mega magical beast, which would be hailed as a respected veteran in the Earth Elemental Plane, be fooled by Beifeng into coming here?!

And there were two figures seated atop the scorpion's back. The taller one was a tan-skinned high elf, and a strange, charming light could be seen in the elf's eyes. Crystals

and stones were embedded into its skin.

"A high-level sand dragon that can transform into a humanoid?"

In this current generation, high elves could be said to be basically extinct, and only the ancient dragons would still use their forms.

"Number Five, I've said it so many times already. Before you're able to perfectly transform into a human, you should cover yourself with a cape."

The ruler of the current generation was humanity, and it was only natural for these massive dragons to transform into humans for their humanoid forms. Only those ancient artifacts from the even older generations would prefer to use a form like a high elf, which would, indeed, stand out too much today. Yet it was still understandable, as the high elves were the rulers of ancient times.

The other individual had already donned a cape and was at least three or four meters tall. Rocks protruded from all over its body, making it rather obvious that that individual was a top-level existence from the Earth Elemental Plane.

"Your Highness, this is Number Six. He doesn't really know how to talk."

Suddenly, a large piece of the earth jutted out and the ground began trembling slightly. It appeared that something was underground.

"Number Seven doesn't really know how to talk either…"

Alright, it would seem that beneath me was a sandworm. There was a sandworm that was able to leave the Earth Elemental Plane? And it even possessed the ability to communicate? This was definitely no ordinary sandworm. Was this an Earth Elemental Lord tour group coming to visit me?

"Beifeng, just what exactly do you intend to do? And how were they able to leave the Earth Elemental Plane?"

If I had to fight with this group in any other place, it would be rather troublesome. Yet this was the Crimeless City, Diffindor, the heart of Wumianzhe's Divine Domain; I wouldn't be afraid.

Beifeng smiled slightly. "In my 'True Love Domain,' all lives have the right to enjoy the

right to live. No matter if they are ordinary creatures or elemental creatures, they can all live in an environment that feels as wonderful as heaven to them."

"Domain? That sounds like a Soul World. Could it be… wait a moment, did you!? No! This is impossible!"

Beifeng put his palms together, closed his eyes, and nodded slightly. The devout expression on his face made him seem like an old monk no longer interested in the mundane. The rising sun illuminated his old leather jacket, radiating a golden glow that seemed to bestow upon him a divine feeling, the feeling of having surpassed life and death.

"Battles helped me grow. After experiencing combat where I had almost lost my life (he meant doing nothing), and after tempering my will and body (he meant fooling around), I finally made progress. My Soul World may not be strong, but it has the ability to allow intelligent creatures to live within it."

When I heard this, the barbequed meat I was holding in my hand dropped to the ground. Beifeng hadn't even been in the Legend rank for one year yet he had mysteriously managed to enter the realm of Saints just like that!

What was with that ability of his which I had never even heard of before? Wasn't it just a natural version of the legendary ability to obtain harems? This was obviously cheating.

"Damn it! Who's the main character supposed to be—you or me? On my way to the Gold rank, I had almost perished many, many times, but you, by simply doing nothing, quickly entered the Saint rank. Author, there's something wrong with the scenario; what is with this obvious difference in treatment? This game is incredibly unbalanced! Is this one of those legendary stories that always abuses the main character? No! Impossible! If you give the cheat powers to someone else, the story will lose popularity!"

Yep, the Beifeng Herault before me was unmistakably at the Saint rank. Only someone at this power level would be considered an equal by an Earth Elemental Lord.

"Your Highness, us seven brothers really get along well with each other, so we swore to become brothers. And now that my brothers are having difficulties, of course I wouldn't be able to just watch as they suffered. I've always heard how Your Highness

views brotherhood as important, with friends everywhere, so I decided on my own to take them here to follow you…"

After a longer, more detailed explanation, I understood what happened. Us leaving the Earth Elemental Plane didn't cause things to calm down—no, it was the opposite. Emordilorcan had been the origin of suppression for these Elemental Lords, but after he perished, the powerful and ancient Earth Elemental Lords began warring with each other.

Caught in the maelstrom of a war they didn't even want, those Lords who did not want to fight over the now-open Earth Elemental God position were put in a difficult spot. They didn't want to join the battle, but they would be forced to join it.

"Are you saying that you don't want to become the Earth Elemental God? Ha! Don't even mention whether or not we believe this reason of yours, but how can you make us believe that you won't come in to reap the benefits while we're all busy fighting?"

Yes, that was a valid question. Even those Earth Elemental Lords themselves couldn't guarantee that they would resist the temptation themselves if they saw a potential victory right before them.

Doubtlessly, the best way to deal with this dilemma was to get as far away from the site of the battle as possible since they weren't interested in battling; they should leave the Earth Elemental Plane entirely. However, Earth Elemental Lords were unable to leave the Earth Elemental Plane as they pleased unless they were interested in gradually weakening to death.

That was when they accidentally managed to discover that Beast Tamer Beifieg was able to use his Soul World to create a True Love Domain, a place in which any living creature could live. The rest was history.

"…And, so, us seven brothers have agreed to come serve Your Highness."

"Why me?"

"Because only you won't have any biases against us. And, more importantly, since you personally defeated Emordilorcan, it'd be an honor to serve you."

As the children of Chaos, elemental creatures were absolute followers of the law of the jungle. Perhaps they didn't respect mortals, who had much shorter lives than they did,

but the elemental creatures that followed the path of ‘the weak evolving to the strong’ would always have an innate respect for the strong.

In these Earth Elemental Lords’ minds, I had defeated Emordilorcan in single combat, and hence I would have the best new Earth Elemental God had only I been an elemental creature. Serving such a strong individual and asking for protection from him seemed to be an excellent idea to them.

I realized all this after hearing Beifeng’s explanation. I only considered for a few seconds before agreeing to this beneficial thing that had fallen into my lap.

"Alright, I’m really lacking in personnel here so I’ve decided to agree. Beifeng, well done this time. I’ll reward you later. Right, if there are seven of you, where are the other two? They didn’t come? Haha! Seven of you, aren’t you just like the Seven Brothers of the Gourd? Oh, sorry, you probably don’t understand my little joke, although I think it’s quite fitting. Pfft! Beifeng, I bet you’re Number Three again."

Hearing that I agreed, Beifeng was instantly delighted.

"Yep, I’m Number Three again. Although I don’t know what the Seven Brothers of the Gourd are, us seven brothers came up with a name for ourselves as well. Since we’re all at the Saint rank or above, we’ve decided to call ourselves the ‘Seven Great Saints.’"

"Huh? Seven Great Saints? Hahaha."

Alright, Beifeng ignored the fact that I was clutching my stomach with laughter and excitedly shouted to outside the city.

"Big Sister, Number 2, His Highness Roland has agreed!"

"Where are they?"

The tall mountain in the distance suddenly moved and waved its hand, which was in the clouds. That mountain had actually been an incredibly tall tower giant!

“…Oh my, that’s really quite the Saint."

"Moving about in cities is a bit inconvenient for Number 2, so he’ll just wait outside. As for Big Sister, you should know her already."

"Hello, Your Highness Roland. I hope you still haven’t forgotten about an old lady like me."

I looked to see who it was. Her raspy voice was familiar, one that I had heard just recently in the Earth Elemental Plane.

But when I saw who she was, I inhaled a large amount of cold air.

"The Mother of Ten Thousand Stones? The Great Stone Sculptor Ainslo! Why are you here?"

Upon hearing my question, that incredibly ugly mother of some innumerable elemental creatures had her face redden. She even snuck a look at Beifeng, but that action made me stumble upon a realization.

"I—I—I understand now! Don’t—don’t tell me anything at all!"

Chapter 259
Calculations

Perhaps I didn't expect some things to arrive so quickly. At the very least, I wasn't prepared for them.

After verbally sparring with the Holy Church… fine, you may as well call it a backstabbing. Although I had angered the Holy Church, I had made my attitude clear and had shown them evidence of my power.

"At the very least, it is now known by all that Wumianzhe's Church of Law is to be temporarily tolerated by the God of Holy Light. We're not a squishy tomato that can easily be crushed."

On the surface, all the major countries that believed in the Holy Light condemned what had happened on that day… yep, the incident in question was now even referred to by a formal name—"The Humiliation of Soros."

Alright, this name alone made it easy to see that fact that the pitiful Cardinal Soros had taken all the blame. Yet, from a certain standpoint, he would now become famous in history. Yep. He should thank me for that.

[It seems that your performance was quite meaningful, as it helped Princess Peach increase her shamelessness once again. It appears that you'll soon be peerless in the world (in shamelessness.)]

"Shut up! I've already sealed this new piece of dark history! Who dares to bring it up in front of me!?"

Even though those countries were condemning me for my disrespect of the Holy Light, it was all on the surface and didn't affect our weapon sales one bit. It was rather the opposite, in fact. In private, every secret envoy even praised me and promised large amounts of resources to support and encourage me in continuing to attack the Holy Church's reputation.

Of course, the contracts and agreements on paper were meaningless. However, I was

well aware that as long as Wumianzhe's Church of Law would be able to threaten and antagonize the Holy Church to a certain extent, some verbal agreements would be far more effective than even demonic contracts. After all, the Holy Church enjoyed far more authority and respect than even the rulers; no ruler would be satisfied with this.

What made them even more dissatisfied was that they could only hide their dissatisfaction; they did not know how to vent their frustration. They even had to express as much belief and veneration for the Holy Light and Holy Light job class members as possible, and provide the local Holy Churches with various benefits and support.

The Holy Church was so singlehandedly powerful that its believers typically consisted of over eighty percent of a country's population. And its religious authority was powerful enough to easily get rid of any ruler; all they had to do was declare them a heretic. The domain lords under such an unlucky ruler would happily do away with that 'heretic' king and fight over his position.

Before the Yongye Calamity of about one hundred years ago, which had caused a massive overhaul within the Holy Church's internal system—wait, no; their internal changes had started even earlier. Before their first major internal changes from over three hundred years ago, religious authority had towered far, far above royal authority. In that day and age, even a local head priest would dare to stand against the ruler of the land, and a cardinal would be able to ruin an entire country. In fact, the various princes and princesses of a country were mandated to report to the Holy Church's main headquarters for service (as hostages) and represent their faith in the Holy Light.

In a way, the incident of the Mist Kingdom was connected to all of this. If it weren't for the fact that the Holy Church and the numerous countries had gone overboard, the Yongye Calamity would not have occurred. And this would not have led to the major internal changes within the Holy Church. In fact, even the religious changes within the Holy Church of three hundred plus years ago had to do with me. If you would calculate it in such a manner, it could truly be said to be a messy state of affairs. Perhaps it was my destiny to go against the Holy Church.

Once some opportunities were missed, they could never be regained. If the Holy Church wanted to regain their status from three hundred-ish years ago, the rulers of each country wouldn't agree even if the other Gods' churches agreed.

Perhaps, the happiest of all were those countries of "fervent believers," which had "Saint" in their names, like San Antonio. It was no wonder that they were the ones who were in the greatest hurry to send their secret envoys to promise their support. It was as if they were afraid that they wouldn't be able to provide their support in time in case the conflict between us and the Holy Church intensified, as though our Church of Law would be smacked to death with a single slap of the God of Holy Light.

As for them supporting us on the surface? Well, we couldn't count on that unless they were idiots.

Yet we had finalized weapons deals for the next thirty years, along with unbelievably beneficial conditions for us such as them paying full price upfront and no time limit on delivering the goods. As long as we were shameless enough, this was no different from them giving us free money.

These obviously unreasonable conditions were not only evidence of the importance placed on our products by other countries, but it was even more so proof that they had long wanted to go against the Holy Church.

"I didn't gain anything from the Holy Church and actually received support from the Holy Church's potential enemies? I'm speechless."

The military parade and weapons sales were both highly successful. In a way, this also proved East Mist's power and the foundational strength of the Mist Alliance. Now that a new generation was upon us and especially with our new products being proven in battle, no smart ruler would miss the opportunity to obtain all these new technologies we were offering to sell.

And this wasn't only a temptation for outside countries. After we proved our might, several countries in the Northlands had secretly contacted us, and we were now in talks, discussing the possibility of them joining the Mist Alliance.

However, I still didn't change my mind. The first, original members of the Mist Alliance would only consist of six factions and countries: East Mist Communal Country, Sleuweir Kingdom, Xiluo Empire, Sharal Autonomous Region [1], Northlands Barbarian Tribal Alliance, and Rhodes Kingdom. However, I had only added the Rhodes Kingdom to avoid too much suspicion of bias and favoritism.

Yep, the Rhodes Kingdom, which had been sitting on the fence, joined us after that

military parade without a shred of hesitation.

"No matter how large the future Mist Alliance will be, all of the first original members of the Mist Alliance will become its core. Expanding it too much right away might not necessarily be a good thing."

And, right now, within the walls of my grand conference room, the Rhodes ambassador added the final signature. The six original members of the newly born Mist Alliance was formally decided upon, and the Mist Alliance was officially born. I was surprised, however, to receive an unexpected notification from my System.

[System Notification: The Mist Alliance has been successfully established, completing your Epic Quest, Revival of the Mist. With this, the rulers of the Northlands have revived in a new form. Calculating all of your rewards… Would you like a full calculation now? This calculation may affect part of future karma calculations. Please choose carefully.]

"Didn't I already complete this quest? The Sacred Sword?"

At the time, in order to deal with Karwenz, who had suddenly visited, the System had changed the Quest reward into "Receive the God Equipment, Roland Sacred Sword earlier than scheduled" from "Obtain the God Equipment, Roland Sacred Sword, as well as a clue leading to the God Equipment Crown of Thorns." Although I obtained the Sacred Sword, there wasn't much of a reward apart from it, and, in the end, I never received a clue about the Crown of Thorns.

[That Quest reward was just calculating part of the reward earlier than scheduled. Currently, I'm calculating the entire Quest reward. System Reminder: It seems like it's rather rare of me to help you out like this, so why are you so worried? If I don't help you out, isn't there no question about whether your younger twin brother would beat you so badly? Shall we calculate the rewards? Yes, or okay?]

I broke out into laughter. Was there any need to hesitate?

"Calculate the rewards. I want to know where the Crown of Thorns is."

[…It's currently in the hands of the current Bardi Emperor, Orloss the Thirteenth. You even personally gave it to his ancestor.]

Note:

1. The 'Sharal Autonomous Region' was how 'Shawen Free States' was translated by Starve. We are now going to continue using 'Sharal Autonomous Region.'

Chapter 260
Revival of the Mist

[Ding! Congratulations! You have successfully activated the Epic Quest: Revival of the Mist.]

[Quest Requirements: Resolve the danger of the East Mist Communal Country being annexed or forced into being a subordinate country. Help the Winterwolf Country of Far North return—when faced with the Winterwolf True King, even Darsos is insignificant.]

[Quest Rewards: Obtain the God Equipment, Roland Sacred Sword, as well as a clue leading to the God Equipment Crown of Thorns. I know you really want to find this missing Mist God Equipment that's a national treasure.]

[Quest Failure Punishment: You'll be turned into a girl. I'm serious. Very serious. If you can't even protect your own country, you might as well turn into a girl.]

It was similar to those absolutely ridiculous Epic Quests in the past. When I activated it this time, I immediately knew that this Quest wouldn't be as simple as it sounded to complete it.

Resolve the danger of being annexed or forced into being a subordinate country? Just getting past the threat of Auland at the time was plenty to deal with. Was I supposed to make such a foundationally weak country into one at the level of a mega-empire to prevent it from being easily bullied or annexed?

Help the Winterwolf Country of Far North? If it was just the return of the Mist Kingdom, then changing the name wouldn't matter that much. However, helping East Mist gain its independence probably counted as a Quest, and it would probably be perfectly completed if I was able to revive East Mist to the level of the former Mist Kingdom.

The Revival of the Mist? Yes, this was the foundation and the only important Quest goal. As long as the Mist Kingdom and the People of the Mist were revived, all the problems would naturally be solved on their own.

That was how I understood things when I received this Quest, and it was also how I went about carrying things out.

I had returned to the surface for a bit over a year. With the creation of the newly born Mist Alliance, there was now a large amount of progress in military affairs, politics, religion, and various other aspects. Perhaps the newly born Mist Alliance couldn't be called mature yet, and there was still a long path to go before East Mist could reach the status of the past Mist Kingdom and rule over the entire Northlands, but, at the very least, it was no longer a squishy tomato that anyone could tread on.

Imperceptibly, the System had helped me out again. If it had decided to make its final calculations for the rewards back in Antuen when my plans for the Mist Alliance—including religious changes, the peaceful coexistence of multiple species and cultures, and other such political changes—hadn't yet come into fruition, the final reward evaluation wouldn't have been very high. Now all the foundations were complete. All that was needed was for things to develop on their own, and I would receive the results I wanted. Doubtlessly, this was the best time to calculate my rewards.

"Actually, even if I wanted to manage things, there's not much I can do. So let the future generations decide the rest with time…

My insufferable System, do the calculations."

After I gave the command, the entire world seemed to stop and quiet down. Countless gray lines, both vertical and horizontal, intersected across space and collided with each other, forming knots. These lines of fate connected the myriad people and objects, rearranging the order of time and space and giving birth to a power of fate that could twist reality and the future itself.

These lines of karma then trembled, as though invisible hands were plucking them, and were then pulled out of me. They rearranged in midair before returning to my body. In this soundless expanse, time and space were meaningless. It seemed to be only an instant before these tossed-out threads and projectiles connected back to the untold number of people and objects, establishing new relationships of karma.

The heaven and earth had stood still. I, too, was unable to move and could only act as a witness to what was occurring. I was aware that if it weren't for the fact that I was able to create my own world of Frigidwinter Earth, then I would have been just like the past me; my consciousness would be frozen the moment I told it to calculate,

devoid of the power or right to observe such a scene.

"Lines of karma? The highest-level Concepts of Order, Time and Space? This is the true effect of Fate Points?"

Merely watching all this occur caused a chill to run down my back. I broke out in a cold sweat. This wasn't fear or astonishment but an instinctive humbleness that any human would have upon witnessing a Creator's ability firsthand. I could sense that although I, too, had reached the boundaries of this power, I was still lacking in comparison with its full might. It was akin to the difference between an ant and a massive dragon; there was no comparison at all.

"If I hadn't been able to 'Create a World,' I wouldn't even have the right to understand these things? What exactly is my System? Why does it have the ability to control Time and Space, as well as twist karma?"

I faintly detected the foundational powers of my System for the first time, but I didn't dare think any deeper about it.

[Do you see now? This is my power! That's why you bastard must respect me more! Hehehe! In front of me, a novice like you is still a fresh greenhorn. It'd be fine, however, if you're willing to become my disciple. As long as you remain in your Princess Peach form and look at yourself in the mirror every day, I shall consider it. Yep, yep! What a great idea! Why don't you start with your favorite lace-maid attire tomorrow? Oh! (high-pitched) hehe~ Oh~~~~~~~ Hehehehe~ Oh (high-pitched)~~~~~~~ Hehehehehehehe!]

Just as I had started to respect it a little, everything vanished in bubbles together with my System's shamelessness and classical 'female antagonist triple laugh.'

"Ptui! Dream on! That'll never happen!"

However, the mechanical notification sound of messages appearing before me didn't give me any time to think of this for any longer.

[Quest's First Goal: Eliminate the danger of the East Mist Communal Country being annexed or forced into becoming a subordinate country. Calculating results…]

[Originally, there were five countries that had ambitions regarding the East Mist. Ranking from highest threat level to lowest, they were: Sleuweir Kingdom, the surface

beastmen led by the Bloodaxe Tribe, the Tassel Elf Kingdom, Kasolan Kingdom, and Auland Empire.]

[These five factions no longer have the ability or ambition to annex or suppress East Mist. This Quest Requirement has been completed with a rating of 'Excellent.' You have been rewarded with 100,000 Fate Points and the Epic-ranked material Unyielding Jade. System Reminder: Tsk! You're just a lucky blind cat that managed to catch a dead mouse.]

Alright then. This was a pitfall as well. The Auland Empire, which everyone considered the biggest threat, was actually the smallest threat, while the biggest threat was, in fact, the Sleuweir Kingdom. Yet thinking about it a little helped me understand. When talking about motives, the Sleuweir Kingdom had the same culture and species and hence had the most reason to invade. After all, any slightly ambitious ruler would want to complete the major achievement of reuniting the People of the Mist, which would definitely be an accolade left behind in the annals of history.

Perhaps Sleuweir had always been waiting for East Mist to weaken even further while secretly hoping to benefit. It was likely that if the Auland Empire had succeeded in forcibly suppressing East Mist, the first reaction or military invasion would have been from Sleuweir.

As for the beastmen on the surface and the Tassel Kingdom? Their actions already proved their ambitions towards East Mist and even the entire Northlands—they had both taken military action… As for the Kasolan Kingdom—fine, the San Antonio Empire—so you didn't have any good intentions, either. Perhaps their target was the entire Northlands, and they already sent out their chess piece, Kasolan.

In comparison, the end result was naturally that the Auland Empire was the least threatening. They only wanted East Mist to be subordinate to them, and even if they were finally prepared to annex us, it would probably be an entire century later. I understood everything. Yep, the System was definitely the wisest, as nothing could escape its eyes.

"Wise!? I understood everything, the hell! Just how bored are you? You actually pretended to be my own mental narration! Also, what's with your reminder about how 'even Darsos is insignificant?' Was that supposed to be a hint of how I had enemies much harder to deal with than Darsos? Do you dare make me suffer any more than this? How can anyone guess at such a roundabout hint, one with more than ten

twists?"

[Tsk!]

"What are you tsking for? Are you that unhappy if I'm not suffering? Are you that unhappy that you didn't get to turn me into a girl? Is there any other System out there like you that's always trying to think of ways to make its host suffer? Just look at all the other Systems in other stories, with protagonists learning martial arts at the age of two, business and economics at three, how to start a harem at four, becoming a noble at five…"

Alright, I was just making up things about other stories' protagonists without any proper references, but I had suffered far too much. And it was impossible for me to get any revenge upon my System, so at the very least I had to complain a little in order to vent.

Yet, while saying all this, I wiped away some cold sweat. This System was far too insidious. If I had believed that only taking care of Auland was enough, then I probably would have received zero rewards in the end, as the completion rate wouldn't have passed even 20%.

[No, you can take revenge on me. As long as you go listen to Gria's concerts every single day, or enjoy what the Gentlemen Alliance members' personal lives are like, such as going to visit Omar's exercise gyms, you can definitely have your revenge.]

"Do you really think I'm that much of an idiot? That I would listen to your advice which would kill us both? No, wait—at that time, you just have to shut off all your senses while I'll definitely die by myself!"

[Quest's Second Goal: Help the Northland's ruler, the Winterwolf Country of Far North, return to power: the Sleuweir Kingdom, East Mist Communal Country, and Sharal Autonomous Region have all joined and become important parts of the newly born Mist Alliance, this represents the rebirth of the Winterwolf Country, and calculations can begin.]

Alright then, I opened my mouth wide agape in surprise but didn't say anything in the end. Wasn't it basically just a word game by my System? From the very start, this Quest included all the Descendants of the Mist, including the Sleuweir Kingdom. If I had only focused on East Mist, I would have received a 50% completion rate at most, no,

perhaps even 33%.

The most insidious of all was that the System had laid a trap for me known as the Sharal Autonomous Region. These half-bloods indeed had half of their bloodline from the People of the Mist. It seemed that they counted as People of the Mist as well, and tossing them aside and not caring about them wouldn't have been good.

"Just continue digging pitfalls for me. Sooner or later, they'll get so ridiculous that you won't know how to write this story anymore. Wouldn't that be quite fun for you?"

I didn't know what my System would think of my fourth wall-breaking retort, but I then heard the icy cold sound of my System reporting next to my ears.

[Analysis on the Mist Alliance complete. The Mist Alliance is currently composed of six core countries. Analyzing its future prospects for development… Potential future alliance members include: (You can use these as recommendations for strategic development)]

[The beastmen from the plateau. After the Underground beastmen finish their assimilation of the beastmen from the plateaus, and as long as you can suppress the influence of the beastmen from the plains on them, the likelihood will increase. And based on current projections, as long as there's a sufficient amount of diplomacy, trade, and resources invested into them, the likelihood of this area joining the Mist Alliance is projected to be above 70% within the next twenty years.]

[The Underground World Union: This faction's overall power is greater than the current Mist Alliance. Slowing down the process of them joining the Mist Alliance was a correct decision. Also, the Underground World Union has an overly complex internal structure, and will require a long and slow process of reorganization and rule before integration. You can consider having Sulfur Mountain City, Black Iron City, and other such Underground Cities that are particularly friendly towards the surface to join first. Based on current projections, the likelihood for this area to join the Mist Alliance is projected to be above 90% within the next fifty years. I recommend that you take extra steps to ensure the smoothness of this transition.]

[The other three Northlands elven kingdoms: The Tassel Elf Kingdom no longer exists, while the other three kingdoms are currently in chaos. They are afraid of revenge from the humans, and they hate the Elven Gods even more for going back on their words and deceiving them. From all the possible choices, if you use Elf Queen Suana as your

envoy and voluntarily reach out in friendship to them while simultaneously suppressing the enmity from non-northern elf kingdoms and the Elven Gods, they are highly likely to join the Northlands' largest faction—the Mist Alliance. System Reminder: They no longer have an environment where they are able to take care of themselves. Food, water, clothing and other such resources for them all depend on other countries now, and joining the Mist Alliance is a must for them to survive. You understand… If you treat them too badly, you'll be stricken by thunder. With your typical shameless and limitless behavior, this area is projected to have a likelihood of joining at over 80%. The time that it joins the Mist Alliance is limited only by human factors (I'm talking about how shameless you are), so it is impossible to calculate a time projection.]

Just how was I supposed to retort? It kept telling on one hand me not to treat them too badly and to stop being so shameless, while on the other hand it was strongly recommending me to take advantage of their weakness to force them to join the Mist Alliance. Was this supposed to be a legendary example of a tsundere that couldn't speak what she was thinking? I was so confused.

[The seven countries of the Northlands: Sleuweir Kingdom, East Mist Communal Country, and Rhodes Kingdom are all part of the Mist Alliance now. The Kasolan Kingdom is a complete subordinate country of the San Antonio Empire, and there is a lower than 1% chance of the Kasolan Kingdom joining the Mist Alliance, unless San Antonio collapses. The possibility of the Fengqi Kingdom and the Suya Kingdom joining the Mist Alliance will depend on the rate of the Mist Alliance's growth and power, what benefits you offer to them, and many other factors. It is impossible to calculate the likelihood that they will join.]

[Based on the current composition of the Mist Alliance and probable future developments, calculating your Fate Point rewards…]

A screen with unknown purposes kept showing me various numbers, such as "Religion: Unified Church, +12," "New military technology improvements, +7" and so on. These mysterious numbers kept accumulating, and when the numbers finally settled down, the final answer was ready.

Everything that the System was calculating was about the future—the future that was the most likely to occur due to all the relationships of karma. However, even the current Mist Alliance was no longer a tiny country that could easily be crushed by others.

Our victorious battles and the fact that the changes here were evident were known to everyone, and the current East Mist of the Northlands was already being viewed as a miracle land by humanity. This place was the origin of many new technologies, a new political system, a new way of living, and was where a new Order God gained power.

In this poor and frigid land, religion, culture, politics, and technology began combining and influencing each other. The teachings of Wumianzhe presented the possibility of many species and cultures living together. This unique species makeup and cultural atmosphere helped create new technologies and revolutionize society. And the birth of these technologies would be reflected in military and political affairs as well. Nobody would be able to predict the final product when all these factors mixed together in a chain reaction, but what people knew was that it had already attracted the attention of the entire world. Every day, countless visitors from other countries would come here to learn from us, and this poor and frigid land was now destined to no longer be as isolated and lonely as it was in the past.

Most importantly, the main headquarters of Wumianzhe's Church of Law was stationed here, and the teachings of Law had already begun to spread and slowly change the way of living in this entire area. The teachings of the Holy Light had met its strongest challenger ever. This perhaps would take much time still, but it was capable of changing everything at its very foundations.

I felt many things as I watched these numbers continually increase. All along the way, bitter, difficult, and unfortunate events had been countless in number. Suffering was a part of my daily life, and the times I had made others suffer was something uncountable as well, and I seemed to have dug plenty of traps, deceived, stolen, and scammed—cough—no matter what, after all these difficulties, I was more than halfway to my overall goal.

At the current moment, the Holy Church's reputation had successfully taken a huge blow, while the Law job class members had received recognition from the entire world. I also had the newest technology for this new generation, and the Mist Kingdom had finally revived in a new form. The People of the Mist, which consisted of many cultures to begin with, now had new family members and cultural aspects, while we had a home of our own to fight for again.

I was no longer alone…

[Future Mist Alliance calculations: With Wumianzhe's Church of Law as the national

church, this Mist Alliance, which consists of many member countries, has the potential to reach and surpass a mega-empire's strength. You have completed all parts of the Quest with a rating of 'Perfect.' You are rewarded with an additional 100,000 Fate Points, along with the mystical artifact Emblem of the Winter Wolf, and the SemiGod Equipment, Bloodlust Contract, which is a one-time-use consumable item…]

Although I had suffered quite greatly on the way, seeing these System Notifications, which were representations of my success, made me feel rewarded for my efforts. I was truly happy. My efforts hadn't gone to waste.

"We finally have a home."

With this, all the difficulties and suffering I had gone through were worth it.

Chapter 261
Silver Coin Squad

"Silver Coin Squad! Report!"

The gathering here of my new expedition squad was our final preparation before leaving.

"Knight Number One, present!"

Knight Number One was a gray elf Law Knight, who wasn't wearing heavy and solid metallic armor; instead, the elf was clad in leather armor made from a SemiGod-ranked hydra's skin. This was far more precious and of more excellent quality than any metallic armor, especially since this SemiGod-level hydra's skin was something rare and definitely couldn't be purchased anywhere.

This lighter armor made an excellent pair with any elven warrior. It wouldn't restrict an elf's natural dexterity, and its defensive ability against all sorts of slicing and piercing was even stronger than the hardest metal armor.

Its excellent magic resistance properties also far surpassed the element of mercury that was nicknamed as the "King of All Magical Metals." However, I had to be sparing in its usage; if it weren't for the fact that SemiGod hydra skin was too difficult to obtain, I would have loved to give such equipment to all of my elite warriors, but…

"Leader, can I wipe off the black dust? Such excellent equipment looks like a secondhand equipment that costs only fifteen silver coins. It was so difficult for me to take it from Momo…"

Yep, the gray elf before me wasn't that Momo, who lacked any moral integrity. For the sake of my chastity—cough—cough—for the sake of my authority as the squad leader, I ignored that "Mad Dog," who had strongly requested to go along with me. I had also ignored her comment about how "Momo only wore this for a few days, don't steal Momo's treasure! Ah! Stinky Sister Yawen, don't put it on! Your thick legs and all the fat on your chest will break her." I chose Captain Yawen, who had just finished the moonlight ritual.

And this wasn't only due to my bias. Since both Yawen and Momo were Law Knights, Yawen, who was at the peak of Gold rank, was not only more reliable in power level, but her tremendous Dragonslaying Sword, which she was able to use so easily, was definitely a top-level weapon at least of the Legend or Epic rank. When her armor's defense, magic resistance, and natural magic resistance were all taken into account, she had high DPS as well a high tanking ability. Her only weakness was her somewhat slow speed. Her mind, which had once been swaddled in thoughts about the Holy Light, was both trustworthy and honest. If necessary, she would be my perfect cannon fodder to cover my escape—cough—I meant meat shield.

"Since everybody trusts me and the two Highnesses gave the important task of managing Town Security to me, as the captain of Town Security, how can I possibly let myself be limited by the sunlight? Most importantly, forget about being captain but how can I let myself lose to Momo? I will accept the moonlight ritual to become a gray elf that doesn't fear the sunlight."

Yawen gritted her teeth and accepted the moonlight ritual, becoming the representative of a batch of new gray elves within Town Security. The celebratory fact was that after Lorci's death, the moonlight ritual no longer had so many religious elements to it, greatly decreasing in both risk and pain. After this news spread, many normal dark elves also underwent the moonlight ritual in order to live life on the surface without fear of sunlight.

"It seems that the Moonlight Goddess has a good temper. She didn't even mind the fact that she got so many false believers. This ritual even takes up a significant amount of her divine power. Does she intend to fight for the Divine Obligation of Salvation? That would mean she's declaring war against one of the God of Holy Light's Follower Gods."

All that stuff aside, Momo's greatest advantage was gone after Yawen became a gray elf as well. Yep, I definitely didn't choose someone so honest and easy to bully like Yawen because Momo was too difficult to deal with.

As for the side effects of taking the Town Security head captain with me… hehe, the weather sure was nice today, wasn't it?

"Number 2! Cohen! Knight… Magical warrior!"

I glanced over at him, causing this pitiful acolyte to immediately turn away. Perhaps, in front of us, he was still nothing more than someone to vent on, but this young knight

was already a major and popular personage in Diffindor. His seemingly divine talent in magic helped him gain fame, and as my knight retainer and a good friend of the great engineer Timmy Lade, this young knight, who came from a farmer's family, had entered the higher-ups of this city. He did not win others' trust with his status but with his honesty and friendliness.

Perhaps the only incomprehensible part was that even though he mysteriously managed to enter the Silver rank as a mage, he still hadn't progressed any bit whatsoever as a knight. Not to mention that he always emphasized his status as a retainer knight, but it would only take the mention of one thing before everyone understood.

"Oh, he's His Highness Roland's disciple? No wonder."

"What the hell! Is there no normal person around me…?"

When I first heard about how everyone thought, I had become incredibly angry and immediately tried to counter it. But the more I tried countering, the tinier my voice got. After all, I tried recalling the best I could, and with all the names I remembered, such as Adam, Amelia, Reyne, Glina, and so on, it really didn't seem like there was a single person who could be termed as normal. I lost my confidence.

"Hmph! It's definitely not my fault. It's the fault of that King of All Gentlemen title."

[I think that it's simply that birds of a feather flock together. Did you meet many normal people even before you had this title?]

I didn't even know how I should respond to my System's retort; it had hit me in such a weak spot. It really seemed like that was the case, as Cohen and Yawen were the few relatively normal individuals out of everyone I knew. Although a dark elf that loved the light and a magical genius who was obsessed about becoming a knight were slightly strange [Slightly?], they were still mostly normal.

By now, all of you probably understand my standards for choosing my companions for this expedition. That's right: normal people! I had enough of gentlemen as well as incurable chuunibyous! This time, I did my best to pick as many normal people as possible to accompany me and average out the Beifengness of this team!

[If you want to reduce the Beifengness of your team, kick yourself out of it. That's a better solution than anything.]

"Shut up!"

[If you keep treating me like this, do you believe that I can level you up to the God of all Gentlemen, and multiply your ability to attract gentlemen by ten times?]

Cough—cough—the weather sure was nice today. Let us return to the main topic at hand.

With Harloys teaching him, Cohen's studies in magic progressed at an astonishing pace. He already had his own unique understanding of being a Four Elemental Swordcaster and had developed numerous unique sword seals and magic sword techniques of his own, well surpassing what he was taught. Even though he was clearly still a novice Silver rank, he already had magic sword techniques surpassing the Gold rank or higher.

As for melee sword techniques and combat prowess? After being taught by several dedicated Sword Saint level instructors, he had probably progressed from "someone who would be sliced half to death while being chased by a skeleton soldier" to "someone who would chase a skeleton soldier and fatigue himself to death." Well, fine then. There was at least some progress. But since skeleton soldiers were basically at the same level as a farmer, his progress in this area was practically ignorable.

"You bastard! I've never seen a swordsman as idiotic as you. With so many Sword Saints teaching you, even a goblin would have evolved into a goblin swordmaster. You can't even remember the basic correct holding grip for a sword! As expected of Roland's disciple. There's such a nice path for you already, but you don't want to take it, intentionally making things difficult for yourself."

Alright then. If you ignored the last part there, Adam's angry scolding was quite reasonable. Still, I was able to understand what young Cohen desired. Back in the day, I had understood everything about sword techniques instantly yet always found myself wanting to fall asleep when reading textbooks about magic, and I was still unsatisfied with being a melee combat class.

"Back in the day, when I was unwilling to become a melee combat class, it was mainly because I felt that all melee classes were cannon fodder, while mages were cool and

powerful. As for why Cohen is so resolute about becoming a knight, it's probably because a knight, to him, represents protection and honor."

Although I could understand, a normal human's growth period in the Gold rank typically only lasted for a few years. With Cohen's outstanding talent in magic, it would be a pity if he wasted it.

"Coming out this time is probably a good chance to gain some practical combat experience that'll be good for him. If you're still incapable of becoming a swordsman through this, then obediently be a mage. What's perfect is that we're probably going to visit the Mage Country on this trip as well. I can give you a recommendation to the Cloud Tower for you to immediately go and cultivate there."

As I looked at the young Cohen who had a sad face, I felt like I was looking at a past version of myself. I patted him on the head and then flicked him forcefully as a way of encouraging him. I then focused my attention on the next teammate of mine, who had joined me of their own volition and was someone who I was unable to refuse.

"In that case, I'm Number Three? As for my job class… Dragon Queen? Oh, how about a ranger? My swordsmanship is alright."

The black-haired beautiful woman was wearing exquisite silver chainmail along with a mercury rapier that was far more decorative than practical. She was just going along because she could conveniently deal with Molly's request for help, and as for her Dragon City…

"Hehe, the weather sure is nice today."

Yep, although today was filled with dark clouds, thunder and hail, the weather sure was nice. It seemed that dragons had an excellent understanding of the weather as well; she had an identical opinion as mine from earlier.

"You haven't even been Dragon Queen for all that long yet. Aren't you afraid that your bastard subordinates will rebel if you leave?"

"In the Underground World, we're the largest faction already. If they rebel, who would they join? Wouldn't they be afraid of our revenge? Besides, as long as they have the ability and courage to rebel, who cares? It's so boring being Dragon Queen. I can't do this, I can't do that, and I have to stay at the Dragon City. It's even more boring than being in Sulfur Mountain City back in the day. It's basically like being in jail; who would

want to do that? Now that I'm outside, I'm going to drink—er—play as much as I want."

Should I say that this was as expected of Little Red? This status of being the Dragon Queen that Molly viewed as her own lifeblood was nothing more than chains binding Little Red down. Now that she had escaped after seizing the chance, Dragon City was probably in chaos.

But it was a good thing for me if she came along. After all, we weren't exactly going out on an adventure, and it was important to have a trump card that could turn the situation around at a critical time. Originally, I had wanted Adam or Margaret to come along, but those two obviously knew that I was looking for people to do some work, so right as I was preparing for this expedition they had vanished, nowhere to be found.

"Hmph, it's fine if they don't come as well. Otherwise, I'd only see flashes of light every day. Number Four, who's Number Four… Oh."

"Your Highness, why do you suddenly sound so dejected? Did I do something impolite?"

The person before me who was acting so "honest and surprised" was the Legend-ranked archdruid Eaglestorm. I could only helplessly take him along; it was fine for an adventuring party to lack mages or warriors, but it would be nothing more than suicidal to be without a single healer.

After all, nobody could be certain that they would never be injured, poisoned, cursed, or ambushed. Yet because of our current relationship with the Holy Church, it would be quite difficult to find a high-level Holy Priest to heal us.

Although the Church of Law's job classes were capable fighters, they did lack healing capabilities. All the Holy Light job classes among the Town Security were dark elves, so it wasn't convenient for them to come along. And, so, I could only helplessly choose the only backup option—the representative of the generalist school, the druids, who were capable of attacking, defending, healing, and casting magic but mediocre at all.

"Number Five, Krose. Your Highness, I shall work my hardest!"

The Judgementor and the windstorm druid Krose came along as well. Wasn't there a certain saying? Druids, Holy Knights, and shamans all counted as only half a priest each. Since Eaglestorm by himself would obviously be unreliable, I might as well take

a few extra people with me.

"Yep, I took two with me since druids can only count as half a priest each. They're both Legends, even if one is a transformation specialist and the other is a windstorm specialist. They should at least count as one priest if I add them together. I hope…

But the moment I saw how Krose was holding on to two books titled "Introduction to Emergency Treatment: Teaching You How to Tie Bandages in Three Minutes " as well as " A Guide to Herbal Medicine That Even a Monkey Can Learn" along with the fact that Eaglestorm had various healing books attached to his waist (all beginning-level), my eyes began twitching. It would appear that I had been expecting too much out of them.

"There's no helping it. If it comes to it, I'll do the healing personally. Yep, since I'm a melee specialist Holy Knight, that makes it three healers; we should at least count for 1.5 priests."

A ridiculously high-level draconic ranger, a genius magical swordsman who basically had almost Gold-rank combat strength, and a Law Knight who could kill and defeat any Legend rank with her racial talent and equipment alone. This was such reliable frontline strength. But, the moment we got to our rear, things instantly seemed much more unreliable.

Yawen and Cohen nervously glanced at these extravagant "Legend-ranked healers." In the end, they decided against saying "druids are only half a priest when they're specialists in life magic" and unhesitatingly decided to remain uninjured as much as possible.

As for Little Red, she yawned and immediately began napping. Humans' normal level of healing wasn't going to be of much use to her to begin with. Any cardinal-level Holy Light priest would probably run out of mana while attempting to heal her at an extent that wouldn't even reach her natural recovery rate while sleeping.

"Me, me, there's also me! I'm a Saint-ranked Beast Tamer. I'm Number Six, aren't I? Yep, what a lucky number. I'm so fortunate."

That bastard didn't pay any attention to the fact that I was doing my best to ignore him; he even did his best to make his presence known. If I had any other choices, I

wouldn't have chosen him.

But the problem was that for an expeditionary squad like ours, the abilities of a veteran beast tamer were far too useful. Scouting in the wild, tracking, prematurely sensing danger, checking for traps, and so on. With a veteran hunter like him on our team, we would be able to make much easier progress outside in foreign environments. After all, our ranger was a non-specialist in ranger techniques who only relied on overwhelming base stats (a certain dragon: hmph.) So, it was practically an absolute requirement for Beifeng to be brought along. Especially because of his beast tamer class's ability to control and detect beasts, which would be a huge help to my goal.

"You're forbidden from giving me any trouble, and you're banned from spreading your mysterious teachings about true love and mental pollution everywhere. You're also barred from doing anything disgusting in front of me…"

Beifeng kept nodding, but I gave up when I was only halfway through. No matter how good his promises sounded, he would instantly forget them the moment he met some new "true love."

"I'll be Number Seven, then. Yep, I'm the Holy Knight… I meant ice and snow archmage!"

I proudly rubbed my snow-white long archmage robes. It wasn't easy for me to have such a chance to show off, after all. For so long, I had been a melee combat class, but now I finally got to be in the rear.

"It wasn't easy, being a Holy Knight for so many years. I can finally change my identity. Hmph! From today onwards, please call me archmage Rodrey Vincent… what did I write on my fake ID again? Forget it, it's too hard to remember if the name is too long. Just call me Rolo."

I made some fancy movements with my staff and pretended as if I was a physically weak mage who required his staff in order to walk. However, I accidentally used too much force with my staff, causing a large piece of the ground to crack and rock shards to fly everywhere.

"It looks like using top-notch metal to make a mage staff isn't such a good idea, though

I think this will make for an excellent weapon. Yep, whenever some stupid muscleheads rush too close to me, all I have to do is smack them with this. Just imagining it feels great."

"…Should I start my comments with the mage who can't even remember his own name he gave himself? With your Intelligence, you might as well just go be a warrior. Or should I be commenting on your mage staff that even an ogre wouldn't have enough Strength to pick up? Are you simply intending on winning your battles by beating the enemy warriors to death with your mage staff? Or, should I begin by commenting on your little squad's name? Just who was your language teacher?"

The silly cat's retorts were getting sharper and sharper. It seemed that she had been getting much practice recently.

"You're already commenting! Besides, what's wrong with naming us the Silver Coin Squad?"

"What about the squad's full name?"

"The Silver Coin and Handsome Man's Mystical Adventuring Squad. It sounds pretty good to me?"

"Back in the day, your adventuring team was called 'Gold and Beautiful Women Adventuring Squad,' which I won't comment on anymore. After all, you were the team leader, and you said the more mundane a team name was, the easier it would be for people to remember. 'Don't all adventurers seek romance and money? This name will move so many people.' There were also quite a few females in our team, and we were all happy to be praised as beautiful women, so we were fooled by you due to our lack of experience. But do you know just what happened when we told others about our team name? They laughed so hard that they even dropped their weapons they were holding on to. That was the biggest humiliation of my life."

Since even Little Red was complaining so much, it would appear that she had quite a lot of grievances.

"After a while, apart from you, who else would call our adventuring team by its real name? In the end, all of our personal reputations far exceeded that of our team's reputation. Just a while ago, an idiot even asked me about the name of our adventuring team in the past, wanting to learn information about our adventures before. I sent that

idiot flying with a single slap. Everyone else thought that I had a bad temper, but the real reason is your ridiculous naming sense. Is such a name something I can say out loud? I still want my reputation to remain intact."

Little Red continued with her complaints, while a certain silly cat laughed continuously as she listened and even worked hard at adding fuel to the fire.

"But now take a look at the team names. From 'Gold and Beautiful Women,' all you did was turn Gold into Silver and change Beautiful Women into Handsome Man? Your naming ability probably reaches a heavenly scale."

I fell silent, but that silly cat still didn't know what was good for her as she continued making me angry.

"Handsome Man Squad? As expected of a name from you. Could it be that you want to be called the Handsome Squad Leader? Hahaha, your Princess Peach form must have given you a lot of pressure. Do you want to be called handsome that badly?"

I was so angry that my veins were bulging as I grit my teeth and commanded that silly cat with our magical pet contract.

"Now I know what our team is lacking. It would seem that we're missing a cannon fodder thief class whose profession is to step on all the traps for us in order to disarm them. Yep, the best choice for a thief is a cat person class. Number Eight, Harloys, come. As the squad leader, I've even prepared a thief outfit for you. Why don't you put it on?"

"Wait a moment, did you just say cannon fodder? Also, what are these? Cat ears and a cat tail? Just where is the tail supposed to be inserted? And there's actually such a pink armor? Ahh, you pervert! Why do you have such things with you!"

"They were leftovers from our spies' investigation into the Beastman tribes. Harloys, don't even think about changing the topic or escaping. Obediently put this on for me!"

“…Could it be that you were using them? You're such a huge pervert! Don't even think about it!"

Chapter 262
Famous Detective Roland

"There's only one truth! [1] You're the one who murdered Jack! Rosie, his newlywed wife!"

I shouted as I pointed at the short woman who was currently sobbing in an auntie's arms. All the other villagers in the room had expressions filled with shock and disbelief. In their minds, these newlyweds had just gotten married and were really close, with an excellent relationship.

Jack had been suddenly murdered, and Rosie had been the saddest. She had already fainted several times from crying too much; how could she possibly be the one to have done such a thing?

"The evidence is in how Jack died. The knife wounds on his neck aren't what really killed him, nor are the bruising handprints on his neck responsible. The pale color of his face is the critical factor. He was poisoned to death! Those handprints and bruises on his neck were simply caused by himself in his instinctive desire to try and breathe. The wide-open window and missing valuable necklace are just red herrings meant to disguise this case as the work of a thief. As for evidence? The evidence is this half a bottle of poison that I discovered in your backyard! Rosie, do you dare to show me all the kitchen utensils in your home? There are definitely still some traces of poison left on them. Don't tell me you broke all the dishes!"

Obviously, my logical reasoning for this deduction wasn't exactly airtight, but Rosie wasn't exactly a well-educated lady from a rich family. She was only a village girl who had never seen the world before. When I suddenly roared at her and shook a bottle of medicine—not poison—before her eyes, she instantly panicked and revealed everything.

“...I didn't do it on purpose! I was just trying to scare him. It's his fault for taking my dowry and gambling it all away; we have no more money left at all for even food… Wahhh! Who knew that rat poison would be strong enough to kill him?"

Alright then. This Jack fellow's reason for death was now clear. He had actually been

poisoned to death by a common killer: rat poison.

"And even if he lost my entire dowry through gambling, that would have been fine, but he—he even cheated on me, and he had an affair with Carr from the neighboring jewelry store! Hahaha! Jack actually cheated on me with Carr for three years, and married me only to conceal his preferences! That's why I made Jack unable to see him for forevermore!"

Alright, it turned out that Carr was the name of another man. It would seem that this Jack fellow had rather unique preferences. I watched Rosie, who had been laughing and crying finish with laughter out of extreme anger while gritting her teeth. Her smile was obviously an expression of one who had given up after cracking from too much mental pressure. While I sighed at how much information I just received, I had other things to exclaim about as well.

"It would seem that to this Jack fellow, the same gender is true love, while love between the opposite sexes is only an instinct. How are you supposed to have true love if the genders are different…? See, the evidence is that this guy died within not even three months of having gotten married."

But, doing this much was enough since we were only outsiders here. The rest should be handled by the locals. However, since I was able to complete the quest to find the killer in such a short time, I was quite proud of my own effectiveness.

"Being able to marvelously solve the mystery in just two hours? From today onwards, please call me the famous detective Rolo!"

"…You need to say all that? Everyone knew that she was the murderer. You were the only one wasting time, looking for evidence everywhere and having so much fun."

Alright then, on a nearby wooden table, there was a small cat thief who had a dissatisfied expression as she repeatedly touched the fake cat ears attached to her head. That tan cat tail attached to her was also listlessly limp. It would seem that Harloys, who had newly entered the thief job class, was quite displeased with her new identity and "equipment."

"I wasn't wasting time at all! I watched several hundred episodes of Detective Conan and Kindaichi Case Files [2] before, and I understand more than two thousand ways to kill people and the motives for doing so. How could people like you see through such

mysteries so easily? Hmph! Fools."

“…You seem to have forgotten that I was the one who taught you undead magic, and the deceased's grudge was all around that woman. Without even needing to use soul summoning magic, anyone can discover that the remnant of his soul was still in the room, continuously screaming. It was so easy to deduce. Remember to do an exorcism later; otherwise, he might turn into a grudge-bearing ghost."

She could do all that? I was so astonished that I opened my mouth wide agape, as I had forgotten entirely about such spells. It would seem like it wasn't so easy to be a detective in a magical world, after all. Any undead mage would definitely become an amazing detective, and there would be much competition. However, the others were attacking my confidence as a famous detective as well.

“…There was the scent of poison coming from the deceased's mouth, and the same scent was on that woman's hands. The scent was quite fresh; it was probably only two hours old."

The wryly smiling archdruid rubbed his nose, but I could detect his pride in himself underneath that seemingly casual expression of his. As a transformation magic specialist druid, anything like a bear's strength, a cougar's speed, or a dog's nose was child's play to him. What he played with was instead a SemiDragon's strength, a griffin's speed, and a phantom wolf's sense of smell. It would be a simple matter for him to whiff such a low-level poison in just one minute.

And when I looked towards Krose, who seemed so eager… I turned around again without saying a single word. Of course, I knew that since she was a judging specialist Judgementor as well as a high-ranked priest of Law, criminals would be unable to hide from her. She probably wouldn't even need to use any Divine Arts to detect lies; just a simple judging spell would take care of everything.

"Your Highness, Little Feather told me that he saw the entire process of that woman poisoning her husband. He and his wives severely condone such vicious behavior."

I should mention that Little Feather was a sparrow that Beifeng had met here. Were even sparrows able to have harems in this day and age? There must be something really deceiving about Beifeng's honest-seeming smile. But, from my understanding, probably only Yawen and Cohen in my little Silver Coin Squad didn't realize the truth of the incident. After all, they were low-intelligence useless cannon fodder—er—I

meant melee combat classes.

“…You think that anyone would be able to lie in front of a True Dragon?" Little Red spread salt on my wounds ever so casually.

"Your Highness, our normal training involves doing simple investigative work like this as well. We dark elves have a high amount of knowledge regarding poisons. It was quite clear the moment I saw that corpse."

Yawen seemed to find her words quite awkward as she saw how I was obviously becoming depressed, but she was too honest to know how to use white lies to make me feel better.

My little disciple Cohen didn't say anything; instead, he was continuously nodding in agreement with my deduction. But as a poor farmer's boy who was an abnormal knight possessing an Intelligence value over twice that of his Strength, he had instantly discovered the remaining half a bottle of poison the moment he had walked in the door and found all the clues.

But, he wanted to give his teacher face. Yet, for me, his ridiculously overboard expression of agreement as well as way too much nodding was the worst method of spreading salt on my wound of all. It made me even more embarrassed.

"Magic is so annoying! Only the wicked would flip to the end of a detective novel to find who the culprit is! Famous detectives never need to rely on magic! We only need acute observational ability and imagination. Can't you just use various little pieces of evidence and clues to conduct logical deductions that slowly force the culprit into a corner?"

Everyone had confused expressions that seemed to say, "There's already magic that does all that, so why go to all the trouble?" This made me even more embarrassed, as it turned out that all of my deductions had been unnecessary to begin with. And, so, my desire to cry turned into reality.

“…I hate this world that's completely unscientific! How are famous detectives supposed to live here!? You wicked people who go online to look for the culprit when playing detective games!"

Old Bob, who was the mayor of this little town, was finally able to rest assured as he watched the villagers taking Rosie away. No matter how chaotic things had been, this

incredibly rare act of murder in Buja Town had now been solved, which was a good thing. As for the mage leader of this little squad who was currently drawing circles on the wall… cough, Bob knew that people in the mage job class were a little peculiar. He decided to write this off as some sort of strange method of celebration, and he wisely pretended to not see anything.

"Amitabha! This humble monk is journeying to the west in order to request Buddhist scriptures. These are my three disciples and my steed. This dragon here is a black dragon horse who just learned how to walk and is in a rebellious phase, not wanting anyone to ride her. The dark elf here is my third disciple, the Sand Monk, while the hook-nosed beefy man is my pig-transforming Zhu Bajie. My first disciple is… Harloys, do you know how to transform into a monkey? Hey, you actually bit me!" [3]

Simply judging by his self-introduction, Mayor Bob felt that this venerated mage must have had his brain struck by meteors in the past. Bob didn't understand it one bit, and it didn't seem like the mage had been listening to him when Bob made his request. However, Bob knew that people shouldn't be judged by appearances. He believed in the rumor that the crazier a mage was, the more powerful they were. He had just requested the mage's squad to solve this case less than two hours ago, and they solved it already.

It was already considered a huge event for there to be a murder in such a quiet small town. As the mayor, Bob had been under much pressure to solve the case, so he had requested help from some new adventurers in the area. However, this adventuring team seemed to consist of some strange members: there was a beastman, a dracon, an elf, a druid, and even humans. This motley crew seemed unreliable.

But now, the solved case proved that they were reliable after all. The criminal had confessed, and all the evidence was found as well. It was now an ironclad case that he could tell the villagers about. He was quite happy with his own choice of choosing these adventurers, and kept thanking the team's members.

When Roland finally recovered from his depression, the fifteen silver coins earned from solving this case had already transformed into an abundant feast for tonight's dinner as well as two weeks' worth of travelers' inns' fees. Although this still wasn't considered much money, it was the largest amount of money they had received in the entire past month.

Unlike stories told in epics and legends, real adventuring squads were just like this.

This was especially all the more so in the relatively peaceful central plains. Ordinary adventurers spent most of their time helping this little boy find his family dog, or helping that little girl deliver a love letter—tiny quests like these. Rather than calling them adventurers, they were more like a bunch of hired temporary workers.

Some people became adventurers in order to have a stimulating, adventurous career. However, the fact was that dragon-slaying or demon hunting missions were quite rare, and also had high requirements of one's power level. The top-level adventuring squads that had the ability required to do such missions would also have to carefully consider the risk-reward ratio whenever they coincidentally came across such high-difficulty missions.

The Lagraz Kingdom that we were currently in had been at peace for many years, so there was very little chaos within this country. At the very most, some goblins appearing at the border would be considered the greatest threat, and even the Lagraz Royal Knights would fight with each other for the opportunity to gain some glory and military achievements. It was even worse for the adventurers in this kingdom, as any adventurers and mercenaries with even the slightest speck of ambition would consider going to other countries instead.

Of course, in any area where there was nonstop warfare, that location's adventurers and mercenaries might even be stronger than the local armies. Those that fought monsters every day in order to grow stronger and even dared to accept missions to participate in war were completely different from local adventurers. After all, there were quite a few examples of mercenary or adventurer leaders that had become real kings.

Only relying on quest and mission rewards obviously wasn't enough, so most adventurers' income still relied on victory loot. There were quite a few adventurers that even stole from or attacked those who hired them, which was why adventurers and mercenaries as a whole had somewhat bad reputations. This was all the more so for newly-born adventuring squads that didn't establish any reputation yet. Without any reputation, they would be considered untrustworthy.

That was why most adventuring squads took careful steps to protect and improve their own reputations. Any slightly higher-level quests or missions would also have requirements of the adventuring squad's reputation and overall power level. Not just anyone would be able to accept such tasks.

Old Bob chose the Silver Coin Squad that had basically zero reputation mostly because a murder case in a farming town like this was destined to be unprofitable to begin with; the amount of money the town could afford to pay was pitifully small. Large mercenary squads and veteran adventuring teams wouldn't even take a second look, which was why he tried hiring this squad of youngsters. He didn't expect that they instantly solved the case, which was a happy surprise for him.

As for me, I had carefully selected this border town that was close to the Bardi Empire.

One side of this city was walled off by mountains. The Elohim Mountains extended for several thousand kilometers, and every week people would come out of the mountains in order to explore the world. Obviously, becoming an adventurer to work for a living was an excellent and common choice for a temporary job, which was why it was quite easy to get accepted as an adventurer here. The officials here wouldn't possibly go through the trouble of entering the mountains to check your identities, and adventuring squads consisting of members from the same hometown were quite common. However, there weren't many adventuring squads that would choose to stay for long in such a peaceful little town with very little profits to be earned.

As for the Silver Coin Squad, the high number of people moving through this town meant that it would be easy to fake our identities. There were few permanent residents and management was lax, which would greatly decrease our troubles. We could train together here in this town and get used to each other, while also learning how to imitate the locals' accents. This would help us in doing what we needed in this surrounding area.

As for me, I had an Epic Quest which required me to go to the Cloud Tower in the Mage Country to activate the next portion. I was supposed to talk to the Truth Overseer named Oslowen, which was obviously for something important. However, I didn't intend to go there immediately since there was one year given on the time limit to begin with. I wouldn't feel reassured unless I first went to the Bardi Empire to take a look at the Undead Plane Dimensional Door that was rumored to exist. I was feeling quite anxious about it. In order to make more accurate decisions, it was extremely necessary to disguise myself and somehow get into the Bardi Empire.

Originally, I had intended to directly enter the Bardi Empire, but their ridiculously distorted and strict governmental control over all adventurers and mages would obviously be a huge problem. If we were surrounded by an Undead Emperor as well as the Bardi Empire's army and attack from all sides, it would be 'quite fun,' which was

why I instead chose to enter from a neighboring country.

The Lagraz Kingdom wasn't strong. However, its royalty was related in blood to the Bardi Royalty, so it had a decent relationship with their neighbor, the Bardi Empire. It was common for citizens from both countries to visit each other. Also, while this town we were in wasn't a large or flourishing one, it was very close to the main road leading to the Bardi Empire. Inns and tolls on the main road were too expensive, so there were many veteran travelers staying in this town who wanted to save money by resting somewhere slightly farther away.

My idea was quite simple. Since there were often merchants coming to and fro, they would, of course, be hiring guards. When we met some rich Bardi merchant who had a sufficient amount of status, all we had to do was find an appropriate opportunity to display enough power in front of him and have him be the cover to help us get into the Bardi Empire.

The stronger a Dimensional Door was, the larger it would be. The moment it was activated fully, there would be an incredibly obvious movement in the Elemental Tide. It would be impossible to conceal. I expected that I would be able to complete my preliminary scouting objectives simply by following some Bardi merchant around.

"But it's so boring just waiting. I've already helped little Catherine next door find her missing cat six times already. Should I just give her Harloys in order to coax this foolish naughty child who keeps feeding her cat nothing but bones and lollipops?"

Since the situation in the Northlands was going well, and I currently wasn't pressed for time, I was actually quite enjoying these fun days that were just like a vacation.

Of course, since our adventuring squad consisted of quite a motley arrangement of species, we spent far more money in town than we earned. The villagers here ended up seeing us as being led by a second-rate mage with too much money on his hands, together with his bodyguard (the buff and muscular Eaglestorm), his concubines (all the women), and pet cat (a certain Harloys who really loved to bite me) on a chuunibyou adventure. It was completely understandable.

Several weeks had passed, and Little Red had polished off every single last barrel of alcohol in this entire town. We had been grinding every single available quest in this little town, but still hadn't met upon an appropriate opportunity with a Bardi merchant yet. However, another person that we had arranged to meet with found me

at this time.

"Lilith? You came here quicker than expected. Where's Amelia?"

Note:

1. The author really likes using this Detective Conan quote!

2. They are both Japanese manga series.

3. All of this is a long Journey to the West reference.

Chapter 263
Dimensional Descent

Originally named Fina Milan, Lilith Milan was a high-level member of the Blood Tribe as well as the main character of "Sleeping Beauty." Events in her past caused her to lose her trust in men and not feel safe around them, and she was now sexually interested in only women.

Yet ever since our time in Sulfur Mountain City, she was my most trusted subordinate… fine, the main reason for this was that my other subordinates were too unreliable and unworthy of my trust.

She would separate personal matters from work and would always keep her cool during incidents. Trusted by all her companions, she possessed a great deal of common sense. This was most important—this last part alone made her stand far above a certain group of bastards.

However, Amelia's appearance had exposed Lilith's true familial history and identity. This had led the higher-ups of the Church of Law to a standstill; they weren't sure whether she would leave because of this. Without her, things would become incredibly difficult, which would be a disaster.

Luckily, she had made her choice known to everyone by silently continuing to work as needed. She had chosen to remain in the church.

That was why we all were astonished when Amelia and her had suddenly left a few weeks ago. They had only left a short message with no clear explanation. Although we did possess the ability to keep in touch with each other, it was still quite a surprise for me to meet her here.

"Why are you here? Wasn't Amelia together with you? Where is she?"

Lilith's face was quite pale as she shook her head. The blood seeping out from the corner of her mouth explained everything. Upon taking a closer look, it was evident that she was in a bad condition.

"Eh? You're injured? It appears quite serious?"

Lilith's life had been changed by a secret forbidden spell. She was a special, one-of-a-kind Blood Tribe; basically, she was a type of true ancestor. Although she was quite young (for a Blood Tribe member), not only did she practically not have a fear of sunlight, but her power level was quite high as well. Vampires were also naturally talented at recovering from their injuries. That was why it was definite that she had received some serious injuries; she had even lost control of her blood, the most precious thing to any Blood Tribe member.

"Cough… I was a little injured, and didn't… suck any blood."

I instantly understood. Due to some certain preferences of hers, Lilith had always relied on certain women that she "got along well" with as food sources, and had never attacked or killed anyone.

As a Blood Tribe member who served the Church of Law, her morals were a little too proper and outstanding. Even if she was heavily injured, she had no intentions of attacking others to help herself recover. Although she had made it all the way here, her injuries must have only gotten worse; she was almost unable to control her instincts anymore. It seemed like her eyes were turning green as she looked at Yawen.

Why was this picky eater only looking at Yawen? She had known Krose for many years already and obviously knew what Krose had been in the past, not to mention that Krose had been sent out with a task to do today. Harloys had a beautiful outer appearance, but her Blood Tribe instinct kept reminding her that there was definitely a scary monster under that beautiful appearance, so she definitely wouldn't touch Harloys. Little Red's dragon blood would be incredibly healthy and beneficial for her, but Lilith wouldn't even dare to mention this in front of her. So, her only choice was this gray elf female knight.

"…I… can still go on."

Yet judging by how she was spitting blood as she spoke, it was obviously not a good idea to have her go on like this. No matter if it was a druid's life magic or a Holy Knight's holy healing magic, they would only have the opposite effect on a Blood Tribe. Any herbs or medicines wouldn't work on her undead body, either. If she lost any more blood, it would likely be difficult for her to maintain her sense of reason.

"I'll do it."

Although Yawen had said so, I knew that she couldn't. Part of the moonlight ritual involved using needles to continuously pierce the skin, which would cause a large amount of blood loss. It would be quite difficult for Yawen to donate any blood at this time, not to mention that Blood Tribe members often lost control of themselves when injured. It would be quite unfortunate if Lilith accidentally killed Yawen.

"Who else, then?"

Alright, if none of the women could do, then Lilith decided to make do with a man. Taking a look around, Lilith saw that Cohen was too weak, Eaglestorm was too old, and she was scared of infectious diseases if she bit Beifeng. Finally, her green-tinged eyes landed on me, and she was astonished to discover that her master's blood had an appetizing aroma, resembling that of three-hundred-year-old wine.

"Master…"

That ravenous stare made me break out into a cold sweat. When I looked around me, everyone backed away and looked at me with expressions of satisfaction at my upcoming disaster.

Well, I could only fill in this pit that I had dug for myself. I helplessly reached out my arm and furled up my sleeve. I looked out the window and didn't dare watch the sight.

"Please be light with me. I'm more scared of receiving needle shots than anything. Oh, right, my veins are a bit deep. It won't take you a few extra bites, will it? Look and make sure before you bite down."

Alright then. At the very least, she was much better than certain clumsy nurses in my previous world and made me bleed with a single bite. However, even though I had clearly reached out with my arm, what hurt instead was my neck… Who said that it was a pleasurable experience having blood sucked by a Blood Tribe member? Come out, I promise not to beat you to death… as for that strange and numbing wonderful sensation that came afterwards, it was definitely a mistaken impression. Yep, a mistaken impression.

"What a wondrous and rare flavor, as expected of Princess P—"

"Shut up! If you keep talking about that, no more blood for you."

"You're saying that a Dimensional Descent appeared? How is this possible!?"

"Yes, Aunt Amelia (why does this sound so awkward to me?) met an incredibly powerful opponent, and we were separated. But before we lost each other, she came to such a conclusion."

Soon, Lilith was fully reinvigorated and filled with energy again, so she gave me an explanation of everything.

It turned out that Amelia had left because of a huge incident after all. The border clashes between the Bardi Empire and Mage Country had turned into all-out warfare, but just such a "small matter" wouldn't have moved Amelia. Ultimately, she was both one of the highest-ranked mages in the Mage Country as well as a member of the Bardi royalty. Not only that, she hadn't participated in either country's affairs for so many years already, and due to certain ridiculous habits of hers, both sides probably wanted to remove her name from their ranks.

What really made Amelia decide to take action was a piece of news that one of her subordinates in the Bardi Empire privately sent her. This message mentioned that in Port Victoria, a major merchant port city which recently joined the Bardi Empire, a large amount of blood sacrifice incidents had appeared. There even seemed to be signs of the presence of high-level undead. Also, more than twenty strange black towers had been erected outside of the city, with some purple-black crystals lighting up the tower tips. There were even sounds of souls wailing reported to be heard in the vicinity.

"Soul-Summoning Towers" were incredibly common in undead magic. They were a type of magic user's personal base, very similar to an archmage's mage tower. There were countless different functions and sizes based on customization, but all of them would have some basic functions in common—summoning the souls of the dead and cultivating the souls into an undead mage's magic power, which would increase the power of their undead magic. As long as there was a sufficient number of dead and their souls in the Soul-summoning Tower's area, an undead archmage would have basically limitless mana.

This was also part of the reason why the Gods despised the undead. However, the creator of Soul-Summoning Towers didn't dare go too overboard to the point of interfering with the cycle of reincarnation. The souls that were drained of their mana

could still enter into the cycle of reincarnation after the undead mage was done with them. However, that was only possible if they didn't turn into undead because of the extremely painful process of draining their mana that would leave them with countless grudges.

When comparing Soul-Summoning Towers with mage towers, the former was slightly weaker than the latter, but due to the fact that materials needed for the former's construction were undead materials, they were much cheaper to construct. They were easier to construct as well, taking up much less time, so it was a product that could be said to be of high-quality and cheap. Of course, the side effect would be that everyone would come attack you. Not only that, any place that erected Soul-Summoning Towers doubtlessly meant that there were high-level undead present there, which would cause the Holy Church to immediately send people to attack them.

"…But the Bardi Empire has already exiled the Holy Church and all Holy Light job class members. The Bardi Empire's also remaining strangely silent on this matter. Port Victoria's various organizations and citizens can only think of their own ways to survive. Aunt Amelia has a friend living there. But unfortunately, when we arrived, everything was already in chaos. The Undead Plane has begun its Dimensional Descent already."

Lilith's tale caused everyone hearing it to inhale cold air. Although she said it so lightly, everyone here who knew what a Dimensional Descent was could already imagine a scene that was like hell on Eich. But what astonished me even more was that Amelia actually had a friend—cough—cough—I should get back to the main topic.

"You're absolutely certain that it's a Dimensional Descent and not simply the opening of the Undead Plane Dimensional Door?"

"Yes, it's Aunt Amelia's assessment. With everything that's happened after that as well, there should be no mistake."

"Dimensional Descent" was a specialized term that even mages rarely used. This term referred to what would happen if two planes got sufficiently close enough to each other. Parts of some areas would begin overlapping. This would typically appear near the closest areas to the Dimensional Door. For example, if the Earth Elemental Dimensional Door at Antuen really succeeded in opening, then the surrounding environment would have begun showing signs of elementalization. The large amounts of naturally born small and mid-sized earth elementals were the best evidence of this.

However, in most normal cases, even if a Dimensional Door succeeded in completely opening, at most the area around the Dimensional Door would change to match the other plane's environment. A complete dimensional overlap wouldn't appear. To use an analogy, the change to the environment that a Dimensional Door typically brought about was like adding some sugar to water and making it into sugar water, while a Dimensional Descent was like squeezing two cups of water into one cup of water, which would likely result in the cup breaking.

"If one of the Elemental Planes performs a Dimensional Descent, then more than half of everything living in the surrounding area will instantly die off. Those still left alive would have characteristics of elemental creatures and would never be able to live normally on the mortal plane again. If the Undead Plane, which is filled with death, performs a Dimensional Descent…"

Doubtlessly, Harloys, who was an expert on magic, had the greatest right to make an assessment of what would happen. Yet judging from her current expression and silence, it was obvious that she didn't have much hope for Port Victoria.

"I believe in Amelia's ability to assess the situation. If the Undead Plane really is performing a Dimensional Descent, then we should consider not going there to save anyone; all the living will instantly turn into the dead, and part of the Undead Plane will appear there. And it's probably a permanent effect. This is far more troublesome than any Land of Death."

I nodded in agreement. Harloys' assessment, which she had finally ended up giving, was basically the same as what I was thinking. However, I had thought of even more troubles.

"If that place has already transformed into a part of the Undead Plane, then that means some existences that are limited by dimensional natural laws will be able to descend there. No wonder Amelia met with trouble. There's a high probability that she met a real Undead Emperor."

It was obvious that the major city Port Victoria would become nothing more than a page of history. Its population of almost one million residents had completely turned into undead, and the veterans of the Undead Plane had their own home bases established there now. But, I was thinking of how the Bardi Empire was destined to leave its name in the history books for infamy, having paid such a large price—a price that was likely only going to grow even larger.

"There's no response from the Bardi government?"

"None at all, and news about it has been suppressed. When I managed to escape, I even saw knights in the surrounding area keeping the main road leading to Port Victoria on a lockdown. Caped undead were also openly talking to military officials, while skeleton soldiers and zombies were being organized and commanded by human officers. It's obvious that they've already reached an accord. And…"

"And?"

"I heard some news that the Bardi government's official channels are announcing that the new undead armies are here to help the Bardi Empire defeat the Mage Country. Although it caused quite a lot of resistance, it all seems to have been suppressed."

As a port, Port Victoria was obviously by the sea. And right across the sea from Port Victoria was the Mage Country. I was basically able to guess their intentions from these pieces of information.

The merchant city Port Victoria originally belonged to another country and was a location that the Bardi Empire had recently obtained; it wasn't a place that they highly valued to begin with. A merchant city like Port Victoria wouldn't have many military ships stationed, while the ones present, typically the small and medium-sized merchant ships, wouldn't be able to carry many people. Even if Bardi's renowned land armies went on ships into the Strait of Debo, they'd be nothing more than easy targets unable to conveniently use the advantages that they had on land.

After receiving more and more information, I had a guess—but there would be a huge amount of trouble if I was on the mark. I directly stated what I was thinking.

"How wide is the Strait of Debo? I only want the straight line distance."

Yawen took out a map and measured it with a ruler. When she converted the distance scale on the map, she suddenly lifted her head.

"Less than two hundred kilometers! If the undead army makes a sudden march, one night will be more than enough."

Undead weren't afraid of fatigue and didn't need to breathe. Natural barriers that were

impossible obstacles for other living creatures were nothing in front of them.

The ocean waters were treacherous? Ocean waves were tall enough to capsize vessels? While that may be true for the ocean's surface, the bottom of the ocean was always calm.

All the port areas where vessels could land at in the Mage Country were heavily guarded? In that case, just find any random unguarded area to climb ashore.

These were all tactics I had used back in the day to make use of the special characteristics of the undead, attacking with unexpected methods. Yet since I had made these precedents, it was only natural that they became standard undead attacking strategies.

With all this information, the big picture was getting quite obvious. But even the ruler of an empire wouldn't be able to act entirely as he pleased, making such obviously ridiculous policies. At the very least, he would have to convince all the factions within his country and give the other factions red herrings of benefits to be gained; he would have to convince his subordinates somehow.

The current Bardi Empire was still likely at a cooperative stage with the Undead Emperors. As long as the undead were able to prove their worth, there would be plenty more cooperative opportunities between them and the Bardi Empire in the future, and of course the undead would help the Bardi Empire even more in the future. Since Port Victoria was formerly an enemy country's city that had been recently conquered, why would the Bardi Empire care about it?

"If the undead armies suddenly ambush the Mage Country from underwater with high-level undead assisting them, then even the Mage Country might not be able to defend against them. Perhaps Amelia heard some news about this, which was why she personally went… Lilith, do you have more detailed information about what happened to Amelia?"

Lilith anxiously shook her head; she seemed to lack self-confidence.

"No. Not long after we arrived, the Dimensional Descent occurred. Of course, as a member of the Blood Tribe, I was fine. But, no matter how strong Aunt Amelia is, she's still a human, and apparently she recently fought against someone powerful and was

a little injured…”

However, I smiled at Lilith’s anxiousness. Perhaps this would be the brink for others, but I didn’t at all feel like that maniacal witch would have any problems. Her existence had already exceeded the capabilities of life.

“…Relax, she’s even less a member of the human species than you are."

"Relax, Lady Lilith. I can sense that in that direction, Lady Amelia’s life forces are still blazing strongly. Not only one month, but I think she can easily maintain herself there for another two or three years. She’s not the one in trouble; the undead that angered her are the ones who have to worry."

Eaglestorm, who had been closing his eyes and thinking, suddenly spoke up and made such a statement. Lilith, however, only believed his words halfheartedly. There was such a great physical distance between them; it seemed for even a Legend-ranked druid to make such a statement with confidence.

However, Harloys and I exchanged glances. Back in the Earth Elemental Plane, Eaglestorm had also witnessed Amelia’s complete form. As a druid who lived in the forests, it was basically a natural talent of his to sense a forest. If he said that Amelia would be fine for the time being, then it was very likely true.

Even at the very worst Amelia would be forced to reveal her true form, and she still wouldn’t be easily dealt with. I was able to somewhat relax when I thought of this. Yet all these things had happened, and I had already decided on what to do for the next part of our little excursion.

"Hurry up with our preparations and gather all the equipment we need. At the very latest, we shall move out on the day after tomorrow. It’ll be best if we can find a Bardi merchant, as that’s the best way to sneak in. If not, we’ll have to secretly cross the border!"

Chapter 264
Progress

Unlike the snow-covered Northlands, spring arrived early in the central plains of the south. The temperature would rise quickly within two weeks of the first spring rain, and spring's arrival would be accompanied by numerous showers.

To use the churches' way of saying things, the Winter Goddess Donya decided to give her power over to the Spring Goddess Arsheer. Amid this warm season of blooming flowers, the plants that had hibernated during the winter sprouted new buds. Starving animals begun their search for food. A new year had brought with it a new cycle; all living creatures were reinvigorated, and new lives were born in this golden era.

Alright then, I'll stop speaking poetically and start talking about more practical things. Yep, let's talk about making money. Spring brought with it plenty of business opportunities.

In this era of cold weapons, traveling typically relied on horses and horse-drawn carriages. In winter, the roads were caked in ice, and traveling was inconvenient; the transportation of goods and daily life products would be quite slow. Throughout the winter families and stores would use up many goods, and when it ended, there would be a need for restocking.

This was why each spring was a golden opportunity for any merchant to make money. It was also considered acceptable to raise their prices slightly. The high demand at this time of year would allow merchants who specialized in this line of work to make an astonishing amount in their first cargo shipment of the year—it would amount to a staggering thirty percent of their entire profits for a whole year.

The Lagraz Kingdom was a major producer of silk, green obsidian crystals, redwood, and rosmarinus trifoliate. Among their exported products, green obsidian crystals and rosmarinus trifoliate were both magical ingredients, and redwood was an excellent wood for crafting mage staves. These magical ingredients were all highly sought after by both the Mage Country and the Bardi Empire.

Since the market had demand, there would always be sellers. All the merchant groups

would head out immediately after the final snow of the new year and sell off local products in other countries for profits. Then, in another country like the Bardi Empire, they would use their profits to buy various local products and sell them back in the Lagraz Kingdom for enormous profits.

However, just like my original world in the past, the great profits to be gained from the importing and exporting of goods would be accompanied by great risks. If merchants ran into bandits or unscrupulous governmental officials, it would be considered lucky if they could retain even half of their wares. If they were even unluckier, they might even run into military situations, political affairs, or even warfare and other unpredictable factors, which would cause them to lose everything.

Yet, in this generation, the most dangerous of all was to attract the attention of some "domain lord." After all, no matter how great a merchant's connections were, they would still be limited in a country that wasn't their home. Some major nobles treated stealing wealth from foreign merchants as free breakfasts as long as there was some passable excuse they could come up with.

As ordinary people wouldn't dare to take up the import-export trade, there would obviously be no ordinary people in this business. Those that dared to become import-export merchants were typically very difficult to take down. Many would have extremely strong supports, sometimes even being connected to the royalty of their origin country; they would be unafraid of the extortions of a normal domain lord. Some would have sufficient strength to protect themselves, and some would have their own personal mercenary groups or something similar. After all, the fact that they were able to protect themselves in foreign lands meant that they had trustworthy combat strength available in their hands.

The leader of the Veji Merchant Association had no connections to royalty or nobles and was obviously of the latter type. Although this merchant association was only a new one that had existed for a little less than twenty years, the hard work and careful management of the Veji Family's leaders helped them successfully monopolize the trade routes between Bardi Empire's Anliso City and Lagraz Kingdom's Anton City. The scale of their mercenaries matched that of a small domain lord's army. However, there was something different about the situation this year.

"…It seems that the best I can hope for is that I won't lose everything."

Sindy Veji, aged 46, was one of the higher-ups of the Veji Merchant Association. He had

been conducting import-export trade along this route for almost thirty years now. Yet unlike past years, news about the Bardi Empire's situation had been murky recently, all sorts of rumors abound.

Skilled merchants were instinctively sensitive to danger. In their eyes, a major upheaval within a country was synonymous to problems in its economy. Recently, there had been many rumors about strange magical monsters and undead appearing within the Bardi Empire, which greatly decreased the amount of merchants traveling between the Bardi Empire and the Lagraz Kingdom.

Sindy gazed at an approaching thunderstorm as he mused to himself; he was quite worried about the situation. Unfortunately, there was nothing he could do about it. Many orders had been placed with their merchant association in the previous year, and several of them were from old customers that had been with them for over a decade; he absolutely couldn't afford to anger them. No matter what, he had to make this trip to the Bardi Empire.

Unusual circumstances would require additional measures. The leader of the Veji Merchant Association was willing to spare no expense and paid heavy fees to invite two of the top ten mercenary groups in the Lagraz Kingdom. They had even required that the groups send out high-level elite combat strength to come guard them.

As a result, the strong were indeed willing to be hired by them. The leader of The Eagle of Sulo Mercenary Group, "Meteor Sword" Juste, and the leader of North Horn Mercenary Group, "White Dragon" Carlogier personally arrived to guard them. These two individuals were both very famous for their strength in the Lagraz Kingdom, and, as agreed, they brought their elite subordinates to guard the Veji Merchant Association. The problem was that the expected profits from this time's import-export trip weren't going to be enough to pay the price to hire these two mercenary groups.

"Heavens, please don't let us meet with any trouble, especially not those undead that don't care about their lives…"

If the hired mercenaries didn't meet with any combat situations, the typical way that they worked was that they would only have to be paid eighty or ninety percent of the originally agreed upon price. There also wouldn't be any need to compensate their losses, so that would be the best case scenario; the Veji Merchant Association would at least make enough money to cover all their costs.

"Sir Sindy, why do you always look so depressed? The weather's really nice today. You should be happy that we can make good progress due to the weather."

In Sindy's eyes, this blonde-haired boy, who was all smiles, appeared to be only fifteen or sixteen years old. However, after talking a bit more with him, Sindy felt more and more like he didn't understand this boy named Rolo.

Rolo seemed childish and ridiculous, but was especially talented in the merchant business. Some random sentences that he would say would require Sindy to ponder for quite a while before he understood them, and, in the end, he would feel like they were quite logical.

These strange members of the Silver Coin Squad came to Sindy of their own volition and offered to be hired as mercenaries for an incredibly low price, which astonished him. At first, he thought that there was some plot, but he understood when he looked at the wares that they were carrying. He must have thought too much about things, and they probably only intended to seek protection from a large merchant convoy. Their offer of working for cheap was only a cover for wanting to borrow his much larger group to help them make a small profit.

Normally, this type of joining in mid-way was somewhat taboo and typically wouldn't be accepted. However, when Sindy directly told them that he had seen through their real intentions of "joining him for protection," they admitted it quite honestly and even offered to pay him a sizable sum.

"…We absolutely need to deliver this shipment of Wenlo grape wine. Right now, the world isn't peaceful, so how could we dare to travel by our weak little selves? We'll pay you, and if there really is trouble on the way, it's always safer with more people."

Of course, how useful the bribe paid to Sindy was in allowing them to travel with him was unknown.

"Right, Captain Rolo, could you tell me more about what you said yesterday regarding the relationship between banks' loans and market prices? There were some things that I didn't quite understand. For example, if I can talk to the banks and…"

For Sindy, who had been a merchant for two-thirds of his life, he had gained much knowledge over the past few days. Although this Rolo fellow was quite young, his knowledge was vast, which was to be expected of a mage. About loans, banks, and…

well, according to his vocabulary, he called it all ‘finance.’ His personal opinions were completely different from the norm regarding this subject. Although it seemed to be a deviation, when Sindy carefully thought about what Rolo said, they sounded quite reasonable.

Meanwhile, as I listened to Sindy, who was endlessly prattling on about the merchant business, I was regretting why I hadn’t stopped my stupid mouth from saying all those random things about finance.

"Originally, I had just intended to pretend to be a merchant as a convenient way to join them, so I randomly picked some economic theories from my original world to tell him. I never expected that he took them so seriously to the extent that he now wants to know everything about economics. I was a law major, okay; I’m not interested in economics to begin with. How would I possibly know about the foundational workings of economics? If he asks me any longer, I’ll have to start making things up."

The best way to make a lie seem like the truth was to put the lie within another lie that would easily be seen through. This would make "intelligent" people reveal the "lie" by themselves, finding the "truth" that they were looking for.

Meeting Sindy’s merchant group was an unexpected lucky occurrence for me. However, joining them when they were all highly on guard was difficult. If we volunteered and recommended ourselves just like that, we would most likely be rejected, and if we showed off our true abilities, it would instead make them think that we had some nefarious plot. So, I decided to purchase some grape wine as cargo and made up a story about someone in the Bardi Empire ordering it. I intended to pretend to be a small merchant who was simultaneously trying to save money by being a mercenary.

However, the result gave me a headache. My disguise had been too successful, as after I told Sindy some words that I only happened to hear before in my past life, he actually treated these sayings as valuable treasures. If he kept asking me, I might get exposed as a fraudulent merchant."

"Shh, this is a forbidden topic."

Alright, since I didn’t know how to respond, I decided to treat it as a secret I didn’t want to tell him. Although it was totally uncute of me to answer in such a fashion, he actually viewed me with even greater importance. He changed from speaking directly

to talking in a roundabout fashion, and tried striking up a conversation with me every day, all in order to dig up some more of my opinions about commerce.

Today was the third day since we joined them and left Buja Town. This guy actually came to find me early in the morning for more questions, and just as I was intending to make some stuff up, our attention was attracted to the sudden sounds of arguing and weapons clashing.

"Again?"

We all felt helpless. No matter if it was in literary or martial circles, nobody liked being number two. Those in the same line of work would always be competitors, and one of the side effects of us joining this merchant group as an adventuring squad acting as guards was to make the other two mercenary groups view us with displeasure and enmity.

"We already accepted this guarding mission. Originally, we're already displeased with the two major mercenary groups splitting the guarding fees, so what's with you all butting in?"

Even though we already said that we wouldn't ask for any of their fees, sometimes those in this line of work only wanted to fight for their face. Over the past two days, the other two mercenary groups had challenged us numerous times. Normally speaking, since we were the ones in the wrong to begin with, this would all be over if we just let them win once. Yet although I kept telling my members to act weaker than they really were, none of them were that weak to begin with. All of them promised me so prettily face to face but immediately broke their promises when I wasn't watching. In the end, those mercenaries were the ones on the losing end, and the two much larger mercenary groups that had lost repeatedly kept hoping to regain their face, but this resulted in them losing over and over again.

And, right now, this was doubtlessly yet another argument caused by some "accident."

Suddenly, a purple magic flash appeared in the sky above our camp. The source of the light came from where everyone was gathered.

"…That should be Captain Juste's famous Epic-ranked weapon, the Meteor Sword. As expected of Juste, a Gold-ranked weapon master. His attack is so frightening. It seems

that he's become serious. Eh? It's already at such an extent, but Captain Rolo, you're not worried about your own people being injured?"

I shook my head, smiling wryly.

"Worried? Of course I'm worried, but I'm worried about that Meteor Sword fellow. Let's go over there and take a look. I hope that nothing will happen… damn it, that idiot actually challenged Little Red! Sindy, do you have any coffins in your cargo? I'll buy one. Oh, whoops, it looks like a coffin will be unnecessary. Do you have any gravestones?"

While Roland and his companions were still on the road, the Bardi Empire's plan for an ambush met with an unexpected amount of trouble.

With the assistance of the activation of many black obsidian Soul-Summoning Towers, the human-made Dimensional Descent of the Undead Plane had indeed succeeded. Large amounts of low-level undead were created. However, in this area filled with death, where even the colors of the world had become gray and white, there was an abnormal patch of green that incredibly stood out.

"You still haven't figured out what that is? Damn it, why is there a forest here? And it's a forest that actually attacks undead on its own."

The lich Alu had been under the impression that he had received a simple task. All he had to do was command and control a large number of low-level undead to slaughter a bunch of completely unprepared humans. However, the abnormal forest that suddenly appeared had delayed his original plans far beyond what he expected. When he thought about the extremely brutal and cruel methods that Undead Emperors liked to use on those who failed to carry out their orders, Alu felt a chill run down his spine—and this was despite the fact that he should have lost the ability to have such sensations.

"Sir, there are more and more strange plants gathering in that forest. The forest is also expanding, and the most inconceivable of all is…"

The black-robed Blood Tribe, Kaka, spoke softer and softer. He seemed to be guessing and sounded quite uncertain.

"What is it? Just say it!"

"It really resembles that recently popular game, Plants vs. Zombies. All those plant types are from that game! I'm a big player of that game and recognized this instantly! And, all those plants are specially modified to work against the undead. Those peashooters are actually capable of shooting Bullets of Light, while those magical vines can actually absorb undead magic, and the plant bombs actually contain holy water inside. This entire forest seems like the natural enemy of the undead."

Alu paused in surprise but then reacted with extreme anger. He used a magical large hand crafted of ice to grab that unlucky Blood Tribe member Kaka.

"What? Our undead army has actually become someone else's game? Are others viewing us as mere monkeys monkeying around?"

The furious lich thought about what would happen to him if he didn't finish his task, and his mana began to seep out uncontrollably. All the high-level undead near him hurriedly retreated. Only the unlucky Kaka who was freezing to the extent of turning pale in the ice claw's grip was struggling to find a way to save himself.

"Sir, since the enemy's troops are all commonly seen in a game, we can also think of ways to deal with the plants from the same game."

The lich Alu nodded as he rubbed his chin, which consisted of nothing but bones.

"Such as?"

The unlucky Blood Tribe member forced his brain to work and somehow came up with a few ideas.

"For example, burrowing zombies, flying zombies, and buckethead zombies. Plants can only block from one direction, and we can send in aerial undead and take a circuitous route around them. There are so many methods." [1] 1

"Yep, yep, not bad! Take some troops with you and lead the way."

Alright, at least dying in battle would be slightly better than being executed by his boss. Kaka wanted to cry as he led a fresh batch of undead armies to battle.

However, the result remained the same.

Flying zombies? Dandelion seed bombs were waiting for them.

Burrowing zombies? The magical vines and plants' roots had long since created a terrifying underground network.

Equipping the zombies with steel buckets as protection? Gigantic piranha plants that suddenly popped out from underground swallowed everything.

Taking circuitous routes? This was reality, not a game. Hills and plains were covered with this forest, so how could they succeed in flanking it?

And the lucky (or unlucky) Kaka managed to survive as a miracle with injuries and tatters all over. He had only half a breath left in him, but when he saw how Alu's eyes were burning with cyan colored soul flames, he suddenly felt like it would have been better for him to not return.

"Hehe, what else do you have to say for yourself?"

"Sir, it's not our fault for being useless. That forest is cheating; all those plant troops types are ultra-rares; random draws for several tens of thousands of gold coins might not even give you one! But it has all of them! This is basically no different from a pay-to-win player abusing a free-to-play player—it's too much!"

Crack!

With the sound of ice freezing over, the Blood Tribe member, who was addicted to games, was frozen into cubes of ice. The furious Alu turned to his subordinates, only to see that all of them were avoiding his gaze. In the end, he could only give his orders helplessly.

"Everyone, attack! Have the Soul-Summoning Towers continue creating new undead. We're going to go all-out, let's see who can win in a war of attrition. We absolutely must carry out the Undead Emperors' will, otherwise… you all understand."

Note:

1. All Plants vs. Zombies references!

Chapter 265
Proclamation and Master of Shooting Himself in the Foot

The holy city of Istadi was one the most famous cities in all of Eich, with a long history and a unique religious culture that was famed throughout the lands. Every day, countless admirers of the Holy Light would come visit this divine capital, which was filled with Holy Light.

Although Istadi wasn't a large city, a majority of its residents held divine job classes. This small city contained seven world-class churches and hundreds of small and medium-sized churches. They were all on the level of historical relics.

And, in this mountainside city, there was a famous flight of stairs carved into the side of the mountain. These were the famous Stairs of Holy Light, and every single moment one could see admirers of the Holy Light climbing up these steps. There was an endless number of beautiful sculptures lining both sides of these stairs, including those of ancient heroes, historical figures, and the most common of all: various people from legendary tales who had a strange variety of appearances.

However, more than three hundred years ago, there was one maniac who had managed to singlehandedly transform these famous Stairs of Holy Light into Stairs of Blood, and he didn't even receive any form of divine punishment. From then on, the Stairs of Holy Light became the Stairs of Blood… alright, with so much explanation, everybody probably knows what Istadi is.

Istadi was the main headquarters of the Holy Church as well as the place where Holy Light had first descended. It was the origin of the Holy Church.

If you walked to the end of those famous white stone steps and arrived at the mountaintop, you would see a collection of seemingly shakily constructing buildings—the headquarters of the Holy Church. This was the most important area of the church and enjoyed more than half of all religious faith in the land. It could even be called the place where the most power was centralized in all of Eich—the Baen Holy Sanctuary.

In the past, those who passed by this area would walk slowly with their heads held high. The people who lived here would act as if they were born with the right to be proud—and, in fact, this was indeed the case. There would forever be conflicts between religious and divine authorities, and in that generation, even a powerful domain lord wouldn't dare to antagonize a local head priest.

Perhaps a poor, old priest living nearby would be appreciated by some cardinal and turn into a major personage of some empire the very next day. Obviously, reality was always stranger than fiction, and this sort of thing was actually quite common. Today, however, everyone was in a hurry and spoke cautiously as they snuck peeks at the place filled with Holy Light.

"There's still no result? All the cardinals have been inside for so long…"

At roughly three o'clock in the morning, the holy bell at the entrance of the Baen Holy Sanctuary had started ringing, which signified that every high-level church member and cardinal had to arrive here on time within thirty minutes. Although this bell wasn't the warning bell that signified an immediate combat situation, the last such time this meeting bell had been rung was more than twenty years ago.

It was obvious that something major had happened. Even though they didn't show it on the surface, many members of the Holy Church were secretly discussing amongst themselves, wondering what could have occurred. While the higher-ups were busy in their meeting rooms, numerous rumors had already started spreading through their subordinates.

"Could it be about that incident regarding the Northlands? After all, there have been so many rumors about that incident, and it's greatly affected the Holy Church's reputation."

"It can't be. The divine message from the God of Holy Light confirmed that they're now our allies. Would His Holiness the Pope dare go against a divine message?"

"Then what could it be about? What major incident could cause all the higher-ups to be summoned? It's basically just like the Holy War against Kasen twenty years ago…"

The priest who was speaking trailed off at the end as he broke out into a cold sweat. For mid and low-ranked people like him, a Holy War was not good news at all.

Perhaps glory and the victory loot from combat would make the higher-ups overjoyed,

while the glory from a Holy War would also rouse fervent believers who were willing to sacrifice everything, but for ordinary members of the church, a Holy War meant endless amounts of death. Any amount of gold and glory would be preceded by a mountainous pile of corpses. And it was only natural for there to not only be the corpses of heretics but the corpses of believers as well.

"They've come out; they've come out!"

"It's His Holiness the Pope!"

When the white-robed Pope Caloma came out, his typical peaceful appearance was nowhere to be seen. That grim look on his face was the best announcement of all, causing everyone in the plaza to fall silent. The numerous cardinals and high priests that followed after him all had differing expressions: some looked serious and didn't say a word, while others were angry to the point that their faces were red. Of course, there were some that were pretending to be serious but had yet to notice how their mouths were imperceptibly arcing upwards.

From the standpoints of mortals, the recently ascended Pope Caloma was already in his sixties and could be considered an elderly man with not much time left in him. However, in history, except for the popes that died of unnatural causes, most popes would be able to complete at least two terms, with each term lasting ten years. As for where the popes went after their terms were completed, perhaps only the new pope after them would know.

Pope Caloma was quite obviously in a bad mood as everyone looked at him, filled with questions. He didn't intend to mince words and directly tore apart a golden scroll. The next moment, a thin and short old man transformed into a huge divine figure that floated in the sky. This elderly voice resounded in thunderclaps, and nobody in the city of Istadi was able to ignore it.

"Orloss from the Bardi Empire has allied himself with evil undead and sacrificed one million citizens of Port Victoria to the undead, an extraordinarily wicked act. After conversing amongst ourselves and listening to the will of the God of Holy Light, we, the Holy Church, hereby declare in the name of the God of Holy Light that Orloss Mossivory Saint Milan is an evil heretic. The Bardi Royal Family's title of 'Saint' in their name is hereby revoked, and Orloss shall be considered the enemy of the Holy Church henceforth!"

The pope inhaled deeply, as if to remove any final shreds of hesitation, and he grit his teeth as he declared the most important part of his announcement.

"Evil is right beside us, and I, Caloma the First, declare with my authority as the pope that there shall be a Holy War! All those that believe in the Holy Light shall fight for the sake of Holy Light and justice and become the mortal enemies of Orloss and his evil undead allies."

It wasn't a long declaration, but it shocked everyone who heard it. The Bardi Empire was no small country. Any disagreements with the Northlands were actually unimportant, as mega-empires were the main powers in Eich. For the Bardi Emperor to be declared a heretic while he was still in power meant that the entire country had been declared heretical.

While it was indeed true that the Bardi Empire hadn't been very friendly towards the Holy Light in recent times, it still maintained at least a surface level of respect. Exiling the Holy Church didn't mean that they were making the Holy Church an outright enemy. But declaring a Holy War now meant that all the believers of the Holy Light would become the Bardi Empire's mortal enemies.

Of course, this was only in theory. Against an entity as powerful as the Bardi Empire, nobody would casually go fight them without enough benefits on the line. Unless the Holy Church acted as the vanguard and started creating an anti-Bardi Empire army, perhaps each major country would only criticize the Bardi Empire a little but take zero action.

And for those countries that had direct benefits on the line regarding the Bardi Empire, such as the Mage Country, this would be an easy excuse to declare an all-out war against the Bardi Empire.

The most pitiful countries were the small countries nearest to the Bardi Empire. If they were part of the Holy Light religion, then they would be forced to pick a side. And if they picked the side of Holy Light, the Bardi Empire's army would probably be on their doorstep the very next day.

After the Holy Church made their declaration, the human countries were highly likely to begin a vicious internal war of their own right before the Eternal Holy War was about to begin, no matter the reason. This was doubtlessly something that most people wouldn't want, but if Orloss continued allying himself with the Undead

Emperors, then it was highly likely to happen regardless.

And if this battle really did break out, Port Victoria, which had already became part of the Undead Plane, would no longer be considered important. The battle between the human mega-empires would probably cause several times more casualties than the number of humans that died at Port Victoria.

“…This is so scary. It's even more unacceptable than the Holy War from twenty years ago. A mega-empire has actually been declared heretical! Is there going to be a world war?"

"That's not possible. Even the Holy Church might not be able to accept such a large-scale battle. It's not four hundred years ago, when the Holy Church was at its mightiest. The mega-empires won't fight with their all for the sake of the Holy Church."

However, some more perceptive individuals were able to hear what Pope Caloma didn't say, rather than what he said.

"Orloss was the only one he declared a heretic. He also didn't mention any specific time to attack the Bardi Empire."

Back in the day, the entire Mist Kingdom had been declared heretical. Only declaring the Bardi Emperor Orloss to be a heretic doubtlessly meant that there was still room for negotiation. As long as the Bardi Emperor was changed before an army set out to attack him, then there would naturally be no more need to attack the Bardi Empire on the grounds that they were heretics. Not to mention that there was also no specific time stated to attack the Bardi Empire or organizations named to attack it, which undoubtedly left plenty of room for mediation in regards to time as well.

"This is probably a method to divide the Bardi Empire and force the nobles there to rebel. But with Orloss' powerful iron grasp over his own country, it's difficult to say if it'll be of any use."

Two days later, when this news arrived in the Bardi Empire, it indeed caused many waves despite the fact that the Bardi government attempted to suppress this piece of news. Unfortunately, Orloss' position as Emperor remained as solid as it had always been. Any domain lords that dared to resist against him had long since been killed by him decades ago, and all power was centralized in his hands. Even if there were still those that had their ambitions, what could they do?

But, some things would be difficult if not impossible to suppress for forever. There were quite a large number of Holy Light believers that kept their belief secret in the Bardi Empire, and Orloss would have to start paying more attention to his own safety whenever he went out.

However, the elderly Orloss simply maintained his same routine as always, eating and sleeping as usual. Those who knew about the situation were impressed with his mental fortitude. While the Bardi Empire appeared calm on the surface, the most panicked were actually the high-level undead from the Undead Plane.

"Why are they reacting so fiercely? It's the opposite of what we expected!"

Perhaps it was because of that incident in the Northlands, the one that had caused the Holy Church to lose some of their reputation. This had naturally damaged Pope Caloma's reputation along with it, which possibly made him want to search for some way to save face. Perhaps it was that the incident at Port Victoria was truly too vicious, which angered Pope Caloma into taking such drastic action. An analogy for what had happened would be if two poker players were playing against each other and still testing each other out, when one player unexpectedly went all-in, putting all his chips on the bet, greatly shocking the other player who was utterly unprepared.

Even the cardinals that Pope Caloma summoned didn't expect their pope to take such drastic action, so of course it was the same for the undead visitors. Their "cooperation" with Orloss had just begun, and they hadn't even put most of their plans in motion yet, but they had already elicited such a fierce reaction from the entirety of human society and the Gods' churches.

What the undead expected was that the pope should have looked more at the big picture and do his best to condemn what had happened while sending out scouts and diplomats to slowly gather information in an attempt to smooth things out. Instead, Pope Caloma had risked all-out war with a mega-empire right from the very start, taking a hard stance.

"Damn it! Is this pope insane? Did we dig up his ancestors' graves?"

"This is bad! Increase the rate at which we carry out our plans! Otherwise the Undead Emperors will have our heads!"

While all the countries were reeling in shock at Pope Caloma's astonishing declaration,

my party was currently at the Bardi Empire's border, relaxed and preparing to enter.

When Little Red had sent that idiot who had challenged her flying with a single slap, a veteran from that idiot's mercenary troop challenged her next. He, in turn, was also sent flying with a single slap, and in the end, the arguments became worse and worse and deep grudges were formed… Fine, I made that up. None of that could have possibly happened.

Veteran mercenaries wouldn't possibly be so idiotic to become redshirts. If they made such a mess of things, causing both sides to have deep grudges when the intention was merely to test the waters and causing them to anger someone beyond their abilities to handle, then such a rash mercenary group wouldn't have survived until today.

Not to mention, the leaders of both mercenary groups were both personally present. In such a situation, it would be even more ridiculous if they acted too much out of hand.

"The silver-ranked Cassandra was sent flying with a single slap? That ranger must be at least of the Gold rank."

"…Even the Eagle of Sulo mercenary group leader Juste was sent flying with a single slap, and his Epic weapon Meteor Sword was knocked out of his hands by his empty-handed opponent. He's a veteran weaponmaster with hundreds of battles under his belt. A Gold rank? You think that black-haired woman is merely a Gold rank?"

"A Legend, then? No, Captain Juste has also fought with Legend-ranked warriors before and has never lost that badly. That means this woman must be a Saint-ranked warrior at the minimum. With such a young Saint-ranked warrior under his command, just who is that young master?"

'Young master' referred to a certain young-appearing mage, who only drank tea and chatted all day. The job class known as a mage was one which required the accumulation of knowledge. Other job classes could take shortcuts and level up speedily, but it was practically impossible for mages to take shortcuts. His shiny and blue archmage robe indicated that not only was he rich, but he was also quite confident in his own safety.

The mercenaries weren't blind and had long since discovered that the Silver Coin Squad was led by this young man who lazed about and did nothing all day. With the

excellent abilities shown by this squad's members, rumors reappeared that this adventuring team consisted of a young and rich noble together with his servants, maids, and concubines.

Add on the fact that people were bored and made up stuff to add on to the rumors, and the rumors started sounding more and more real. Eaglestorm became a loyal butler, Cohen a manservant, Beifeng a clown, the caped Lilith a mage bodyguard, and the two elves were treated as female elven slaves that only a noble family could afford. As for Harloys… well, in a way, they weren't wrong about their guess. She was indeed a pet, just not the type that they were thinking of.

"Oh my, that Rolo fellow stays on the carriage all day even when it's light outside. Such depravity makes me so envious—I mean enraged!"

"Those elves and that cat girl always get on that carriage for several hours at a time. That guy has limitless stamina?"

Cough—cough—although their lecherous smiles were rather obvious, at least they had some brains and didn't count the Saint-ranked Little Red in my so-called harem. She was still treated as my bodyguard. Otherwise, if the "pride of dragons" reared its head, all of those lechers would certainly have been burned to ash.

Those whispers behind our backs were no secret to us despite the fact that they were trying to keep their voices low. The result was that when I pointed and laughed while rolling on the floor at the silly cat who was the only one they had "guessed correctly" about, I received an additional set of teeth marks on my head.

Getting back to the main topic at hand, no matter how speechless the process caused us to be, at least the other two major mercenary groups arrived at an accord to not antagonize this young noble out on a tour. Since this noble seemed like he was here simply to have fun, then let him have his fun.

After proving our power, everything else was naturally easier. Mercenaries that didn't know whether they could live to see the next day were quite practical. When fighting with their lives on the line for the sake of money, benefits were much more important than honor. They were looking to start a fight simply for their reputations, since losing reputation meant losing money in their line of work. But they had calmed themselves down for the sake of their lives; it would obviously be suicidal if they continued antagonizing us. Besides, having an extra "mercenary group" around, which was

strong and didn't even want a cut of the guarding pay, seemed like an excellent deal no matter how they looked at it.

"It's just a young guy playing around; let's not take things so seriously. Besides, it'll be bad if we antagonize some major noble."

Later, both mercenary group leaders even came over of their own volition to apologize to me. Some of their higher-ups even came over to chat with us to improve our relationship, but from how I saw it, their main goal was to find out who we really were, along with wanting to hire some people from under me.

I unhesitatingly decided to ignore them. If the bastards under my command had some people to amuse them, that would be for the best. Otherwise, if they got really bored, who knew what they would get up to.

Soon, however, I regretted my decision. Even though that Juste fellow was pretty strong—he was at the Gold rank—he had zero conversational skills and still kept trying to joke around with us, which was unbearable.

"Haha, where was I last time? Right, my joke from last time. Why do undead homes always have one less room than other species' homes? I bet you can't guess, so let this uncle tell you. It's the bathroom! They don't even eat, so any bathrooms in their homes would definitely be nothing but decorations. Hahaha."

Even though Meteor Sword Juste looked like a straightforward middle-aged man, he kept telling the lamest of jokes. None of us laughed at all while his companions forced themselves to laugh twice just to appease him.

"Is there something wrong with your leader's brain? Did Little Red beat him a little too much two days ago, causing him to become an idiot?"

Harloys had a venomous mouth as always with her comment, but surprisingly, the mercenaries from Juste's group nodded and smiled wryly.

"He's excellent as a captain, but he has a strange sense of humor. At any rate, none of us have any expectations from his jokes so we might as well laugh at them. Otherwise, there will be no end to them."

The person who said this in a low voice was a young mage from Jakardia. He was also the strategist for this mercenary group, but right now he could only smile wryly as he helplessly watched his boss.

Meanwhile, Juste, the master of unfunny jokes, apparently noticed that people didn't find his joke to be funny so he worked his mind and came up with a brand new joke.

"Do you know which room is the best place to eat in at an undead's home? Yep, that place is definitely the cleanest because it's not even useful to them. The bathroom! Hahaha."

Alright, I didn't know why he liked telling jokes about undead and bathrooms so much. However, judging by how Lilith and Harloys were both looking at him with displeasure, I knew that Juste was going to suffer for what he said in the future.

After all, both of them were undead that possessed the ability to eat like normal, and they probably needed to use the bathroom on occasion as well… Should I say that he deserves what he's going to get?

He seemed to have noticed that nobody was laughing, so he thought things over and somehow came up with yet another joke.

"Right, have you heard about the story of the brave Dragonslaying Warrior and the Underground city? Once upon a time, there was a foolish red dragon who ate too much…"

This time, a certain long-haired woman ground her teeth. I finally laughed as I listened to this stale joke as I observed this master of shooting himself in the foot.

"Let me tell a joke as well. Once upon a time, there was an idiot who talked about slaying dragons in front of a dragon and undead toilet humor jokes in front of undead, and then… well, there's nothing else left."

And right when we were about to enter the Bardi Empire, Pope Caloma's declaration against Emperor Orloss had started to spread around all Eich. The Lagraz Kingdom's Royalty were devout believers in the Holy Light, and they decided to answer the Holy Church's summons and declare war against the Bardi Empire after some hesitation.

One day later, after the news spread, the Bardi Empire and Lagraz Kingdom formally became countries at war.

Basically, everything was unbeknownst to us while we were currently together with this merchant group from Lagraz, with the intention of entering the Bardi Empire to gather information.

[System Reminder: Relax. The Master of Shooting Himself in the Foot is a title that forever belongs to you. As another friendly reminder, you should probably go to the Fate God's divine temple and attempt to change your own fate.]

Chapter 266
Unfortunate

Should I say that I was fortunate? The Veji Merchant Association was well known, and all the border officials recognized Sindy Veji. We proceeded quite smoothly.

Well, except for the fact that this was a time of turmoil; border security was raised by several levels. The unfamiliar faces of the Silver Coin Squad led to some small trouble.

"Isn't it all because of the troublesome times we live in? I invited some extra mercenaries to help protect me."

Sindy's reason sounded quite convincing, and the other two famous mercenary groups he hired lent further credence to his claim. We, however, were the unconvincing ones as we didn't resemble mercenaries at all.

We were without any reputation or combat achievements, and even our mercenary registrations had been just recently done. We definitely appeared more like spies than merchants. However, thanks to the "shiny gold gifts" that Sindy handed to the border guards, they pretended to not see us.

The approval process would normally take a minimum of two or three days to report all goods brought into the Bardi Empire. Yet since the goods were precious "seasonal wares" that were vital for replenishment, the head of border security helped simply the process as much as possible and only glanced over the goods before letting us pass through.

As for me, I still had yet to realize that this was the beginning of my misfortune. As a "small merchant" who had successfully fooled a bigger merchant into helping smuggle me across, I was quite happy at how I made it past this difficult obstacle. Of course, I thanked the "big boss" for helping me out.

"No, no, I should be the one thanking you. Although you're quite young, the depth of your knowledge is amazing. I've learned so much from you these past few days… If possible, could I invite you to come join our Veji Merchant Association? I shall personally recommend you to our leader. You should consider it more, as even a genius

like you will find it difficult to start a business from scratch. Connections and capital need to be accumulated over several decades, after all. As long as you're willing to join our Veji Merchant Association, I promise that your future job level won't be lower than mine at all."

Sindy Veji was quite sincere with his words. Everything had been abnormally quiet along the way. He didn't understand the small amount of friction between the mercenary groups, but this young man named Rolo had unimaginable ideas about the banking industry, business development, loans, and debts—and they were all theories that he had never heard about before. And, the more he thought about Rolo's theories, the better he felt that they sounded.

As for the fact that he spent so much money on this trip hiring two mercenary groups, he felt it was all worth it with the knowledge he gained. Sindy, who treated the Veji Merchant Association like his own family, was doing his very best to recruit a talent for his boss.

I was beginning to feel awkward because I could sense the sincerity of this middle-aged merchant. I seemed to have gotten too carried away in acting the part of a merchant. In the end, I could only go along with the rumors about me and tell him that I was from a rich family, and that I was only out here to gain experience but still needed to go home in the end to take over the family business.

Yep, all of that was the truth. Of course, I slightly glossed over some things, such as not telling him that the family business was a kingdom.

"…That's such a pity. If you ever change your mind, the Veji Merchant Association shall forever welcome you."

I observed this middle-aged merchant who had such a look of regret, who could only give up in front of my sincere and polite rejection. He ended up giving me a recommendation letter to the Veji Merchant Association that I would probably never end up using, which even caused me to feel guilt, an emotion I rarely felt.

"It seems that I have quite the potential as a merchant, which caused him to feel so much regret."

But just as I was getting all happy, that silly cat immediately jumped out and cast a cold bucket of water upon my thoughts.

"Ridiculous. An expert merchant was actually fooled by a layman? Do you even know what the current price of salt is, or which trade route is the most profitable one? Theory and practice are two different things entirely. And, the most important of all, did you see how a merchant like him was talking to the border guards? Do you know how to speak so politely and give bribes like him?"

Alright then. Reality was quite cruel. Be polite and profit? Speak softly? Smile like a merchant? I would probably just punch the border guards straight in the face instead.

"Hmph, you silly cat. Talking like you understand."

"Ridiculous! Of course I understand. Mages are a job class that uses a lot of money. How can they live if they don't understand some of the merchant business? After so many years of accumulation, I have numerous large merchant associations under my name. My income every year can support me in activating several tens of seven-circle research projects."

Seven-circle was already at the level of a Legend-ranked mage. Normally speaking, even a Legend-ranked mage could only afford to activate one research project at a time. This meant that this cat could actually afford to pay for several tens of Legend-ranked mages' expenses all at once. Just how rich was she?

I was outright astonished to hear this. I never expected such a rich girl to be right by my side. This silly cat was actually a white, rich, and beautiful rich girl? I did some rough calculations, which told me that her income was at the minimum equal to a mid-sized city's.

"Please, carry me, rich girl! Please sponsor me! Please support me! Please loan me money… please be my sugar mommy!"

"Sure, Princess Peach…"

"Shut up, silly cat! If you ever mention this again, I shall sell you off as a cat who can talk."

Alright, after another typical battle between human and cat, I won yet another round. Hmph! Did she really think that transforming herself into a humanoid form would help her defeat me? I know how to spit! I also have longer arms and legs! And I know how

to grope and pinch—cough—cough—something like proper limits were never important during fights!

Still… when I touched the loli on her chest in the heat of chaotic battle, she really was quite flat. It even hurt to touch; she was so flat, just like an airport runway, causing me to cry in sympathy.

"…I should prepare some extra milk for you. It even hurt my hand! It's also bad to have other people say I'm abusing my pet."

"Pervert, you're dead! I'm going to go all-out against you! Weren't you the one who forbade me from transforming into a mature form!"

"Dream on, silly cat! You actually want to be taller than me!? Just obediently be Princess Flat, and remember to wax that airport runway chest of yours."

Alright then. The second round of the human-cat battle began with this.

Cough—cough—getting back to the main topic, our fake identities became real identities thanks to Sindy's careful protection. We smuggled ourselves into the Bardi Empire quite successfully. By the time we arrived in the Bardi Empire's first border city, Raclaila Town, not only did we not meet with any dangerous magical monsters, but we didn't even come across a single bandit.

"Whew. The domain lord here is an old friend of our Veji Merchant Association. More than 40% of our goods are sold to him. It seems that I won't be saddled with a monetary loss this time after all."

Sindy was laughing quite happily. He had already mentally prepared himself to lose money on this trip, but things were unexpectedly smooth so far.

"Although those undead are quite cruel, they actually made the road safer."

Unlike the typical magic of mages, which required a large amount of money to fund their research, the biggest problem with undead magic research was typically the "lack of materials." That was why in the past, catching undead mages typically required one to only have to guard a cemetery or a large burial site. It was even said that some high-level Holy Knights could even receive a cemetery guarding sponsorship fee, as they basically lived in cemeteries.

And from what I learned through certain channels, the Bardi Empire actually even gave the high-level undead the status of nobles and allowed them to freely gather "materials" as they liked. This doubtlessly caused a huge wave in the Bardi Empire's society.

In order to avoid incurring public outrage and rebellion, the undead didn't touch anything like the nobles' cemeteries as of yet. Instead, outlaws, bandits, and magical beasts on the road met with trouble. The undead volunteered as "defenders of justice" and wouldn't listen to any excuses. Typically, the high-level undead would then add numerous new skeleton soldiers and zombies to their subordinates after delivering a vicious beating.

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry when I heard this rumor. Should I say that the undead had evil intentions but did a good deed? At the very least, the bandits and other lawless individuals who didn't become research materials speedily gave up their illegal ways and vanished. Every main road soon became much more peaceful and safer.

"Well, it's just temporary. The material's quality directly influences the final product's quality. Commoners' bones are at the quality of being blown apart by a single gust of wind. The corpses of the strong are the real high-quality materials. In this era of strong ruling over the weak, the corpses of the strong will typically be at some respectable location, and would never be just randomly thrown into a mass burial site."

"For undead mages, if commoners' cemeteries are appetizers, nobles' graves are desserts. The royal mausoleums are the true feasts for them. I refuse to believe that they'll be able to stand letting such a feast pass them by."

As the both of us were veteran undead mages, Harloys and I exchanged smiles of mutual understanding.

"It seems that you have quite a deep understanding of royal mausoleums. You've done something like this in the past? How many times? And how many times were you caught? What's the reward on your head?"

"Ridiculous! You think that you're incredible just because you've dug up a few elven royal mausoleums before? I'm your teacher. Have you ever heard of the books that I wrote, 'Ten Greatest Missteps by Grave Guardians—the Joy I Had from Stealing Right Under Their Noses' or 'How to Analyze a Noble's Status and Quality of Materials from

the Emblem and Design of a Mausoleum'? These are must-read books for any undead mage."

"Ohhh! You were the one who wrote those classics! I'm a loyal fan of yours. But, even though the book's title says 'ten,' why did you write more than ninety and the book series still hasn't concluded yet?"

"Hmph! How would I be able to scam more funding if I ended it just like that? Start from 'ten' and never finish! My goal is to reach the stars! When I finally finish, the number of chapters I have shall equal the number of stars!"

"…Doesn't that mean it'll never end? Sigh, this area of research (shamelessness) is something I'm still lacking in. If there's no more content, I just stop writing. But you must have heard of my book on practical methods, 'Eighteen Ways to use Luoyang Shovels'. I even heard that my book sold pretty well."

"That damned unfinished book that ended only halfway through was written by you? You even dare to brag about such a thing? I'm going to stuff you into a pit!"

"…People should look forward towards the future. It's too difficult to fill old pits, and I prefer to continually dig new ones."

"You really are an absolutely shameless bastard. Forget it, I shouldn't say anything about you as that'd be the pot calling the kettle black. Let's just forget things."

In some ways, Harloys and I were quite similar. We were both academic theorists (what a farce). At this moment, if you ignored the fact that I had teeth and claw marks all over my face, as well as the fact that Harloys' fake tail was snapped in two and her blonde hair was rumpled all over, we were really such a good teacher and disciple pairing that got along quite well (knaves of a feather flocking together).

Cough—cough—I should get back to the main topic again.

While exclaiming at how surprisingly peaceful this trip had been so far, Sindy was going to wait here in this town for at least two weeks for various small merchants from other cities. Meanwhile, our goal was Port Victoria, so it was naturally time to split up.

But, before I left, Sindy was actually invited by the local domain lord for a dinner party. As he wanted to help the "merchant Rolo" establish connections, he kindly invited me to go along with him as well. Originally, I wanted to refuse politely.

"Apparently, there's a major personage from the Bardi Empire's capital here, a distant relative of the Bardi royalty who's going to attend this dinner party. If you want to do merchant business in Bardi in the future, this is a great chance for you."

I didn't care one whit about merchant opportunities in Bardi, but if I could receive information about the current situation in the Bardi royalty and Bardi capital directly from a high-ranked noble, then that was something I wanted more than anything.

And, so, I agreed to go together with him, but as a result…

"Damn it, why are these guys still chasing after us!?"

"Weren't you going to the domain lord's dinner party? Why are they all chasing after you for your head, and you even dragged us into it!?"

I turned to look behind me. The noble's private soldiers were still on my tail, chasing me.

"Um, it's a long story. On a well-lit night with a full moon and no wind, we…"

"We're currently being chased, so explain it to me with only one sentence!"

"I'm so unfortunate!!!!"

Alright then, that was definitely quite a short explanation. But the grudge and deep agony contained in that sentence reverberated through all the mountains and forests. The deep emotions within could single-handedly shake the heavens and earth and cause even the gods to tremble upon hearing it. Just how pitiful and how much of a grudge was there?

"I'm truly so pitiful!"

Chapter 267
Unexpected Visitor

Raclaila Town was part of Earl Samuel's domain, as well as where his main residence was located. Although he was a powerful local domain lord, Earl Samuel was going through tough times as of late.

His domain didn't have any particular special products. Most industries were at only a mid-or low-level here. In the eyes of those nobles from more urban areas, this location was probably a classic example of a hick location. The only noteworthy part was that this was one of the reasonably well-run domains closest to the Lagraz Kingdom, so the import-export trade was relatively flourishing. More than seventy percent of Earl Samuel's income came from taxes on the import-export trade.

However, ever since last winter, due to certain unstable political factors within the Bardi Empire, the number of merchants coming from Lagraz had significantly decreased. Since this would greatly affect his tax income, it made his life rather difficult.

Still, it looked like his luck was improving again. Not only did the major merchant Sindy Veji come as agreed, even "Brilliant Pearl" Carolyn A. Milan from the Bardi capital of Haisler came to visit his domain on a vacation, which was a great political opportunity for him.

This Carolyn was a distant relative of the emperor and had the royal family name of Milan. Although she was only a distant relative who wasn't even in the line of succession to inherit the throne, her father Duke Harold was a major personage who even the princes had to defer to. As an infanta [1] [1] who was young, beautiful, and renowned for being wise, on top of her illustrious family name, Carolyn had many suiters within the Bardi Empire.

Earl Samuel was overjoyed that such a person chose to come spend a vacation within his own domain, while also simultaneously being nervous that he would accidentally antagonize her, which would, undoubtedly, be bad for him.

And so, Earl Samuel invited the best chefs and acting troupes within his domain and

held a major welcoming party at his residence. He invited all the nearby local nobles and leaders and even the major merchant Sindy Veji from the east, which caused him to receive some criticism.

In the eyes of most nobles, while they may benefit from making trades with merchants, that was something that they couldn't do on the surface. After all, that was considered a "low-class" activity.

As for me, as an add-on to Sindy's merchant party, I was quite happy to join Earl Samuel's welcoming party.

Yep, I was simply happy to be able to receive new information. It definitely wasn't me being happy at being able to eat and drink as much as I wanted for free or anything like that.

Fine then, I admit that these Bardi spicy soup noodles were quite agreeable with my palate, that these freshly-baked apple pies were absolutely scrumptious, and the spices on that barbequed meat were simply perfect. These fried chicken legs tasted even better, not to mention the excellent pudding and finely-aged red wine… The provisions I was eating recently tasted so bland, and since I wouldn't have the chance to meet such delicious foods again, I didn't care how others were pointing and looking at me.

Who cared if I was drooling or swallowing everything in a single gulp? Just call me a rural hick that had come to the city. Who cared what everyone said? Forget about reputation, stuffing my stomach was more important.

Those who saw my archmage robe and wanted to chat me up gave up instantly upon seeing the ravenous manner in which I was devouring food. Even Sindy shook his head and gave up the idea of introducing me to important personages. But, since nobody was going to come bother me, I was more than happy to enjoy such an abundant feast—it was a rare opportunity for me. I only forced myself to stop when the main character of the dinner party finally appeared.

When Infanta Carolyn appeared outside the door, she attracted everyone's attention.

I won't comment on how she was clad in so much jewelry. Also, since she was from a major family in the capital, her aura and appearance were both better than passable. However, since everyone politely put down what they were drinking and eating when

she arrived, I could only do the same so as to not attract unwanted attention to myself. I helplessly put down the pudding cake that I was chewing.

"Sigh, such a grand show of etiquette just for her. Looking at her family crest, she really is an infant?"

I'd already seen so many beauties already. Don't even mention an infanta, even princesses were common in my eyes. However, the servant that followed after her astonished me quite greatly—an actual lich.

Perhaps other people didn't know how to differentiate between skeleton mages, skeleton soldiers, and mages, but for me, the soulfire of liches was akin to a bright light in the middle of the night, easy to identify.

"This is Lord Rex. He's an imperial envoy on a tour of inspection by orders of Emperor Orloss. He represents the will of Emperor Orloss."

Alright then, did I accidentally transmigrate into a fairy tale now? Using a lich as an imperial envoy for a tour of inspection? Was I going crazy, or was Orloss the crazy one?

But representing the will of the emperor meant that he had an incredibly venerated status. Not to mention that there was someone as high-ranked as an infanta doing the introductions for him. Plus, there were plenty of recent rumors about undead receiving noble titles, so even the blind or young brats would know what they should do in such a situation, not to mention these local nobles that had survived the stage of politics for so long already.

There was an endless amount of applause and cheering. The local domain lord Earl Samuel was the first to show his welcoming appreciation, and all the nobles kept bootlicking and kissing ass. There were even some young and beautiful women that cast seductive looks at the lich out of habit, but they soon discovered that there was something wrong about the situation. The lich seemed to be looking at them with an expression that said 'are you joking with me?', which caused these young ladies to hurriedly lower their heads in an effort to decrease their sense of presence.

As for me, when I heard that a lich actually became an imperial envoy representing the will of the emperor, I was so shocked that I almost choked. I hurriedly drank two gulps of some two-hundred-year-old Omto red wine to swallow down my surprise.

Only later did I find out that this was all part of the Undead Emperors' plan. In order

to completely take over the Bardi Empire, they made their plan with centuries as the time unit. And now, it was time for them to plant the seeds for harvesting. In order to solidify their "authority," having a high-ranked noble from the capital taking a high-level undead around on a tour of inspection and establishing the undead's authority was just part of their overall plan.

"See, even major nobles from the capital are recognizing high-level undead as high-ranked nobles. What are you all worried about?" This was probably what the Undead Emperors wanted and were hoping for—to mitigate humanity's distaste for having undead rulers above them in order to avoid any unplanned accidents when they put their plan into motion.

However, their plan was still limited and with flaws. With Emperor Orloss ruling with an iron grip, it was possible for people to accept some undead as nobles, but if they discovered that the entirety of the Bardi Empire was ruled by undead, this country would likely come to its end. Perhaps, it was precisely because the Holy Church learned about this that they made the decision to "eliminate the sources of evil" here.

Still, the undead were probably just looking to temporarily coax human worries. As for whether or not they'd be exposed later… when the Undead Emperors all descended, they wouldn't really care if they were exposed anymore.

If this "main character" arriving for the dinner party could be considered just the first program for tonight, then, when the infanta that just arrived from the capital started whispering in Earl Samuel's ear and pointing at Sindy, I faintly perceived that the God of Misfortune was giving me his blessings once again.

"Pope… heretic." "Battle!" "Enemy country…" "Capture them." "Take their riches."

Thanks to my 20 points in Legend-ranked Perception ability, my five senses were far above an ordinary person's. I heard these few words through the stubborn winds, and when I saw Earl Samuel's expression change from disbelief and astonishment to one of consideration and then great joy, I knew what I should do next.

"Damn it, this is going to be 'really fun' now. Perhaps I really should go to the God of Fate's sanctuary and pray to him."

But, I was already too late.

"Guards, capture those spies!"

It would seem that Earl Samuel had already finished thinking over things and come to a conclusion. Actually, he didn't need to hesitate at all. Since the Bardi Empire and Lagraz Kingdom were now officially at war, he probably couldn't expect any more merchants coming over from Lagraz for at least the next several years. In that case, he might as well just take all of the Lagraz merchant Sindy's goods for himself, which was a concrete way of enriching himself.

As for the reason for taking all of Sindy's goods for himself? "With the two countries at war, doesn't that obviously make you a spy? I'm going to take everything you have, and as for you, if someone pays a ransom for you I'll let you go, otherwise you can just rot in jail here."

What if the two countries later improved their relationship? That would be no problem either. Would these foreign merchants really have the ability to take revenge? There would always be new fat lambs arriving for the slaughter. And besides, it was still possible to work together if Sindy was able to pay a sufficient amount of ransom money.

Not only did Earl Samuel come to such a realization at this moment, but Sindy was no idiot, either. He had already expected something like this to possibly occur due to the unstable political situation. The moment he heard the word "spies," he unhesitatingly took a scroll out from his sleeve and tore it.

A five-circle magic random dimensional door appeared. Since it was too quick and too unexpected, even the lich Rex was unable to stop him. Sindy was randomly teleported to a location within a three kilometer radius.

It would seem that this was his ace card for escaping, and he had been prepared to use it at a moment's notice.

"Wow, Mister Sindy, aren't you forgetting about someone? Don't just make your teammate suffer like this."

Several dozen pairs of eyes were staring at me. Since the main character Sindy had ran away, I, who was only a side character, had obviously leveled up.

"Um, if I say that I'm not together with him, will you believe me?"

"Catch that guy!"

"Yep, that's how everything happened!"

"That's why you unhesitatingly brought all the soldiers chasing after you over to us? Aren't you the one that's making your teammates suffer?"

A certain silly cat was angrily shouting at me as we hid in a small forest. She was quite angry because she had just lost her collectibles.

"Isn't he just a mere lich? Why don't you just kill him? Do you really need to run like this?""

"...Do you think that it'll end with just a lich? There will probably be something even more troublesome after him. Besides, I'm currently only a Gold rank. Do you think it's possible for me to defeat a Legend-ranked lich together with a bunch of small fries?"

"Do you really dare to tell me that you honestly believe that? You can't even defeat a lich?"

At the very weakest, all liches would be Legend-ranked. But judging from his mana waves and soulfire's strength, the lich Rex was only at the top of Legend rank, and he was even a Legend rank who lacked foundational strength because he had been forcibly improved in power by an outside force.

Although undead over the Legend rank boundary that possessed intelligence were typically stronger than humans at the same power rank, based on my understanding of undead magic, normal Legend-ranked liches weren't all that difficult to deal with.

Especially all the more so because I could tell that the lich Rex seemed to be an ice magic specialist apart from using undead magic. That would be nothing more than showing off in front of an expert, and as Harloys said, it would be quite easy for me to deal with him. However, I didn't do so because I had other considerations.

The soldiers chasing after us were mostly the domain lord's private soldiers, and most of them were Iron-ranked novices. If we really wanted to turn around and counterattack, literally any one of us could do the task on their own. However, I forced everyone in my squad to listen to me, ordering them not to scare them off. But the pity

was that although I preferred to simply run off and come to a peaceful solution, they seemed to be quite stubborn about following us.

Thanks to there being local residents supplying them with information in this environment filled with enemies, they were quickly able to catch up to us again.

"Catch that mage, otherwise our lord will kill us all."

"Bastard! Is that guy really a mage? Why is he so good at running?"

"Don’t mention it anymore! Ah San was sent flying with a single smack of his mage staff and was even stuck into the wall. This guy definitely has an ogre’s bloodline."

"Hurry up and chase after him! This time, our lord is so angry! If we can’t catch him, none of us will get off easy."

As we heard the soldiers saying such things from behind us, Little Red, who had been rather frustrated at not being able to vent, looked at me in astonishment, seeming to question what it was that I had done.

"Not much. Since I wasn’t using a show of force to escape, I used a hostage, that domain lord, instead. That domain lord probably felt like he lost a lot of face in front of that beautiful infanta, so he got angry."

“…I think that there was something wrong with the way you took a hostage. First of all, you should have used a knife, not a chicken leg, when putting something against someone else’s neck. Not only that, after you noticed that you grabbed the wrong item, two wrongs don’t make a right—you actually finished eating that chicken leg and used the chicken bone to point at everyone, shouting ‘Don’t come over, otherwise I’m going to stab your domain lord to death with this chicken bone.’"

"An earl that was almost stabbed to death with a chicken bone? I think that once this news spreads, he would prefer to have been stabbed to death by you."

Having a magical pet that was connected to your mind was truly inconvenient. This was especially because she would take every opportunity she could get to make fun of

me. Did she really think that I didn't want to use a dining knife instead? Who knew that I would accidentally grab the wrong item?

"That's right, not only that, Roland even thought that the earl was being noisy, so he used pudding to—grrgh!"

I unhesitatingly stuffed the final chicken leg I had been saving for myself into that silly cat's mouth, finally giving myself some peace and quiet.

"…If I'm correct in my calculations, this could even be a good opportunity. Yep, let's go meet back up with Sindy again. I still need to recover my fees for mental trauma."

"Stop changing the topic! We want to hear more! Just how did you escape using a chicken leg!?"

"Stop mentioning chicken legs!"

"What about the pudding, then?"

Note:

1. An infanta is a historical term that refers to a daughter of the ruling monarch [of Spain or Portugal], especially the eldest daughter who was not heir to the throne.

Chapter 268
The Past and a Plan

Although the soldiers chasing after us worked quite hard, they were obviously destined to receive nothing for their efforts. Meanwhile, I was mainly focusing on how to calm down a certain dragon's anger rather than on how to find a path of escape. Otherwise, I'd be cleaning up piles of ashes.

Little Red's black hair was beginning to turn red, and her black eyes were turning red as well. It was quite evident that she was furious. If I didn't do a good job here, perhaps she'd be breathing dragon breath the very next second.

"Hey—hey—hey—Little Red, when we were adventuring together back in the day, I never knew you had such a bad temper. Weren't we all used to being chased like this?"

"Ridiculous! Back in the day, that was because we weren't strong enough to win. If we didn't run, were we supposed to wait around and let them kill us? It's all your fault for being a professional at shooting yourself in the foot, always antagonizing those stronger than us. Besides, did you really have such a good temper in the past? You would always get angry at being chased and you would never care about who you antagonized regardless of their strength. But have we ever had a similar experience like now where we're being chased around by those much weaker than us? They're even insulting us so viciously!"

I tried recalling to the best of my memory. For the sake of my reputation, of course I should shout "How could we possibly have such a humiliating experience? For glory and honor, we should turn around and fight to our fullest!" but when I thought of how a certain silly cat always peeped on my thoughts and made a career out of going against me, I could only honestly shake my head.

"Actually, there were quite a lot of times that we ran from those weaker than us, usually when we were the ones lacking logic and reason. For example, whenever you dine-and-dashed or drank-and-dashed, whenever Adam did something stupid or owed a debt or had something to do with women, and Lisa was basically an expert at stealing

things—we were all equally skilled in attracting aggro—glurgh!" [1] 1

Alright then. Before I could finish my sentence, Little Red covered my mouth. Her fiery eyes transformed back into black eyes once more, and she had the rare expression of panic on her face. It would seem that when faced with her dark history, she was unable to get angry anymore.

"Hahaha! You forgot about how Margaret was scamming magical knowledge from other mages and getting into trouble with her experimental magic. Actually, everyone was roughly the same. After all these years, why talk about such matters anymore? Let's just forget about the past."

"...I would have forgotten about it if you didn't mention it. I think that you were all novices back then, which made me suffer so pitifully. I was basically both the nanny and the daddy for all of you, on top of you all having such strong personalities. None of you ever listened to me. Things weren't easy for me!"

Everyone was looking at us in astonishment and disbelief with expressions that said "so even the great ones had days such as these." This actually caused Little Red's face to redden in embarrassment. It would appear that even a huge ancient dragon like her could only surrender to her own dark history.

"...Don't mention it. Now I'm beginning to remember as well. There were so many problems with where we went adventuring. A casual adventure where you said we'd just go wherever the road took us would on average cause us to meet three Legends and one Saint per month, and we would always somehow arrive in every species' forbidden grounds and secret hideouts. Do you dare to say that there weren't problems with your leadership for our adventuring team?"

Of course there were problems. Where else was I supposed to find teammates that were so strong and so easy to fool? Naturally, I took my strong teammates to chase after any clue I could for revenge.

Forbidden grounds? Secret hideouts? Royal palaces? In front of the famous detective Rolo Charname [2] 2 and his strong companions, that was nothing!

"Hmph! If it wasn't for me carefully picking our adventuring paths, how could you all possibly become so strong? If it wasn't for those difficult battles back then, how could you grow so powerful? It would probably take you an extra five hundred years to reach

Molly's level."

When Little Red heard this and recalled those "youthful days" of hers that were filled with blood and sweat, Little Red, who wasn't afraid of anything, actually broke out into a cold sweat. It took her quite a while to speak up again.

“...If I could choose, I'd rather wait an extra five hundred years! You bastard, this basically means you're finally admitting that you chose all those difficult adventuring paths for us on purpose! Before, you wouldn't admit it no matter how much you were beaten up!"

"Tsk. You don't understand that it was for your own good. I had to guarantee that you all could grow through life-and-death battles but also not make the battles so difficult that we'd definitely die. Did you really think it was that easy for me?"

"You ******! You're even making it sound reasonable that you made others suffer!"

"Girls should pay more attention to their words and not use words that are censored so often… fine then, tomboys need to pay attention as well. You ******! Don't hit my face!"

Alright then, I wasn't making things up. Actually, it was largely with the assistance of my System that I was able to do so many ridiculous things in the past, things that had also helped Adam and the others to grow in power so quickly.

[Main Character's Adventuring Squad Mode: You are the main character from legends. You and your adventuring team will continuously attract endless amounts of trouble, and experiencing all this trouble will lead to plenty of opportunities for growth. As long as you're able to survive, your party's rate of growth will be cheat-like! System Reminder: Although you're the main character, you don't have the plot armor to never die like most main characters.]

"System, can I exchange for another one of those?"

[The basic rules are that anything you've already exchanged for before can't be exchanged for again. System Reminder: All our products are unique and custom-made by hand. And once they're sold, no refunds. We even deliver! Remember to give us a 5-star review.]

"Sigh, such a pity. It would have been so convenient to have another one of these to

train the novices. We'd just have to go out for a little trip, and if they didn't die, they'd each immediately be powerful enough to go out on their own. Well, even if I could obtain such a mode again, it wouldn't be all that meaningful. After all, I have too many enemies, and strengthening just a few of my allies won't amount to much. I'm just going to have to patiently wait for the Elemental Tide. I can't exactly improve the overall combat strength of the entire mortal plane… Wait a moment, even without the System's cheats helping me, it's not impossible for me to do some things to improve their power levels."

I faintly noticed something, but now obviously wasn't a convenient time to be thinking about such things. There were still soldiers chasing after us… Hmm? Where were the soldiers? Where'd they go? Couldn't they work a little harder? I was still running!

"The soldiers chasing after us? The last soldier chasing after us ran out of breath three hills ago. He's probably still panting, collapsed on the ground. Tsk! Tsk! Tsk! How pitiful. An Iron-ranked novice ran more than thirty kilometers after you in one go; he's probably coughing out his lungs right now. Right, you probably ran an extra ten or so kilometers without needing to."

At the very beginning of us making our escape, the silly cat was shouting about how her legs were short and she wasn't fast as running, so she turned herself into her cat form and took a nap on my head. But now, she had come out again to laugh at my misfortune.

I widened my mouth in surprise. I had accidentally had too much fun while running and forgot about the soldiers chasing after me. It would seem that there was now yet another new piece of dark history for me.

"Why didn't you tell me earlier?"

"Who would dare to stop if you didn't stop? As for interrupting you, seeing how you and Lady Little Red were having so much fun chatting about the past…"

Alright, why don't you just directly say that you wanted to listen in on some gossip? Hmph! Talking in such a roundabout fashion.

"Cough, our next target is to meet up with Sindy's merchant group again. They actually instantly all ran off. Damn it, they dared to make me suffer like this."

"Tsk, he's changing the topic."

"Yep, he's changing the topic."

"Little Cohen, make sure that you don't grow up to be an adult like Roland."

The ranger job class would typically be the best at tracking others. After all, they had both the tracking abilities of hunters as well as the knowledge of how to cast some nature magic. However, the pity was that our ranger, Little Red, was obviously unreliable. If I wanted her to track something, the result would probably be that she would transform into her dragon form and search from the sky above.

If Little Red had been a gold or silver dragon, this wouldn't have been a big problem. It would only be at the extent of some headline news, but Little Red just happened to be a red dragon…

"As an exiled evil dragon, it's understandable to have an absolutely terrible reputation. Fire-type huge dragons love to destroy cities as well as kill humans and set fires; that's very normal. But this isn't the Underground World. If an ancient red dragon appeared on the surface, probably even the Dragon City on the surface would take notice."

The Underground World practically consisted of various species exiled from the surface. And I probably don't need to go into how deep the grudges between the exiled and those that exiled them would be. The beastmen exiled the Underground beastmen, but since both groups ended up in such a pitiful state, they barely decided to forget about things in the end. The elves exiled the dark elves, and as for their relationship… fine then, the dark elves had been wanting to kill the elves for countless years. The moment they returned to the surface, the first thing they did was to attack the elves. After all, for the long-lived to remember a grudge, it shouldn't be called petty—it should be called an excellent memory.

[Ding! Please accept your new title: Roland, the One With Such an Excellent Memory.]

Cough, I decided to directly ignore my system's comment. Who cared if I simply had a good memory? Actually, although people said elves were petty, dragons were even more so. They would often take revenge about some incident from several hundred years ago on their target's descendants, and the worst part was that they typically didn't treat any other species as equal to them. Otherwise, there wouldn't be so many "dragonslaying" incidents, either.

The current generation belonged to the humans. The dragons of the surface weren't

as strong as in the past, and some Dragon Cities were basically empty shells. But if a large-scale number of Underground dragons appeared on the surface, who knew how the surface dragons and Dragon Cities would react? And it would still be alright if she was some other red dragon, but Little Red just happened to be the Dragon Queen of the Underground. Her identity was quite sensitive. If her identity was exposed… I really didn't want to see a huge war between dragons break out.

"Wait for the other Underground species to come to the surface first and see how the surface dragons react. Right now, having the young black and red dragons serve the East Mist Communal Country is also a way of seeing what will happen."

That was why I had Little Red make a promise to me before we left that she wouldn't transform into her dragon form unless it was absolutely required. Of course, this also limited Little Red's power level.

But I wasn't at all worried that we wouldn't be able to find Sindy's merchant group even if she couldn't help us find them…

"They're in a small forest that's forty kilometers southwest of here." This was a magical marking that I had Harloys leave on them. No matter how good we got along, it would always be necessary take certain actions in secret.

"…Southwest, you say?"

Eaglestorm lifted his wooden staff and cast a spell that caused a bright green magical light to gather in his eyes. The next moment, his eyes returned to normal.

"Yep, I found them. The forest told me that there's roughly sixty of them. They're densely packed, but the life forces coming from them are quite strong. None of them are injured. Eh? Their cargo and carriages are with them as well. It seems they were prepared beforehand after all."

In the forest, druids' forest magic would help them to have countless allies. As long as a druid was able to determine the approximate location beforehand, any archdruid would have countless ways of seeing anything that happened in a forest.

Of course, even if they weren't hiding in a forest, we still had another professional tracker with us. Judging by how Beifeng was looking southwest to begin with, he had been prepared already as well.

"Relax, we can't possibly lose them. Amir and Daisy have been informing me of their movements."

“…Who are Amir and Daisy?"

I got a little curious at hearing these names I'd never heard before.

"Daisy is that Sindy's horse, while Amir is the leader of the other cargo horses. They're husband and wife and have a pretty good relationship with me." Alright then, there was far too much information for me to digest here. I really shouldn't have asked.

Judging from the merchant group's complete preparations, the Veji Merchant Association must have been prepared to take such measures long ago. They immediately left the moment they received a signal from Sindy. Although I could understand why they would leave without telling us a single word since we had known each other for too short a time, nor were we true allies, but being sold out like this still made me rather dissatisfied.

And judging by how they all escaped so quickly, perhaps they had all been waiting for such a scenario just in case while Sindy and I were at the party, prepared to escape at a moment's notice. We were probably the only ones that weren't notified, as we had only joined midway.

"Should I say that it's to be expected of a merchant who only cares about benefits? Although I completely understand, it's still a little rude of him."

And a little more than an hour later, when we appeared in front of Sindy and his merchant group, they were both quite astonished and feeling somewhat awkward.

"Um, things were too sudden…”

However, I immediately interrupted his explanation.

"Relax, we're not here to look for trouble. I have a little plan that might be of assistance in this current situation."

Note:

1. For those who don't know, "aggro" is a game term that means you instantly attract hostility from all sorts of NPCs and monsters when you go out. Basically, attracting

"aggro" means you're well-hated!

2. Charname is a Baldur's Gate reference!

Chapter 269
Disguise

The first rays of sunshine illuminated the streets, signifying the arrival of a new day. It was already time to get up out of bed. Yet Carolyn continued to bury her head under her pillow, apparently trying her best to pretend to be a turtle and laze about in bed.

"I don't want to get up; I don't want to get up. That way, that annoying pile of bones won't come looking for me."

Her overly mature appearance and calmly indifferent aura always caused people to forget about Carolyn's real age; she was still quite young. Since she was born in a high and noble family, she had always had to meet the high requirements expected of her, which was why she seemed to be so mature when dealing with others.

However, since she grew up as an isolated bird in a gilded cage, she was actually quite a simple person. Her favorite hobbies were sewing and reading popular stories about knights. She would cry at parts she was allured by and would pull all-nighters finishing her favorite novels. She was basically no different from an ordinary girl in these aspects.

As for her good social etiquette and conversational skills, that was all thanks to her very hard-working personal tutors. If Carolyn was allowed to do as she pleased, she probably would have acted just like the female leads in certain knight stories and rushed out for an adventure.

But this time, as the daughter of a duke, her father gave her quite a difficult task.

"Carolyn, you've probably heard about it as well. The Bardi Empire's higher-ups want to improve our relationship with the undead. This is the will of the emperor. This time, you have been selected to take the lich Rex on a tour of inspection as an imperial envoy. You have to both help the nobles to establish a good relationship with the undead but also not make the local nobles lose too much face. After all, those that join too early will have a bad reputation."

Simply speaking, she was requested to carefully control the situation. She had to improve the nobles' relationship with this lich but also not act too much like a sycophant towards the lich in front of the other human nobles. Originally, as the eldest daughter of a noble family, this level of a political task should have been easy for her. Her personal tutor had long since taught her all types of necessary political skills. However, when she began taking on this task, she discovered that it was much more difficult than she expected.

“…I've heard that the Alosi red wine here is quite famous." (Translation of how nobles always speak in roundabout fashion: You haven't eaten lunch yet, right? How about having a drink in a bit?)

Alright then. When the lich's skeletal head stared at her quietly, soulfire burning within, even Carolyn knew that she had made a mistake with her words. However, she was rather dense and not the type to easily give up.

“…I've heard that the master tailor Kakarot's new creations are quite creative, and have received excellent reviews even in the capital. I also heard that he happens to be here in this area right now doing business." (Translation of noble speak: Your clothes are so old and tattered. How about I accompany you to buy some new clothes?)

The lich Rex looked at his own gray-colored mage robe. This seemingly old and tattered mage robe was enchanted with five different commonly used defensive magics and was incredibly useful. It was also an old companion of his that had been with him for more than a century. Was there really a master enchanter here that could create something better?

But he felt that he should be polite towards a female's invitation, especially since Carolyn was his companion. He also felt that it would be an excellent opportunity to take a look at the works of human master enchanters, so Rex was actually slightly looking forward to this as he readily agreed.

But the developments that happened afterward make Carolyn feel quite awkward. In the city of Anyingdun's most flourishing business district, the lich's hoarse soul voice was loudly shouting "Apart from glowing and self-cleaning, there are no magical defensive effects whatsoever? What garbage enchantments are these! Plus, look at the low quality of these materials! They haven't even been enhanced or had armor added in!" When everyone looked at them in astonishment, Carolyn, who was with Rex, really wanted to go hide herself in a hole.

Still, Carolyn didn't give up. And, so, there were many similar such occurrences.

"Have you heard about Auntie Agier's affair? It's really interesting; she and her uncle actually…"

Rex's cyan-colored soulfire kept staring at her. This girl was quite imaginative to try chatting with a lich about gossip regarding humans having extramarital affairs.

"On the day after tomorrow, there's a charity event… Okay, I got it, I'll leave now and stop bothering you during your research."

The soulfire that had turned blue was already the best explanation. Even Rex was getting tired of her. Having a lich go to an orphanage for a charity drive? Was this supposed to be a Halloween event? What type of lame joke was this supposed to be?

Rex was utterly uninterested in chatting about relationships between humans. He was a lot more interested in the topic of how to turn the living into the dead.

What about perverted jokes and gossip? Although, in a way, this was an ultimate technique that Carolyn had up her sleeve to break conventions or an awkward atmosphere with anyone, wouldn't it just be a type of sarcasm for a lich who had nothing but bones left?

Discuss the international situation or religious beliefs? Are you really sure that you want to shout "For the Holy Light" in front of a lich? She wasn't that suicidal, and as for international situations… lich Rex's memories were all from three centuries ago; she would probably have to start from a period long in the Bardi Empire's past.

As the ultimate evolution of otakus, even if liches were always the classical antagonist in every story, the story's plot would always be about how some adventuring team ran across a lich's ancient castle / mage tower / abandoned library. Liches were a classical example of a guardian boss that would never take action or go outside on their own. In a way, this confirmed one of the biggest characteristics of liches—they wouldn't go outside even if you beat them up, and would want to stay inside forever.

And, from a certain standpoint, the infanta who was in the prime of her youth at seventeen years old was yet another white, rich, and beautiful popular winner in life (someone who had quite a fulfilling life and was very popular). It would obviously be quite difficult for her to communicate with a lich who was the ultimate evolution of an otaku using normal communication methods.

Of course, communication wasn't impossible. As long as one used topics a lich was interested in, even a research-loving otaku would become extremely talkative. But, as for the topics that liches were interested in…"Fundamentals of Undead Magic Research," "How to Use Void Energy to Vook Squirrels," "Which is Better for Creating a Zombie—a Tauren's Heart or a Tigerman's Heart?" Carolyn was probably destined to never learn such skills.

"We should look forward to the future as there's a bright new sun every day—er—dark history."

Carolyn kept attempting to communicate with Rex and adding new pages of embarrassing dark history. She became so annoying to Rex that he was unable to stand her any more. If he took this for any longer, he might even take the brunt of his superiors' anger and turn her into a zombie with no more intelligence.

After the frightening night Carolyn experienced yesterday, she learned so much.

First, she witnessed a young-seeming mage knock away the lich Rex with his mage staff while shouting "Hit!" and then he took Earl Samuel hostage with a chicken leg, then he even smeared pudding all over a death knight's face, escaping in the chaos he created.

Carolyn did her best to control the situation and kept scolding those idiots who dared to make fun of the lich in secret, but when she returned to her room, she kept laughing for half the entire night. However, she was now forced to face reality.

"As I recall, that lich is right in the next room over and I've heard that they have extremely sharp senses… Did I make another mistake without realizing it? Ahhh! I don't want to get out of bed!"

The only part where Carolyn felt slightly reassured about was that Rex seemed to have a good temper. At the very least, he didn't get angry to the point of killing her off instantly with a flick of his little finger.

The sun was fully up now, and she knew that she would probably have to deal with a furious lich who had lost face yesterday night. If she made a fool out of herself yet again, perhaps that greenish-blue soulfire of his would truly explode.

"Sigh, I really don't want to go."

But she had no choice. Her schedule for this trip was tightly packed. After staying here for a little while, she was soon supposed to go to the nearby Baron Matt's domain. She had to discuss the plans for today's travels with the lich and leave as early as possible.

But, when Carolyn finished washing up and doing her makeup, the first scene that she saw when she opened her room's door gave quite the shock to her sense of logic and reason.

In the hallway, that lich she viewed as all-powerful had been torn to pieces. The young mage she saw just yesterday was holding on to the lich's skeletal head, pouring holy silver and holy water into it and shaking it about as if it were dice. He then even used the lich's arm bone to reach inside and stir things up.

Why did she know that it was the lich? The lich Rex's Epic-ranked death gravestone robe was still on its body, and that familiar soulfire was almost extinguished within the skeletal head.

"Are you going to tell me everything? If you don't, I'm going to use your head as a chamber pot. Yep, I'll call it Guldan's—er—Rex's head! Are you afraid!?" [1]

Slam!

Carolyn hurriedly slammed her door, thinking that she must have opened it in a wrong fashion this morning. After a long while, she slowly opened it up a crack.

But just when she reached out her head, she saw that the soulfire within Rex's head as well as the blonde mage were both looking at her. The blonde mage suddenly laughed, apparently coming to a sudden realization.

"Forget it; it doesn't matter if you don't tell me anything. I have an even better target to ask now."

The young blonde mage tossed away Guldan's—er—Rex's head and smiled at her as he randomly picked up a rib bone.

"Don't close your door anymore. You didn't open it in a wrong fashion today. Yep, be more serious! Stop laughing! We're kidnapping you! Stop looking down on this lich's bone; be careful that I'll touch you with a lich's grasp!"

……

"Relax, we're not here to look for trouble. I have a little plan that might be of assistance in this current situation."

Let's turn back time to midnight. In Sindy's temporary campgrounds, when the young man before him said that he had a plan that could take care of everything, nobody really believed him.

After all, the current situation was quite obvious already. The Veji Merchant Association had obtained through its intelligence channels that the Lagraz Kingdom and Bardi Empire were now formally at war. This was far worse than the worst outcome that the Veji Merchant Association had been expecting.

"…What I originally thought was that we would meet with some black-hearted domain lord that wanted too much of a kickback or that we'd run into an undead army. In that case, I'd just have to hire extra guards, and we'd all be able to escape with no problems. But now, the two countries are actually at war…"

The moment the Lagraz Kingdom declared war against the Bardi Empire, it gave a huge amount of trouble to all Lagraz citizens currently within the Bardi Empire. They naturally found themselves within an enemy country. While it may sound cool to fight while surrounded on all sides, it definitely wouldn't be any fun whatsoever when even the street-side vendors and little snot-nosed brats viewed you as a mortal enemy.

And, the most troublesome part of all was that the enemies were no longer disorganized bandits but an entire empire's elite military forces. It was especially so when you consider the fact that strong countries' border forces would always be their best elites—even crossing the border became an insurmountable obstacle.

I casually spread out a map and pointed at a location south of us. This location was the Asa canyon that we had passed through, which was also the largest location at which one could pass between the two countries. Of course, this location also had Fort Haslaiven, which belonged to the Bardi Empire.

On our way here, we had passed through easily—even with someone with such a suspicious identity like me. All it took was a little bribing, as the Veji Merchant Association already had a good relationship with the border guards to begin with. But if we took that same road back… it would probably be filled with peril.

Taking a few bribes and turning a blind eye to a few illegal merchants during

peacetime was an entirely different matter to allowing foreign merchants from an enemy country to pass through during wartime. The former was unanimously understood as a way to make extra money, while the latter was likely to get people labeled as traitors to the country. After all, nobody would be able to guarantee that there weren't spies or intelligence division members within this merchant group.

If we still foolishly contacted that border guard captain who helped us out earlier, then perhaps he would be the first to prepare for our executions. No matter how much gold there was to be offered to him he still needed to be alive to enjoy it. He would probably be the first to try and erase all connections he had with us.

“…Going back is definitely impossible, but the situation is the same if you go to any other part of the Bardi Empire's border. Of course, there are some places on the border that are undefended, but those are highly dangerous areas or filled with either natural obstacles. For example, the Fantasy Forest is rumored to be the home of black fairies. I believe that none of you are foolish enough to gamble on passing through it. No—with your equipment and power levels, entering such a mega-dangerous area isn't even a gamble. It's simply suicide."

Although none of them answered me, judging by their awkward silence, the astonishment that they were unable to hide, and the muffled sounds of discussion amongst themselves, I had been on the mark.

"In that case it's quite easy. There are basically two choices left. Either you try and get past the border at some other location, reach another country, and then think of a method to return to Lagraz, or you just hide out in some mountain, village, or forest and wait for the situation to change. Yet the only possibility for you is the more passive option; you all can only choose the second one."

Even Sindy was unable to hide his astonishment when he heard this. Everything had happened so suddenly, and he had just received the intelligence report about it. He hadn't even come to a final decision when I already saw through his dilemma.

"It's actually easy to guess why. It's quite simple, since the former plan has greater risk to it. If you want to reach another country's border, you'll have to move around within the Bardi Empire. In this situation where the Bardi Empire is now on high alert, every location will be guarded heavily and roaming around in an enemy country without sufficient information as backup is far too risky. If you're caught by any military squad, that'll basically be the end of you. But if this method is unusable, none of you will

probably be able to return home any time soon."

Everyone fell into an awkward silence; they had all realized this, but none of them had been willing to mention it.

“…But have you thought about it? Finding a place to hide out and observe the situation may appear safer but it's actually the most dangerous method of all. As a mega-empire, do you really believe that the Bardi Empire won't have that level of control over its own lands? And the Bardi Empire is quite famous even with other countries for having an outstanding intelligence division. You can hide, but how long do you think you can hide for? The worst mistake that you made was that you're still thinking of protecting your cargo. You actually dared to run together with your cargo? Do you think that local domain lord Earl Samuel will let go of a fat lamb like you guys?"

I saw that they were obviously shaken, so of course I took advantage of this and made my case.

"No! He definitely wouldn't! Based on my understanding of greedy nobles, he'll definitely come hunting you guys down like a rabid dog, and he'll claim all your cargo for himself. After that, he'll send in all of your heads as spies and claim his reward. And based on the current situation, he probably doesn't even need to contact the empire's higher-ups for assistance from professional spies. All he has to do is follow your merchant group's carriage tracks. Perhaps they're already on the way as we speak."

I intentionally paused for a moment here. As I expected, everyone looked in Sindy's direction, and it was quite evident that they were dissatisfied and angry.

As a merchant, Sindy's insistence on taking the cargo while escaping already made the mercenaries rather displeased. But the person paying them was the boss, and unless they were forced to the brink the mercenaries didn't want to disobey their employer's command—that would ruin their reputation, which was ever so difficult to accumulate.

Yet nobody was an idiot here. These details weren't difficult to think of. It was just that the situation was too sudden, and there had been too little time for them to consider things, which was why they had been so careless. Even if I didn't mention this little detail, someone probably would have thought of it soon enough.

At such a time, there would definitely be a conflict between the mercenaries and the

merchant Sindy. No matter if Sindy decided to throw away his cargo or if the mercenaries decided to gamble on being able to protect Sindy, there would definitely be seeds of discontent sowed between the parties in the end.

“…That's why, I'm saying that if I have a method that can both protect your cargo and safely help you leave the Bardi Empire, will you all listen to me?"

Well, I'm going to end this reminiscing of mine for now. I had succeeded in convincing them all. After just showing off a slight portion of my true power, the mercenaries unhesitatingly decided to follow my command. And now, our first step was to eliminate the threat right in front of us before directly beginning a counterattack.

Perhaps Earl Samuel would never even dream that the merchant group his soldiers had been chasing down all last night would come back and attack him the very next day.

"An Epic-ranked mage robe? Oh my, it's even enchanted with 'Ironskin Magic' and 'Dimensional Door.' Little lich, while your power level isn't much, this is really nice equipment you have here."

I tried putting on Rex's mage robe as I adjusted the time distortion ring on my finger. I changed myself from a youth to middle-aged, from middle-aged to elderly, and then from elderly to… after death!

Yep, although this ring was able to change my physical appearance on the outside, it couldn't change what I actually was. I was still someone living, but I now appeared to be nothing but bones that contained rotting flesh. I ended up with the appearance of a moving skeleton.

What slightly surprised me was that the little girl Carolyn watched the entire scene of a living person turning into the undead—a scene that should appear rather frightening—yet not only did she not get scared to the point of peeing in her pants, but she was actually quite excited. It was as if she was delighted to meet with such a major incident.

"Are you going to disguise yourself as Lord Rex? Is it just like the situation in the knight story 'Masked Knights?' But, you don't have soulfire or death magic, so wouldn't it be quite easy to see through you?"

"What a strange little girl you are. Come, take another look."

I concentrated and lit up the fires within my eyes, which burned with the cyan-green color of soulfire. My right hand, which appeared only to be a skeleton's hand, snapped its fingers, causing countless skeletons to appear, shrouded in black mist.

I laughed as I enveloped myself in a thick amount of death magic. Waves of ice also started dancing between my fingers. The real lich who was floating in midair began roaring soundlessly at me. My disguise resembled a great lich more than Rex himself now.

"It's so interesting… I meant this is so evil. Although I don't know how you did it, your disguise is basically perfect; it'll definitely succeed. What do you intend to do next? Threaten me to listen to your orders and help you in pulling the wool over everyone's eyes? I need to inform you first that I won't give in so easily. I don't care no matter what you do to my body, but as long as you threaten my family, I'll instantly surrender."

I was rendered speechless. Did she mean that I didn't need to do anything to her other than verbally threaten her a little? She even volunteered how to make her surrender?! What type of hostage was she supposed to be?

"…Relax, we have a better choice than you. From today onwards, she's going to be Carolyn A. Milan."

A female walked out of the shadows. She, too, had light-green hair, the characteristic of the Bardi Milan Royal Family. Her face even resembled Carolyn to a degree of seventy percent!

"Even if you really look like me, that still won't be good enough. I have a secret treasure of the royalty which the emperor gave to me. Only the Milan bloodline can make it glow—eh? Why is it glowing even brighter than when I hold on to it?!"

Carolyn's necklace was stolen out of her hands by the other woman and was currently glowing brightly, as if it was a God Equipment that had met its true master. Only when Lilith Milan carefully put that necklace on her neck did the pearl necklace slowly reduce its glow.

"…If you don't finish the process of kidnapping me properly, and if you don't even try threatening me, I definitely won't tell you anything that you want to know!"

Just as I was now one hundred percent certain that something was wrong with this little girl's head, Lilith suddenly revealed a dangerous-seeming smile filled with an evil

allure as she approached closer.

"Rest assured, you shall tell me everything…"

Her slender fingers were already beginning to take off Carolyn's clothing, as her red lips and sweet tongue were reaching for Carolyn's shoulders and neck. Meanwhile, Lilith's other hand was already sliding towards somewhere even lower to a place that shall not be named.

"W—w—what are you doing?!! This is totally different from the stories; how improper! You can change to someone else…"

"Aren't I asking you right now? I'm asking your body… mmm, not bad. It's unexpectedly tasty. I truly met a rare one, here. My lord, although I don't object to you watching me dine here, nor do I object if you're interested in joining in, aren't you worried about Lady Harloys reporting about this to Lady Elisa?"

Alright then, I was filled with regret. I had almost asked "Can I really join in?", but I was being glared at with an expression that said, "You're in the way." It was evident that her "invitation" was nothing more than just a "joke."

Although I really regretted not being able to watch the show that would come next, I could only helplessly pick up Rex's head as I left. The heart-itching moans that came from behind me were so difficult for me to forget…

"Hmph! Women may have their ways of communicating, but we have lich-to-lich communication as well! For example, soul torture, soul-searching magic, and psychological attacks!"

Note:

1. Guldan is a WoW/Hearthstone reference.

Chapter 270
Undead Planes

"Zero from the Ice Plane? Aso came as well? Oh my, such a grand gathering. An allied army from all the Undead Planes, and the Undead Emperors are personally leading?"

Corpse, Ice, Desecration, Blood, and Darkness were five of the six major Undead Planes already known to have designs on the mortal plane. Rex's superior—or I should say his superior's superior's superior—was the Ice Plane's Undead Emperor, Zero.

The Undead Emperor Zero's true name had long been forgotten by the sands of time. He was a SemiGod-level lich who gained fame approximately one thousand and five hundred years ago. Nothing was known about him before this, and it didn't seem like he was actually from the Ice Plane. He possessed a vast amount of combat experience and counted as a "newcomer" among all the Undead Emperors.

No wonder this little lich Rex was a user of ice magic in addition to death magic. It was said that the average temperature in the Ice Plane was -20 degrees Celsius; no normal lifeforms would be able to survive in such a place. Naturally, the main type of magic there would be ice magic.

While the common points of all the Undead Planes were that there would be plenty of undead, the ways that undead were created in each plane were numerous and wondrous. Each plane also had its own natural laws. Some were more natural dimensions but happened to be particularly suitable for undead to live in, such as the Ice and Darkness Planes. Nothing would be able to survive in the Ice Plane apart from the undead, while the Darkness Plane possessed the power to twist life and death, allowing the undead to reproduce just as if they were living.

And since there were natural Undead Planes, there would also be unnatural ones. For example, the master of the Desecration Plane, Undead Emperor Aso, had expanded his own Divine Kingdom into an entire Undead Plane.

Yes, a Divine Kingdom. Although Aso wasn't a True God, he was an ancient and powerful entity that even a True God may not be able to defeat. After all, this generation's True Gods still had to be respectful to their elders. Perhaps Aso wasn't a

True God, but he was definitely far more powerful than most True Gods.

Those that surpassed the Three Heavy Doors of the Myth rank but didn't become a God would become SemiGods. However, there were plenty of ancient powerful individuals in the past that reached the standard for becoming a God but had no intentions of doing so. While Divine Obligations and Godhood represented glory and strength, they also represented responsibilities and constraints. At the same time as being able to obtain Concepts powerful enough to affect the world, an individual's personality and soul would be partially taken over by the Concept and be transformed into part of the Concept. The best example would probably be the unlucky God of Holy Light.

Every SemiGod's accomplishments could be described only in epics and legends. For those powerful enough to reach this rank, how could they possibly be swayed so easily by the promise of unreliable power? Some SemiGods even believed that ascending to Godhood was only a type of trickery, a compromise with the world. They believed that the power that they could obtain with their own hands wouldn't be any lesser than that gained from ascending to become a True God.

The capacity of any plane had to do with the Elemental Tide. Even a True God's incarnation in the mortal plane would only be able to maintain a SemiGod's power level at best. Challenging the limits of a plane's capacity to bear one's power level meant that the entire plane's will would attack you. For the mortal plane, that would be the Goddess of Order and the Goddess of Chaos's wills. Even if they didn't personally attack, the huge tide of the mortal plane's will wouldn't let any challengers go. It would be as if the entire world loathed your very being.

For example, there would be endless catastrophes, like accidentally stepping on banana peels all the time, having the worst luck in everything, and countless calamities, both natural and man-made, such as an endless number of enemies arriving at your doorstep. Who knew what the final result would be? Most likely the challenger would have to find a new home just to get some peace and quiet.

And due to Ayer's existence, the position of the Death God had long been filled. Unless a new Concept was born, it would be difficult to even ascend to Godhood these days. However, becoming a Follower God was quite easy. All one had to do was do one's best to suck up to a True God. But how could the Undead Emperors that had experienced so much hardship be willing to serve someone else? Most of them were SemiGods who didn't end up dying but were unable to stay any longer in the mortal plane for various

reasons, so they ended up hiding out in different dimensions to avoid trouble.

As for the residents of the Undead Planes, how they came to be was even stranger. While some of them were directly created by the Undead Emperors, and others were undead mages that "voluntarily" chose to go to different planes due to being unable to stay in the mortal plane, the most numerous of all were, of course, the native residents of the Undead Planes.

The natural laws of the Undead Planes were, of course, tilted in favor towards the undead, similar to the natural laws of the Elemental Planes, which favored the elemental creatures. The Undead Planes were able to naturally produce new undead, but the source of souls for these undead had always been a mystery. One rumor I had heard was that the Undead Emperors were secretly stealing souls from the River Styx, but I was unsure as to the veracity of this rumor.

Of course, if this was true, Ayer would be held responsible as he was the one who oversaw the River Styx. At the very least, he would be charged with negligence.

With the increase in the Elemental Tide, the Undead Emperors would soon have sufficient power to return to their original home, the mortal plane. Yet it must be said that these long-lived existences had since expected the arrival of another Holy War and had been preparing for centuries. At the very least, the things involving a certain Orloss had been prepared by them even before he ascended to the throne as the Bardi Emperor.

The Undead Emperors had the advantages of time and location, especially with their proactiveness. They also had quite a decent amount of unity within their own ranks.

There were a countless number of Undead Planes already known to exist. After all, from the day that undead came into existence, they kept accumulating endlessly as they were difficult to destroy. Nor was the mortal plane the only plane that was capable of producing Undead Emperors. And Undead Emperors could be produced from more than just undead mages. Perhaps some mighty Myth-ranked hero or dragon had given themselves over to serve death, becoming part of the undead.

This was despite the fact that the undead had a pitiful growth to reach top-level power ranks. After all, the Three Heavy Doors of Myth involved one's physical body and soul, limiting the power level of countless ancient undead. Some even considered it an insurmountable obstacle for the undead.

However, the existences capable of becoming Undead Emperors were far beyond what common sense could measure. Even if normal undead wouldn't be able to grow past Myth rank, that didn't mean that the Undead Emperors were unable to improve their power levels. They had thousands, or even tens of thousands of years to form their strongest foundational accumulation of all. Nobody knew just what they specialized in, and it would be impossible to know it without fighting them.

Even when I was at my strongest, I wouldn't have had any guarantee of being able to defeat any Undead Emperor in single combat. Of course, except for a very few exceptions, there was also no guarantee that I would lose.

Luckily for me, not every Undead Emperor was interested in this Holy War, which would happen once every two or three thousand years. After all, it would take a lot of effort to connect their plane to the mortal plane. Based on the current situation, the only Undead Emperors that had interest in the mortal plane were the "newcomers" to the ranks of Undead Emperors.

There were a total of six Undead Planes and eight Undead Emperors at the SemiGod level that had taken action, proving their interest in the mortal plane. This was the information that my "dog" obtained for me as my spy.

Another lucky thing was that none of the eight Undead Emperors with designs on the mortal plane were existences with power levels that would cause me to despair. At the very least, I knew that in a certain Undead Plane, there was an ancient existence on par with Ayer. In front of the most ancient bone dragon of all named Gregory, everything would meet its end.

In each Undead Plane, an Undead Emperor would basically be an unstoppable existence. They wouldn't be called emperors, otherwise, and as the only recent "newcomer" in the past few centuries as well as the winner of the "Best Newcomer Award" due to beating up the Holy Church in a direct confrontation, Yongye's name had already spread far and wide in the Undead Planes.

Due to my fame, I only had to mention that I was Roland, the undying one; I didn't even have to torture Rex's soul or anything. This lich, who was so adamant in saying he would never surrender and even kept threatening me, caved in immediately. Not only did he obediently tell me everything I asked him, he even gave me all the information that he had secretly gathered over the years as well as his own inferences.

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry as I looked at this skeletal lich head whose teeth kept clattering in fear. Was the "undying Roland" that scary to him? Just hearing my name would cause undead to tremble in fear?

I really am a good person. That's why this little lich who was so scared of me definitely wasn't frightened because of my bad reputation. Yep, it must have been that the other Undead Emperors were too cruel, which gave me a bad reputation by association.

"Tsk, so soft. Looks like this Guldan's head won't be able to become a God Equipment. Oh, whoops, I should say Rex's head, right? What? Wrong again? Fine, fine, how about Daniel Wu's head? Yep, like I said, my memory is excellent. I'd never remember wrongly." [1]

And this "Daniel Wu" lich wasn't quite old. Rex was only just a bit over a century, old and had become a lich only due to his accumulated achievements, which had allowed him to receive his superior's assistance in helping him transform into a lich. His power level was a bit weaker than real liches, and he wasn't very popular with his peers. (The rumors I heard told me that he was actually recognized as the most handsome lich in the Ice Plane, which made him super popular with female undead but made all his peers incredibly jealous.) This was also why he had been sent here on such a job which was clearly a "waste of time."

Since he hadn't expected to be sent on this task at all, he didn't prepare beforehand, and he didn't know much about the mortal plane. He had only arrived for a short time.

But just the amount of information that he knew and told me was astonishing enough already.

The Desecration Plane's Undead Emperor Aso had personally arrived on the mortal plane. He had obviously sealed himself and paid a heavy price in order to remain in the mortal plane; he wouldn't be able to fight at his real Undead Emperor level of strength, but Aso was still the highest authority here. That meant that the high-level undead would be organized and act with well-planned goals in mind. Nor would any internal struggles between them be possible. Since we were their enemies, this was doubtlessly a piece of bad news for us.

This was all the more so because we were still roaming around in the gigantic Bardi Empire. If we were exposed, and Aso wanted to come have a chat with me as his junior, that would be truly troublesome.

“…We absolutely can't face him directly or act ridiculously right now? It looks like my choice was the right one."

Note:

[1] ED/N: For those of you who don't know, quoting from Wikipedia, "Daniel Wu Yin-cho is an American actor, director and producer, and as of 2015, starring as Sunny in the AMC martial arts drama series Into the Badlands." He's also considered super handsome. Meanwhile, Rex is mentioned as a "handsome" and "popular" lich.

Chapter 271
The Turtledove Takes Over the Magpie's Nest

In the large room illuminated by sunshine, an abundant breakfast was set out on a long table. Besides a "couple" eating breakfast, however, this room was empty. They had met each other via "speed dating."

In order to suck up to the major noble Carolyn, Earl Samuel had let her stay by herself in his very own magnificent residence, while he and his family all temporarily moved out for the time being. This was quite convenient for what we wanted to do.

"Black tea."

"Yep, yep, here you go."

"That milk cream bread from over there, thanks."

"No need to thank me, Sister, come, open your mouth, say ahhh… Let Carolyn feed you."

When I finished my "interrogation" of Rex, it was already breakfast time. Just as I walked downstairs to the dining hall, I saw two green-haired ladies feeding each other.

I sat down in a random chair and rang a bell to call one of Earl Samuel's servants over. I even ordered some food and poured some wine for myself, wanting to enjoy myself after being busy with work all night, but the moment I took a sip, I discovered that the wine leaked out from the skeletal bones of my chin that was my current appearance… Alright then, the way that servant looked as if he wanted to laugh but didn't dare to laugh made me quite displeased.

"Come, Sister, have some red wine."

They started feeding each other in an even more intimate fashion. When one girl's mouth contained some wine, she approached the other girl's red lips. Their tongues tenderly met each other and silvery-clear droplets dripped down, transforming into long silvery-clear strands of saliva. A certain girl's hand was already reaching beneath the table, and the situation seemed to turn into one which was rated 18+.

"Ah…"

Even though Carolyn was the aggressive one today, she was kissed so much that she was out of breath. Lilith's hand kept doing various things to her as well, and thirty seconds later, Carolyn collapsed on the table with an incredibly red face, and her white skin which was like a swan's was filled with strawberry kiss marks. There were also numerous strands of saliva dripping out of her mouth, landing on the table.

Meanwhile, as the victor, Lilith proudly glanced over at me then stabbed her fork into a tiny tomato, ate half of it, and stuffed the other half into our "captive's" mouth, ending this round of feeding each other.

"…Although the FFF group's motto is that the same gender is true love, while love between opposite sexes is only for reproduction purposes, why does seeing this sight cause the anger in my chest to transform into flames dancing upon my hand? In my dark shadow, countless black-robed individuals are roaring into my ears, 'Burn, burn, burn!'"

"OUCH!"

Just as I was impulsively about to take action, a painful bite on my finger snapped me back to my senses. The silly cat was there as expected, as she retracted her magically enchanted cat teeth and enjoyed the breakfast that I had just ordered!

"Silly cat! What are you doing?"

"…Stop acting like a little virgin boy that's never tasted meat before. Don't you know how unsightly you were just now? Fine then, let me fix my words. Even if you are a three-hundred-plus-year-old virgin, don't make it so obvious. It's shameful."

How could the silly cat possibly understand the rage of our FFF group? Just as I was glaring at her with my flames of anger, that silly cat actually transformed herself into a blonde mature woman as she stretched lazily like she was a real cat and even dared to glance seductively in my direction.

"Do you want Big Sister to teach you? Usually, I enjoy pure young women, but I think that Princess Peach will be even more delicious."

Her blonde hair cascaded like a waterfall, reaching the ground. Her delicate eyes were filled with an alluring splendor, and as she stretched she displayed her excellent

curvaceous figure. Even though she was obviously trying to act seductively, she was still elegant enough to resemble a scholar who read through ancient tomes. It was as expected of a gold elf, the species known as the most beautiful species of all.

At this instant, she was both incredibly alluring and elegant. That seductive expression of hers even moved both women on the other side of the table. Fine then, it would seem that Lilith had changed Carolyn into preferring women now as well.

As for me? Moved? Heh heh, silly cat! I already said before that anyone who dared bring up Princess Peach in front of me would meet misfortune! I said before that you were forbidden from transforming into a form taller than me! I held on to "Daniel Wu's head" as I angrily roared, "You're seeking death!" [1]

“…Wait, don't do that to me! Even if you didn't like my sexy joke, it's not to the degree of…”

Harloys already knew what I was going to do to her thanks to our soul connection, but she was unable to finish her sentence. After some spatial distortions, what remained was only a pink-colored club.

"Yep, from today onwards, you shall become the Legend-ranked weapon Pink Bunny. My enemies shall henceforth suffer the humiliation of defeat by a pink and furry bunny rabbit."

"You perverted, gay…”

In a way, the lich Rex was a classic example of an idiot who didn't know anything about the world because he spent too much time holed up only doing research. Although he wasn't as much as a ditz compared to Carlohin, who crafted her own soul container into a soul bottle and placed it right in her room, Rex, who carried his own phylactery with him, was quite something as well.

“…My body and phylactery have to be in the same dimension. I just arrived in this plane less than two weeks ago and didn't manage to find a safe place to store my phylactery yet. I was intending on finding a place during this tour of inspection…”

"Oh, that's why you made yourself into Daniel Wu's face."

"It's Gul'dan's… I meant Rex's head! No wait, what head are we talking about? This is my head! I think that I was rather creative, and my phylactery was quite well hidden.

Nobody would imagine that someone would make a phylactery into the shape of a skeleton head. I can just find any random grave and bury my phylactery, and then put on the skull of the person in the grave. All I have to do is switch heads, which will take ten minutes, tops." [2]

"You definitely haven't come to the mortal plane in a long time, right? Or, maybe you didn't even become a lich while you were in the mortal plane."

I looked at him with pity in my eyes. If he really did what he intended with his phylactery, there was a ninety percent chance that he would end up with a tragic outcome and a joyous outcome for someone else.

"Hmm? My lord, why do you say that? You're right, I became a lich in the Ice Plane. Is something wrong with my idea?"

"If it was still one hundred and sixty years ago and if you're able to tolerate the stink of a corpse, it would indeed be a good idea. But ever since the legendary story 'Graverobbing Handbook' became a bestseller, where the main character of that story became a Legend after graverobbing and gained incredible riches, the act of graverobbing attracted countless individuals. There's now even internal graverobbing rules and factions. And, after some people really did manage to dig up some ancient God Equipment, many strong individuals also stopped caring about their reputations and joined in to start graverobbing as well. There was even a not-so-nice Legend-ranked mage who was addicted to graverobbing that invented a detection spell to find underground magical artifacts. Many mages that got desperate due to being really poor even joined in this profession part-time…"

The soulfire in Rex's head attached to my waist started flickering. He apparently understood what would happen if he really did what he intended with his phylactery.

"…A lich's phylactery is something incredibly rare and valuable. Amongst magical materials, it's considered Legend-rank and above. In that case, your head would have been dug up by someone in at most two weeks. Either it would be sold off at an auction as an unknown mystical artifact or it would be sent to the Holy Church as a cursed item needing to be cleansed. Either way, congratulations, because you'll be the most foolish lich to have ever been born for dying in such a laughable manner.

Rex's head fell silent, but his flickering soulfire was the best evidence of his fear. Meanwhile, my mood greatly improved as any displeasure at Harloys teasing me evaporated. That saying was true after all; misery loves company. Making someone else miserable was always a great way to make myself feel better.

Although I was having great fun, there was no longer anyone around me.

Should I say that it was a happy coincidence? Although it was sudden, my plan went off quite smoothly. I now had full control over the Bardi Emperor's imperial envoy group. And, due to the fact that no humans wanted to stay overnight in the same residence as an undead, our night ambush that only a few of us participated in was highly successful as well as a well-kept secret. Nobody found out about it.

The lich Rex only took one death knight and one high-level Abomination as his guards. All his other guards were merely low-level undead that had temporarily been summoned. The death knight was the first to meet a painful demise on the night of our attack, as he clashed against a certain "black-haired female ranger" when responding to our ambush.

And the result? Cohen and Yawen spent half an hour putting him back together again, but he still changed job classes to "headless knight…" Well, the shards of one, that is.

Little Red even let out a dragon's roar as she partially transformed into a dragon and threw a punch at him. It was quite obvious that she wasn't intending to go easy at all, and so, her opponent the death knight was easily smashed to little pieces to the extent where it was difficult to put him back together again.

And, in my eyes, this meant that after being chased around by weaklings all night Little Red needed to vent her accumulated stress [System: Are you sure that it's not because of you revealing her dark history?], but that unlucky death knight could at least be proud for being able to die to a huge ancient dragon's power.

As for that Abomination… since the duke's daughter Carolyn apparently despised its disgusting spell, it was merely given the task of guarding the outside of Earl Samuel's residence that Carolyn was staying at. By the time it received its master's command and finally managed to arrive, it just happened to meet with Little Red who hadn't vented enough yet and met an instant end. Little Red even breathed out a little bit of dragon breath and demolished an entire stable.

As for Carolyn's human guards, they were even easier to deal with. Her strongest guard was a middle-aged knight captain who barely managed to reach Gold rank, which was basically nothing to us with our standards for power levels. This knight captain and his novice knight subordinates didn't even notice our presence or what we did last night. By the time they arrived next morning for morning drills, everything was already over.

This wasn't the Underground World where Legend ranks were everywhere. In normal human countries like this one, it was already quite something for the eldest daughter of a noble to be able to have a Gold-ranked "master" as a guard. Not to mention that her guards were also temporarily arranged on short notice.

As for the problem of safety? Even the top-level mercenary groups in the Lagraz Kingdom had only Gold ranks as their leaders, not to mention the fact that a Gold-ranked knight captain with some silver subordinates would easily be able to go just about anywhere in the relatively safe Bardi Empire. When I learned from Carolyn that her temporary guards were only under a simple contract, I immediately had Lilith acting as Carolyn end the contract right then and there and dismiss the guards and pay them right away.

It was quite convenient that this Gold-ranked knight captain had drank a bit too much alcohol last night due to the local nobles' flattery towards him. When he saw that the duke's daughter Carolyn appeared to grow several centimeters taller in a single night, he attributed it to his hangover.

Perhaps the alcohol was quite strong last night, because this middle-aged knight kept thanking "Carolyn" in delight for receiving three months' worth of salary all at once, as if he had won the lottery.

And, things after that would be even simpler, even if they were slightly different from what I expected. (Such as a certain duke's daughter surrendering to us much faster and much sincerer than anticipated). Fine then, I had to admit that our plan was even more successful than expected due to a certain female vampire's "high ability to convince others" and our kidnapped victim Carolyn's energetic assistance.

Yet no matter how obedient or strangely Carolyn behaved, I still couldn't trust her. How could the eldest daughter of a duke give in so easily? If she reported us to the Bardi government or some noble, then that would give us a huge amount of trouble.

So, we still continued as planned, and Lilith disguised herself as Carolyn. It was just that "Carolyn" now had a female servant that greatly resembled her in appearance. Meanwhile, I disguised myself as the lich Rex, and with his head that was attached to my waist helping me out, we could probably pull off this disguise. To make things even more realistic, I summoned my own personal death knight and Abomination.

"Daddy, Ah Dang wants to eat meat!"

"Bear with it for me! Oh, right, you can fill yourself up first with the remains of that Abomination at the door. Just make absolutely sure nobody sees you eating."

In a certain way, the Saint-ranked beast tamer with me gave me an inspiration due to his ability to "emit a True Love domain." If his Soul World was capable of helping other species to survive in it, perhaps my Frigidwinter Earth would be capable of doing the same. However, after some experimenting, I discovered that it was easy for most items to become damaged after being stored in my world because of the extreme chill present in it. I doubted that any life forms with life in them would be able to survive in my world of snow and ice.

Even if it was no good for the living, there wouldn't be any problem for the undead.

And so, after I proved my theory about the undead being able to survive in Frigidwinter Earth, I stuffed it with quite a large amount of low-level undead cannon fodder. But, it seemed like a waste of such a strong ability to only take cannon fodder with me. When considering that it was highly likely that we would meet trouble on this expedition, I figured that I should also put some high-level combat strength inside my world.

And so, I asked Xiluo to loan Ah Dang to me, but I even received additional help that I didn't ask for.

"Your Highness, there are so many cracks in this armor, and it's even glued together. How am I supposed to wear this?"

Like other top-level undead, the Ghoul King Decars spent his time in humanoid form. He also had enough death magic power, so putting on a death knight's armor and pretending to be an ordinary death knight would be quite easy for him.

But the problem was that Little Red had attacked the death knight a little too viciously. We spent a long time trying to piece the armor back together, and it was still evidently

in no working condition.

"How about you go find a blacksmith to help you fix it up? Or, you might as well sew it together with a needle and make do. Do you know how long little Cohen spent on gathering all the little pieces? Complain a little less. Besides, you were the one complaining about being bored inside and wanted to come out. If you complain any more, I'm going to toss you back inside and have someone else do it."

Hearing this, Decars, who was renowned as a mad dog on the battlefield, actually shivered in fear. He wasn't actually worried about the low temperature in my world of snow and ice, nor was it actually that he was bored as he said. That was just an excuse.

"Actually, I wasn't bored at all. Understanding the natural laws of that world helped me greatly. It's Gria who was too bored waiting there, and she began to sing…"

Alright then, I almost cried tears of sympathy right then and there. If I really did switch Decars out for Gria, perhaps she would be so happy that she would start singing. That would be our turn for great misfortune.

I was quite speechless as well. At the time, I clearly only asked for Ah Dang, but another two of the Four Heavenly Kings came along with me of their own volition. They must have been quite bored and free. (Lionheart: Can you stop being annoyed when I'm the one doing all the work?)

Of course, it would obviously be no good if there were only undead with us. Soon, we were scheduled to "coincidentally meet" a group of merchants from the Lagraz Kingdom, and then "coincidentally" obtain some new guards and servants. Then, this Lagraz merchant group would receive the appreciation of Carolyn, the noble from the capital, and then obtain a pass to help the merchant group return to the Lagraz Kingdom from some domain lord that Carolyn would convince.

The rest would be even simpler. We would just have to continue the tour of inspection as planned, and when reaching a close by location, "Carolyn" would suddenly feel adventurous and head to Port Victoria, wanting to take a look at the sea together with the lich "Rex".

Of course, this plan of mine wasn't infallible, but it was fine as long as it would take care of the current situation. By the time we were exposed, we should have long since escaped. Or, if we couldn't make this disguise work until the end, we'd just have to take

each step at a time.

As we left Earl Samuel's residence, which had just been robbed by us without him realizing it, and headed for the next noble's domain, I watched Earl Samuel and couldn't help but laugh. He had been so angry yesterday, but he was now saying goodbye to Lilith in such a sycophantic manner, not to mention that his neck still had a mark left from the chicken bone I threatened and held him hostage with.

"Gul'dan—er—Rex, perhaps there really is a funnier way to die in this world."

Note:

[1] ED/N: For those of you who don't know, quoting from Wikipedia, "Daniel Wu Yin-cho is an American actor, director and producer, and as of 2015, starring as Sunny in the AMC martial arts drama series Into the Badlands." He's also considered super handsome. Meanwhile, Rex was mentioned to be a "handsome" and "popular" lich.

[2] ED/N: Gul'dan is from WOW. From the WOWWiki, "Gul'dan of the Stormreaver Clan was a former orcish shaman of the Shadowmoon Clan from Draenor, who became the first orcish warlock as well as the founder of the Orcish Horde."

Chapter 272
Wood Spirits

Those who had visited Port Victoria before would definitely fail to recognize it as the same flourishing city from the past.

The dimensional overlap turned it into a one-of-a-kind location that couldn't be found anywhere else in Eich. This place was both part of the Undead Plane as well as part of the mortal plane, but, at the same time, it also belonged to neither.

Judging by Undead Emperor Aso's personal arrival, the specific Undead Plane that was overlapped here was likely to be the famous Desecration Plane—a frightening thought. It was obvious that countless undead armies would pour into the mortal plane if the Dimensional Descent was successfully completed.

However, the undead weren't able to reach their goal. The original will of the Undead Emperors was to transform this entire place into a Land of Death that would be able to support a large number of undead from the Undead Planes. They would then slowly invade the surrounding mortal plane, transforming it into their own domain. At the very least, the natural laws of the Undead Planes would transform Port Victoria into a new undead capital, with innumerable dead crawling out of their graves. The dark, sunless Undead Plane was akin to a heaven for the undead, and a complete Dimensional Descent would finally enable the strongest high-level undead to enter the mortal plane.

The newly born undead armies might not be able to leave this area for a while after being born, but they would have enough combat strength backing them up and would fear nothing when multiple Undead Emperors take over. That would herald the arrival of a new Undead Calamity. And it was precisely because they feared this that the Holy Church unhesitatingly declared a Holy War against Orloss. Unfortunately, for the undead, there was a little hitch in their plan.

The current Port Victoria and its surroundings were now divided into two obviously different areas. One was a dark-seeming area filled with shadowy winds, which was the influence of the Undead Plane. The other was filled with bright sunshine and verdant green forests where trees grew at a furious pace. The foliage that covered the

skies represented endless amounts of life force, and that mysterious sun caused the undead so much grief, hatred, and pain.

The powers of life and death clashed against each other here, and in the air, the forest released light green clouds that fought with the gray clouds of death. The Dimensional Door to the Undead Planes, which should have opened up wide, had somehow gotten stuck, as this abnormal area began to remove itself from the control of both the Undead and the mortal plane. The undead army's vanguard continuously arrived here from the Undead Plane, but this magical forest was actually evolving and growing as well.

Near the entrance of the forest, there were two armies cruelly slaughtering each other. One of the armies was, of course, the undead army, while the other was no longer a simply group of magical plants that didn't know how to move. These "native residents" resembled descendants of some uncontacted tribe.

From their outer appearances, one could tell that they were a life form that had never before existed in this world. They were, for the most part, humanoid, but their seemingly slender limbs possessed an inconceivably immense amount of strength, capable of lifting heavy objects multiple times heavier than their weight.

They had different heights and body shapes. Some of them were less than half a meter tall, while others were giants that towered over ten meters. What they all had in common, however, was their leafy green hair made of leaves and the tree bark armor embedded into their skin. With thorns and magical vines tangled around their bodies in a way that resembled clothing, they all had obvious plant characteristics.

When looking at them from a distance, their elegant body shapes, rather nice-appearing faces, as well as their slender figures among the forest made them closely resemble forest elves. However, if one got closer and observed their behavior in battle, nobody would mistake them for an elf species, as elves were known for being delicate and sensitive.

They had no combat techniques whatsoever and relied only on pure instinct. Every one of their attacks were not only more vicious than that of the barbarians but also ridiculously strong and shameless.

Yes—shameless. The undead had to worry about their soulfires being put out or their limbs being severely injured. While severe injuries to their limbs wouldn't kill them, it

would render them useless in combat. However, these plant lifeforms' attacking methods solely consisted of techniques to perish together with the enemy.

In addition, these plant lifeforms mostly fought together in groups. One of the tallest and strongest would stand in front as the vanguard, and they had tremendous strength in melee combat. The vines on their bodies were as nimble as arms, and they could twist their body parts freely in battle. Another side of their lack of combat techniques was that their attacks were completely unpredictable. Melee combat units that had such tremendous strength and couldn't feel pain were difficult to deal with as it was, but they had a more ridiculous undying nature than even the undead.

Cut off its head? They just had to retreat for a few seconds and a new one would grow in its place. Some of the tall tree warriors even got so excited in battle that they directly ripped off one of their arms and tossed them out, which then exploded, killing large numbers of undead. But this wasn't the only part.

Under a green light, the shards from these explosions would transform into a new wave of smaller tree warriors and begin a new wave of attacks. What made the high-level undead the most afraid of all was that after spending so much effort to truly destroy one of these abnormal plant life forms, there would be a sudden patch of green fire that escaped from somewhere which would flit into a nearby skyscraper-level tree, and a little while later, a brand-new tree warrior would emerge from the tall tree and enter battle yet again.

And this wasn't simply an undying quality. The newly-born plant warriors were even stronger than the previous ones, with even better combat techniques. They were even capable of learning combat techniques from the death knights and skeleton generals that they were facing, which increased their combat strength by an additional 20% each time. This didn't seem like much, but with a repeated cycle of revival several tens of or several hundreds of times, it probably wouldn't take long for these plant warriors to reach the level of Sword Saints.

Due to the limits of the Elemental Tide and the mortal plane's dimensional will, the high-level undead were still unable to enter the mortal plane. And, the basic foundational strength of the low-level undead, swarm tactics, was losing out to these plant warriors that had even more ridiculous undying properties.

However, these new creatures of wood possessed more than just warriors that didn't fear death.

The smaller ones among them didn't seem like they had much Strength but were actually even more difficult to deal with. Either they were able to control nature and cast all sorts of nature magic and use various natural talents, or they were able to control the forest's magical plants in targeted attacks. Just like their fellow species members that were skilled at melee combat, they were also undying.

The leader of the undead army was nearing the point of despair. At the beginning, these tiny green-haired things were as weak as goblins and were only capable of trembling in fear under the forest's protection. They blindly ran about everywhere, trying to escape the undead's slaughter, but now, in less than a week, these abnormal lives had evolved to the point of being able to directly face the undead armies.

Yes, these plant lifeforms were all individuals, with their own thoughts and emotions, rather than being a part of Amelia. In fact, under the nurturing of Amelia's forest, they even evolved to the point of having their own language. And not long after, in the future, they would be named the "wood spirits" (named by Roland Mist) and enter history as a brand-new species.

“…If we aren't able to eliminate this entire forest, we'll never be able to win this battle."

The death knight Kakarot came to the same conclusion as his companions. Without being able to eliminate this forest, these strange abnormal wood spirits would never die. However, in order to safely enter this forest, they would first have to kill off all these wood spirits and magical plants that were in the way. They were stuck in a vicious cycle.

"This is basically unsolvable! It's as if we're fighting against a dimensional will! They're supported by the power of fate and luck and have endless replenishment for their combat strength, while we keep decreasing in number. See! Even our luck is becoming worse and worse."

From far away, an exploding durian bomb was tossed randomly in the sky. While they were being tossed randomly, the wood spirits didn't have to worry about harming their own at all. There was a death knight engaged in fierce battle against a wood spirit, but the explosive shrapnel from the durian bomb just happened to explode the death knight into many little pieces, and even though there was less than two meters between them, the wood spirit was completely uninjured.

If this was intentional, then this type of blind aiming and scattershot control far

surpassed that of any top-level elven archer. And if it was all coincidental, the lucky wood spirit survivors deserved to go play the lottery. However, there was an endless amount of luck like this for the wood spirits, while the undead were forever on the unlucky side. Even idiots were able to tell that something was going on.

The lich known as Rod had far more experience than any great lich. Rod was an old subordinate of Aso's while Aso had still been human, and he experienced so many countless battles. Rod also had battle experience across and between dimensions, so the analyses he made of any combat situation were considered trustworthy by all.

Although Rod had never been able to progress in power level due to his body's nature and was still stuck at only the top of Gold rank, his wisdom from accumulated experience and long service helped him to be one of Undead Emperor Aso's most trusted subordinates. Precisely because he was so trusted, Aso, who had already returned to the Desecration Plane, sent Rod out to see what was going on with the combat situation since things had reached a stalemate.

"Dimensional will? How is this possible?"

The dimensional will of Eich had long since sunk into a deep slumber. How could it possibly be present here, making things difficult for them? If this truly was caused by the fury of the Eich mortal plane's dimensional will, this Dimensional Door probably would have been fully sealed off long ago.

An undead named Andro didn't respond to Rod's query, simply looking at the forest filled with the energy of life instead. What Andro imagined was an invisible hand that was covering him, with a demonic-seeming shadowy figure secretly laughing maniacally at them, deriding the uselessness of the undead army.

"Damn it! How is this possible!"

Andro finally noticed what was wrong. A high-level undead that had just collapsed didn't have his soulfire extinguished. Instead, the high-level undead was covered by a green light from the surrounding grass and began transforming from a pale ghostly white into green. The next moment, it tossed itself into a tree. Judging from the shape of the tree's bulge, it was in the process of giving birth to a new wood spirit.

All the undead's corpses were devoured by this forest and became its nutrients. Meanwhile, the dead undead's souls were absorbed by the forest's soul and

transformed into newly-born wood spirits… the undead that excelled at attrition and long-term battles had met their most troublesome match of all, a similar species that did the same thing but even better.

"There's no mistake! It's currently stealing and absorbing souls. This basically contains its own Cycle of Reincarnation. This forest is a newly-born dimensional will! Damn it, this is going to be so much trouble for us."

…

Addendum: The below is an excerpt from one of archmage Victor's lectures (in the year AD 1541) regarding his research on the origin of wood spirits.

…It's very difficult to believe that in the midst of a fiercely ongoing Holy War, a cursed Undead Plane performed a Dimensional Descent and stole away more than a million lives while also simultaneously causing the creation of a brand-new species—the wood spirits.

Perhaps humanity has gotten used to the wood spirits' warm welcoming manner, sincerity, friendliness, as well as hard-working and peace-loving attitudes. Wood spirits are typically regarded as a textbook example of magnanimity and kindness, and very few dislike this species.

However, very few actually know that from the moment this species was born, they were destined to face a continuous amount of battle, and they had to evolve through all this constant violence. In fact, for quite a long while after they were born and recognized as a new species, people viewed them as emotionless combat marionettes.

The most unbelievable part of all was that their creator wasn't any God, nor was their creator some undying existence from another dimension, nor was their creator a member of the elf species, who view themselves as the best at using magic. Their creator was only an ordinary human female mage.

Yes, there's no need to doubt me. Amelia Milan was the same as any one of you listening to my lecture or even me, who's giving it. She was an ordinary human who took slow steps progressing past the Legend and Myth ranks in the mage job class.

Although there are many mysteries regarding how she was able to perform the act of creation, which is on the scale of a Divine Miracle, far too much time has passed since then and all theories are impossible to prove now. The theory I shall teach you all today

is the one that sounds the likeliest, and it's also the most widely accepted one by contemporary academics.

First of all, I should mention that in the Mage Country's records, her personality was considered slightly crazy—er—a bit too aggressive. What can be one hundred percent confirmed is that long ago, she transformed her physical body into an entire magical forest filled with magical plants. Through this process, her soul also transformed into the will of the forest.

Of course, it's impossible for any of us to know why archmage Amelia from over one thousand years ago did such a thing. However, it's obvious that there's always a soul connection between a creator and what she creates. Judging by how cute her children were, the descriptions of the "Holy Mother of the Forest" in legends about how insane she was, or how many incredible criminal actions she did were obviously just artistic embellishments and attempts to stain her honor by her enemies.

Alright, I won't mention those legends about her as everyone knows them already. We can easily tell that she received an elite's education from the Bardi royalty since young, and we all know about how she became the back candidate for Holy Maiden for the Earth Church (this part is in the lecturer Victor's day and age.) From these facts, we can infer that Amelia Milan must have been a gentle and agreeable female who had a saint's personality... I'm definitely not saying this because I have a wood spirit wife, nor is it because I'm worried that if I don't praise this Mother of all Wood Spirits that I'll be sleeping on a tree when I return home, with my two human/wood spirit half-blood sons refusing to even call me dad. (Chuckling from his students.)

Cough, getting back to the main topic, I shall begin from the tragedy that occurred that night. Ah, that was a truly large-scale tragedy of rare proportions. No wonder SemiGod level undead were always viewed as forbidden taboos, as they're truly vicious. They prepared for thirty years and took only one second to activate the next step of their plan, which caused the entire flourishing merchant city of Port Victoria to transform into a city of death with not a single living human in just an instant.

When the "Dimensional Descent" occurred at Port Victoria, over one million lives were instantly lost, and their grudges from their sudden deaths transformed into a physical curse. Simultaneously, due to the unique properties of this location which now had traits from both the mortal and Undead Planes, these grudges and hatred had no place to go and could only cycle around in that sealed unique dimensional space.

What the Undead Emperors had been planning at the time was that this entire area would become just like the Undead Plane, *and that those grudge-holding ghosts and curses would become the undead, transforming into the foundational requirements for a new Land of Death. But, no matter how much one plans, one can never overcome the power of pure coincidence. Perhaps the only part that they didn't plan for was that on that day, Amelia Milan just happened to be in Port Victoria.*

Although Amelia Milan had SemiGod-ranked strength, she still had zero power to resist the dimensional natural laws. In that instant, she also experienced the transformation from the living into the dead. However, archmages typically have many ace cards up their sleeve, such as a magic spell to instantly transform into a lich after dying. And just as I mentioned earlier, Amelia had previously transformed her entire body into a magical forest. When she transformed from the living into the dead, this process only changed her into a magical forest that had lost its sense of self.

The specific Undead Plane that came into contact with the mortal plane didn't possess any plants within it. No such things as undead plants exist according to natural laws either. So, in that instant, Amelia became a bug-like existence in the natural laws. She was both a living gathering of plants, as well as an existence that was technically dead due to the Undead Plane's Dimensional Descent. After a short moment, she became the only living existence as well as only existence who approached the divine in this tiny new dimension, so she managed to obtain the power to control this newly-born dimension—just like that—without realizing it.

Yes, it was a new and independent dimension, not the overlapping point of the two dimensions.

The result of Port Victoria getting stuck between the Undead Plane and the mortal plane was that it became an independent dimension of its own. Once this independent dimension chose a dimensional will of its own, the process of the Dimensional Descent was forcibly halted. The newly-born dimension followed its instincts and searched for a powerful enough will that had the capacity to run a dimension. And, the first will that was born in this dimension became its only candidate. Add on to the fact that this will came from a soul who had SemiGod-ranked strength, and Amelia's will naturally became the best choice possible.

As for information regarding the study of dimensions, and why my peers and I came to this conclusion, you all can study the textbooks written by archmages from Amelia's generation: archmage Harloys''Theoretical Discussions Regarding Time and Space' and

archmage Roland Mist's 'Eighteen Rules of Dimensional Travel (28th Revised Edition, this is probably the final edition)'. Oh, right, Roland Mist wrote many academic works, but at least half of them are just tales about legends and modern stories from that time period. Obviously, they're fakes done by someone else, and the real ones typically have more than twenty revised editions. Make sure that you don't make a mistake finding one of Roland Mist's real works.

Anyways, getting back to the topic, when this newly-born little world chose archmage Amelia as the master of this dimension, especially in a situation where Amelia had lost her own sense of self, her physical body, which was now a magical forest, began to instinctively evolve. And countless grudge-holding ghosts now had a refuge they could seek.

Dimensional wills have absolute power and control over the dimension's resident's souls. This is also one of the basic natural laws of dimensions that archmage Roland Mist had determined, and, coincidentally, the Holy Mother of the Forest, Amelia, who had a motherly nature to begin with, accepted these souls and began searching for a way to help them come back to life.

Dimensional wills have the ability to create lifeforms within their own dimension, and only dimensional wills have the ability to approach the Divine Domain of Creation that belongs to the Goddess of Creation. This is also one of the natural laws of dimensions that archmage Roland proposed. And so, coincidentally, the Holy Mother of the Forest used a combination of humans and elves as the base model in addition to treants that she was familiar with and used her magical plants as the basic blueprint for evolution, which helped her to naturally produce the first generation of wood spirits – the original wood spirits.

Dimensional wills are constructed from a mix of Order and Chaos. The most basic power of Order is to control time and space, while the most basic power of Chaos is evolution. This is the third natural law of archmage Roland. In front of the power of Order that a dimensional will would possess, distorting time and space isn't difficult at all. Performing evolution, which would take other lifeforms millions of years, is also possible.

The threat of the Undead Plane caused the Holy Mother of the Forest to instinctively sense danger and increase the speed of evolution of her newly-born children. After receiving blessings from both Time and Evolution, these wood spirits that were the favored children of their new world evolved at a rapid pace in this new dimension, receiving their own history, culture, and inheritance. They also battled against the

undead armies for a long, long time, which helped temper this newly-born species' ability to survive and will to live on. This is how we arrived at modern-da y wood spirits, this species which seems to contradict itself with how skilled at battle they are despite how kind and friendly they are as a species…

As for why all the wood spirits have the habit of addressing archmage Roland as "Father"—eh? It's time for class to be over? Alright then, if you would like to hear this gossip, please wait for the next lesson.

Chapter 273
Resident Evil

"Young man, I think highly of you. Continue working hard."

When the young (compared to me) Baron Matt welcomed us, the sycophantic smile that he did his best to show me made me feel incredibly unnatural. It was as if a muscular gorilla was doing his best to imitate the faint smile of a young woman.

Alright then. I just exposed this Baron Matt's physical characteristics. Apart from the fact that he wasn't black and hairy, he basically resembled a muscular gorilla.

We followed the planned route of the original imperial envoy of inspection, and we only stayed at Baron Matt's residence for a single night. However, that was enough for plenty of things, such as receiving kickbacks, receiving bribes, and extorting Baron Matt.

Since we weren't scheduled to stay here for long, the young Baron Matt was quite nice to us and immediately brought up the main topic he was interested in. There was currently a large stack of paper currency printed by the Bardi National Bank in front of me. Due to the overly strong centralization of power, the money system in the Bardi Empire had gradually been replaced from gold coins to the more convenient paper currency. As for this small present in front of me, it was two full stacks of the largest value of paper currency, equal in worth to at least 50,000 or 60,000 gold coins, an amount sufficient enough to purchase a medium-sized residence.

“…You're insulting my moral boundaries."

Although I was saying so, my tone was quite indifferent, and I was looking elsewhere. I was making it obvious by averting my gaze that what I really said was: "You think that's enough? You think I'm a beggar?"

Baron Matt grit his teeth. He thought about how his application to rise in noble rank to an Earl had been obstructed by the House of Elders in the Bardi Empire for the past three years, and this was despite the fact that his territory was the size of an Earl's.

Unless a major personage from the capital helped him out, he would probably only be a Baron for the rest of his life. If anything happened, he might not even be able to keep his own domain or secure his children's rights to succeed his peerage.

Matt, who was once an adventurer, could be described as someone who had lived the dream of creating everything he had from nothing. His power level was halfway in the Legend rank, and he was one of the strongest well-known warriors in a one-hundred-kilometer radius. He and his companions earned quite a significant amount of money in their adventures, and Matt used his status as a frontier development knight to even gain a territory for himself. He was definitely a classical example of an ordinary person who had managed to make it big and become successful in life.

However, it was a pity that nobles had deep traditions of valuing bloodlines and illustrious families. "Bumpkin" Baron Matt had never been able to get rid of that nickname attached to him by the other nobles, and the Baron noble title that he purchased using money didn't even come with inheritance rights for his children. His domain was also exceedingly well off and large, so the other nearby domain lords all wanted a slice. There had always been endless amounts of trouble for him, and the fact that he didn't have a noble title equaling that of his domain's status had always been his greatest weak spot.

After Orloss completed a reorganization of noble law, all noble titles of Baron and higher required the capital's Noble House of Elders to approve a promotion. However, Matt had never received any military achievements in the army nor did he have any background. It was impossible for his request to be approved. As he was a former adventurer who had witnessed the cruelty of battle, he didn't want to give up on his comfortable life that he was able to obtain after so much hard work nor did he want to gamble his life in the military, and so, he could only wait and spend his days as a Baron.

Matt even hired a scholar to teach him about noble ways and learned that his only hope was to rely on some powerful noble that had influence in the capital. But, if any of those major nobles were interested enough to take even a second look at him, then he wouldn't have had the derisive nickname of "Bumpkin."

He was quite satisfied with simply being a rich domain lord. After all, he had excellent personal combat strength and a powerful heavy hammer, so none of the nearby domain lords dared to touch him. However, his son was growing up quickly. Unless he was able to somehow succeed in getting his son rights to succeed his noble peerage,

this domain would be returned to the country as the Bardi Empire's property and his son wouldn't have any noble title or domain to his name. How could Matt possibly stand for this after working so hard for what he obtained?

However, Matt finally met a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity today. The lich Rex, who was the imperial envoy, and a duke's eldest daughter, Carolyn, had arrived. This helped reignite Baron Matt's ambitions for the possibility of becoming Earl Matt in the future.

He had already heard that the high-level undead had greater influence with Emperor Orloss than even archdukes. He figured that as long as this lich was willing to help him say a few words, this matter would be such a small thing to the major nobles from the capital and will be easily resolved.

When Matt saw that the imperial envoy lich Rex actually felt like this wasn't enough money, Matt, who was typically stingy, felt a great heartache. He would really have to pay up a lot of money. But more than the heartache, however, he was delighted; as this meant that this was one of the few times someone was willing to accept a present from him, meaning that what he wanted would finally be possible.

“…How have I gotten to this level that I'm so happy that someone's willing to accept my money?"

Of course, he wasn't going to talk about his regrets. He knew that he had to bury his delight in his heart. Matt even intentionally displayed an expression of pain and regret so that he wouldn't be taken for all he was worth; he even added an expression of hesitation.

However, I laughed. This Matt fellow was to be expected as a musclehead cannon fodder—he was a terrible actor. If he really felt pained or hesitant at giving me more money, he would have just left. His facial muscles were almost about to twitch; that was how fake his anger was.

Of course, I didn't intend to reveal that I saw through him already. Otherwise, how would I obtain what I really wanted?

“…Sincerity is the most important."

I said so in a deep tone as I gazed at the silver-colored Epic-ranked hammer attached

to Matt's waist. I smiled meaningfully. This time, Matt didn't have to act as he really did have a bitter expression now.

[Epic-Ranked Weapon: Slayer of the Undying.]

[Attack Power: 30-30]

[Special effect 1, Undead Slayer: Any undead that comes into contact with this weapon has a probability of being instantly destroyed.]

[Special effect 2, Divine Protection: Summon a golden divine protective field which can resist against the invasion of evil. Lasts for thirty seconds. Any that forcibly invades the field shall receive 5 Holy Light damage per second.]

[Special effects 3 and 4: Since the user of this hammer is not in a divine job class, currently not activated.]

[There is crooked line of silver words on the hammer's handle: This war hammer once belonged to a true Holy Knight. Only those that are truly holy will be able to utilize the full power of this hammer. System Reminder: You're a Sword Saint, but you'd rather become a Hammer Saint? Comrade Rolo Big Hammer.]

To my surprise, I also saw on Matt's bookshelf all the books in "Graverobbing Handbook" and "Eighteen Ways to Use Luoyang Shovels". That helped me to understand how this adventurer, who had only been an ordinary person, obtained this holy war hammer. At this moment, I even hesitated whether or not I should sign an autograph for this loyal fan of my books.

But, the moment my System informed me of this hammer's name, I decided that I absolutely had to obtain it.

“...I'm called an undying, and this hammer is named Slayer of the Undying? That's just too unlucky for me. I can feel evil intentions coming from the world. Yep, I should obtain it and make Harloys eat it. These abilities seem quite useful."

As for whether or not Harloys, who used to be undead, would have stomach troubles upon eating such a thing was something I didn't consider at all. At the very least, in the past, Harloys was unable to eat that holy sword named "Pale White Justice" which contained the power of Holy Light. This would be a perfect opportunity to see if she became stronger after rejoining the living. I also hoped for her to be able to

continuously combine and evolve, surpassing even true God-tier Equipment.

But then I suddenly thought of how using a loli to slice at other people made me mysteriously seem like a lolicon. Then I recalled that she was actually a fake loli who was thousands of years old, which instantly made me feel better.

"Tremble in fear, mortals, for the Pink Bunny shall now have new abilities. Undead, tremble in fear at your impending doom. Death is nothing to be afraid of, but dying at the hands of this weapon will be a true humiliation. Yep, I should tie two butterfly knots at the top of this club and draw a smiley face. I should add a pink stuffed rabbit on the club as well!"

Thinking about how embarrassed and unwilling my enemies would be to be beaten to death by such a weapon, I couldn't help but laugh out loud. My soul voice's laughter from the lich form I was in echoed throughout the room, causing Matt to instinctively shiver. However, Harloys was the first to be displeased.

"…If you dare to toy with me like that then I'll dare to cancel my weapon transformation at a time when you're fighting with some powerful enemy. Who cares? At most I'll just show everyone my naked body one time and make sure that your name as a lolicon pervert gets known far and wide in the mortal plane!"

Alright then, thinking about how my pink and fluffy club that I was attacking with would suddenly transform into a naked loli… that sounded rather interesting—I meant awkward! It would seem like the silly cat still needed more proper training. I temporarily gave up on this idea of mine, as what I first needed to do right now was to scam Matt and obtain this excellent hammer weapon of his.

Making a warrior give up his personal weapon, not to mention that this warrior was a top-level warrior halfway in Legend rank, would seem quite difficult. However, the current Matt was no longer the same warrior from five years ago. His peaceful and luxurious daily life had decreased his fighting spirit. The only thing he now looked forward to in life was pretty much his own territory and noble rank. Plus…

"He really was here for this after all. I was wondering why an imperial envoy and a duke's daughter would come visit a far-out domain like mine. It seems like I'm going to have to give this hammer up in order to protect what I have."

Matt had already realized this long ago. More than half of his reputation as the

"Undead Slayer" had been earned by this hammer of his. And due to his well-known reputation, since undead were now one of the main factions in this country, it was only natural that he would attract a lot of unwanted attention and trouble due to his nickname.

This was no different from wearing a set of dragonslaying equipment and dragonhide armor in front of a huge dragon. It would definitely be at the extent of being able to attract aggro simply with one's face. If that person didn't die, then *that* would be really strange.

"Looks like I can't escape this after all? Perhaps giving it up now will even be good for me! At the very least, I can express my friendly attitude."

Matt looked at the excellent hammer on his waist nostalgically one more time as he carefully placed it on the ground. Since I was disguised as a lich, it was only natural that I wouldn't dare to touch this holy hammer, so the female knight behind me picked up this heavy hammer in my stead.

She lovingly caressed the hammer all over. And, when the silver hammer came into contact with her, it began glowing with a silver light, emanating a mysterious aura of fighting spirit. Perhaps it felt like its old master had made it lonely for too long already, and it thirsted for being able to reenter the battlefield.

"A Holy Knight? No, how could a Holy Knight who believes in the Holy Light possibly be together with a lich? She's probably in a divine job class for some other God."

Matt soon let go of his doubts, as the most important to him right now was whether or not the lich in front of him would be satisfied with his sincerity, and whether or not he would successfully be able to obtain a promotion to an Earl.

In a way, this was the tragedy of a former hero in his later years. As someone who created everything he had from nothing, perhaps he was fearless in his youthful and young adult years, but once he truly possessed a warm and loving family as well as a sufficient amount of wealth, he lost his courage and daring spirit.

If he had still been an adventurer and a noble dared to try to steal or extort his wealth and weapon from him, then he would have instantly responded with a swing from his hammer. As for those greedy, lawbreaking, moral-lacking, evil nobles that abused the commoners, he would kill any that he came across. If he met any that were too strong

for him to take on, he could at least beat them up and then run away.

It was the same for this Legend-ranked lich Rex before him. If Matt had been at his strongest, he would have dared to summon his adventuring friends to come slay the lich. Unfortunately, he now had to suck up to this lich and even bribe him.

Sometimes, life was truly ironic. Now that Matt was in the prime of his life, not only did he become a noble himself, he even voluntarily gave this lich his wealth—all in order to obtain a higher noble rank to benefit his wife and son.

Matt shook his head as he put all his thoughts behind him, as he knew he wouldn't have another chance like this if he missed this opportunity. This former hot-blooded hero did his best to recall how the evil merchants that he looked down upon so much would suck up to others. Then, he did his best to smile sycophantically, and he even kneeled on one knee with his good knee, the knee that hadn't taken an arrow before.

As for me, I merely smiled, and was too lazy to care about what he thought. I simply indicated to Yawen that she should put the hammer away.

“…It's good that you understand. After you die, I'm willing to help you become one of us undead. Right, did you know that Lady Carolyn is a huge fan of adventuring stories? She's especially interested in adventurers' personal journals and hand-drawn maps. These are all precious treasures to her. If she can obtain anything like this, it'll be quite easy for her to speak up for your case as well."

Adventurers' personal journals were both records of their adventures as well as evidence of their glory. But since Matt was already willing to give me his weapon, which was his life and blood, these memorabilia of past glorious achievements didn't count for much. Soon, I returned quite satisfactorily with a cart filled with handwritten journals and geographical information.

Actually, this information here—especially the hand-drawn maps from a veteran adventurer like Matt—was the true goal that I was here for. That hammer of his was something I simply decided to scam from him since I could. Of course, if a real lich like Rex had visited Matt, the first thought a lich would probably have upon seeing this hammer would be to kill Matt immediately.

I immediately sent Matt's servants back with the excuse that we didn't need their assistance. This would obviously help prevent us from exposing our real identities,

although it would also cause us to have nobody to guide our way. Of course, it wouldn't be a big problem as long as we stuck to the main road, but that was far from satisfactory. After all, nobody would be able to stick to the main road when running for their life.

As a "proper" noble daughter, it would have been quite strange if Carolyn knew anything about geography or had a map on her. In this generation, maps and locations of cities counted as military secrets. Anyone who understood cartography and how to draw maps would be a professional. It would be quite rare to find a cartographer that was an ordinary civilian.

However, I knew that there was a special profession whose practitioners would always think of a method to get the most complete map of all, which would even include secret passages and shortcuts not shown on official governmental maps. Their maps would even be labeled with threat levels for each area and important things to watch out for, which were quite convenient.

Yep, it was quite easy to guess. Naturally, I was talking about the profession known as 'adventurer,' as they were typically wandering vagabonds. There were perhaps incredibly few professions that moved about as often as adventurers did. Forget about not taking maps, compasses, or not having any informational backup, but if an adventurer didn't even take enough food and clean water with him on an adventure, then it wasn't called an adventure anymore—it would be called suicide.

A veteran adventurer's personal journal and map collection would have more detailed information than any information I could obtain from the government. In order to prepare for the possibility of being chased and needing to escape, I absolutely wanted to obtain a copy of such information for myself.

By the way, I should mention that due to the differing personalities of individual adventurers, their personal journals focused on completely different areas. For example, a certain dragon's adventuring journal focused only on the best foods and alcohols available in each location, as well as including maps and timetables of each location's times when they would receive new stocks of food and alcohol reserves. This particular journal would be highly treasured by any alcoholic.

And due to some special reasons, my personal adventuring journal typically—and intentionally—reduced my personal feelings as much as possible. Although there was a huge amount of information in it, it was quite boring and would put most people to

sleep.

Goblin adventurers' journals could typically be viewed as guides for local businesses, while beastmen adventurers' journals typically contained stories about fighting. As for Adam… how could a musclehead like him have the brains to write a journal?

Although Matt was a musclehead as well, his wife was apparently one of his adventuring companions back in the day, and she had excellent attention to detail. Her adventuring journal was incredibly detailed and even contained many comments about legends and historical records, which just happened to be what I wanted.

Alright then. I didn't exactly lie to this former adventurer who was at the beginning of approaching elderly age. At the very least, I didn't promise him a single thing and simply accepted his presents. He was the one who misunderstood of his own volition… Fine then, seeing how kind he was and how much he had helped me out, I indeed told Carolyn about what he needed. For this type of small matter, she could take care of it with a single message. The only thing was that she would be able to return to the capital… As for why I was uncertain if she would return, that was because based on the current situation, I felt like she was likely to elope with Lilith.

Now that I had profited hugely, and while I was making our plans for future paths to take, the silly cat suddenly came looking for me. She looked incredibly serious, which was quite rare for her.

"Roland, there's something that you have to come take a look at. This time, they've really gone overboard. I'd say that they went even more overboard than you did as Yongye."

There was a large amount of empty space in Baron Matt's residence's backyard. There was also a large amount of grains stored here, and in one of the warehouses, Harloys showed me a pile of grains that could be commonly found anywhere.

The golden wheat still contained some of the chill of winter and was quite cold to the touch. However, I could not notice anything out of the ordinary with this wheat.

"What's the matter? What's wrong?"

"Haven't you felt something odd about eating the grains here while we've been in the Bardi Empire? It tastes especially sweet. At first, I thought that it was a unique situation caused by the local earth and water, so I decided to come check out the grains

stored here, but…”

I opened up the stack of grains and tore apart a stalk of wheat. I put some in my mouth and chewed slowly, carefully tasting them…

“…They do taste rather sweet and it's even a little familiar. It's just like… it's just like…”

Even though it was at the tip of my tongue, I couldn't recall what it was that seemed so familiar about the taste.

"Kasolan's Tears?"

"Yeah! That's the flavor… wait a moment, Kasolan's Tears? That's the best magical ingredient catalyst undead magic is capable of creating!"

Harloys transformed into her humanoid form and twisted some stalks of wheat in her hand, grinding it into a golden dust. Then, she used some filtering devices to increase the purity and added supplemental medicines to it as she stirred. What finally remained at the bottom of her beaker was a gray-black fluid.

Then, she handed it to me, and I drank it all in an instant. When I felt the power of death getting slightly excited within my body, I came to an instant conclusion.

"There's no mistaking it. This is the taste of Kasolan's Tears. It just replenished all the mana I spent on maintaining the skeletons today. This bottle of Kasolan's Blessing is definitely at the minimum at an elite potion's tier. These Kasolan's Tears are of rather high quality."

Kasolan's Tears by itself was something harmless and non-poisonous. However, it was one of the main ingredients in another potion that was a favorite for undead mages: Kasolan's Blessing. This was an excellent potion which had the ability to restore death magic mana, and it also possessed the ability to slowly change the drinker's physical characteristics and help improve the drinker's ability to control undead magic. This was literally the most desired potion by all undead mages.

Pure Kasolan's Tears had long since become a forbidden product by the Holy Church, not to mention that they weren't easy to cultivate. If all these grains had been tainted by Kasolan's Tears, this couldn't possibly be a coincidence. I was faintly detecting the presence of an astonishingly huge plot.

Perhaps Kasolan's Tears by itself was harmless and non-poisonous, but as the best undead magic ingredient catalyst of all, it was incredibly common in many large-scale spells and forbidden spells. I refused to believe that whoever plotted all this would use such a large amount of Kasolan's Tears simply to improve the taste of the wheat.

"All of the grains here have been tainted? Damn it, which undead mage is so insane? Just what does he intend to do?"

However, Harloys shook her head.

"I already asked. These grains were just harvested from the local fields. From start to finish, nobody touched them apart from the local farmers. And they were just harvested and stored here yesterday…"

"How is that possible? Wait a moment, could it be the source…?"

I had an expression of astonishment and disbelief. If this was true, then this was a truly monumental plot that was underway.

"Yes, you're right. I already asked. All of the seeds for these grains were excellent quality seeds received from the capital and have a twenty percent harvesting rate better than average. And these seeds have already spread throughout the entire Bardi Empire, and many people have been eating these grains for ten years or more."

Eating Kasolan's Tears for over ten years? Were the plotters intending on creating a large number of undead mages by increasing the average citizen's affinity for undead magic? No, wait, there was still one other possibility: a certain little trick popular among high-level undead mages.

Harloys obviously guessed at this possibility as well, but she appeared quite hesitant. After all, such a conclusion was far too insane to even think about.

"…You should know that undead mages that consume Kasolan's tears for a long period of time are more than twice as likely to turn into high-level undead that maintain their intelligence after dying."

"Damn it! Which maniac came up with such a large-scale plot?"

"…I heard before that all Undead Emperors are insane. I didn't believe it before, but now I believe it."

The game's scenario only mentioned that the Bardi Empire would soon be sunk into an Undead Calamity, but I never expected that there would be so many unexpected curveballs involved. If the Undead Calamity was activated here in such a fashion, the entire Bardi Empire would become a land of undead. Just how maniacal would one have to be to do such a thing?

[Congratulations to Host for triggering the hidden Epic-ranked side quest: Why does the game, Resident Evil, exist in another world as well?]

[You have unlocked the "Anti-zombie" series of achievements. You can now exchange for specialized anti-zombie firearms. Go ahead and enjoy your fun playing the Resident Evil series in a magical fantasy world.]

[System Notification: I'm really impressed with you. Instead of activating the next portion of your main storyline quest, you went and triggered a hidden side quest. If you don't want to have your mystical fantasy adventure turn into Resident Evil in an Armageddon, hurry up and continue your main storyline quest at the Cloud Tower!]

Chapter 274
New Chapter

When I saw how my System lettered its message with gold, I had the sudden impulse to crash my head into a wall.

"Epic Quest, the hell! Isn't it a little too difficult for me to be thrown into the world of Resident Evil all of a sudden!? Besides, this is clearly supposed to be a mystical fantasy world; why would Resident Evil suddenly appear?! What does it even mean when it said 'I can now exchange for firearms?' Do you really intend to watch me learn how to use guns and play in a real life FPS game?"

My continuous retorts received no response. I could only face the clearly worsening situation.

Making ordinary grains possess Kasolan's Tears as part of their chemical components and even helping them grow naturally would be equivalent to creating an all-new unique species of grain. I didn't have the capability to do this. But that didn't mean that the Undead Emperors, the rulers of the Undead Planes, wouldn't have the power to do so.

By now, with my System's hints, I could pretty much guess at the Undead Emperors' intentions.

Ordinary humans would be unable to ingest the medicinal potion Kasolan's Blessing. It was an excellent curative and mana replenishment potion for high-level undead mages. Yet human bodies had an astonishing power to adapt. An extremely slight amount, when accumulated over the days and years, would possess the power to change the physical nature of human bodies.

If this grain had been consumed by the entirety of the Bardi Empire's population for over ten years, then it was possible that most people in the Bardi Empire possessed an astonishing amount of Kasolan's Tears within them. They would have an astonishingly high natural talent for undead magic, and once the Undead Plague or Undead Calamity or whatever arrived, perhaps it would be time for everyone to play Plants vs. Zombies together.

"Not only will the Undead Calamity easily spread far beyond what was anticipated in scale, it will likely also create an incredible number of high-level undead. I think that Baron Toilet will be at least at the level of a Death Knight Lord. Undead Calamities will never lack in cannon fodder, but they usually lack mid-level elites and highest-level combat strength, and this would make up for their weakness."

"That guy's name was Matt, not Toilet… [1] 1 fine, I know it's not time to comment on his name. If it were me, since the Bardi government is already supporting me to such a great degree, even spending twenty years to cultivate a large group of undead mages is worthwhile. By that time, the undead armies will have large numbers of mid-level elites and lich candidates. But even if we now understand their plot, what can we do?"

When I asked Harloys this question, she was instantly rendered speechless despite how eloquent she had been just earlier.

Indeed, what were we supposed to do? Just because we discovered their plot didn't mean that we'd be able to deal with it. The Undead Emperors had been preparing in the Bardi Empire for at least the past several decades. We entered this too late. To use an analogy, it was as if we joined in on the losing side of a chess game when the situation was totally under the enemy's control. There was no way to overturn the situation.

As for fighting the undead army's current forces head-on? First, let's ignore how the undead were now considered high-ranked nobles recognized by the Bardi Empire. Attacking another country's nobles would be no different from declaring outright war. Even without caring about the chaos that would bring, I wouldn't win in a head-on fight as there were thirteen Undead Emperors in total. If two or more of them fought together against me, I would be forced to use God's Descent. And if the Undead Emperors I faced were the veterans among Undead Emperors, perhaps even God's Descent wouldn't be sufficient.

But fortunately, although I wasn't sure why, I hadn't noticed the signs of the Undead Emperors descending upon the mortal plane yet. The complete descent of any existence at such a high level onto the mortal plane would bring about obvious signs. The True Gods would definitely send divine messages as well. Since everything was still calm for the time being, it would seem that their Dimensional Descent plan must have met with an unexpected obstacle.

Most normal people here would only consider how to defend against the Undead Emperors' invasion. However, I thought much deeper into things than that, with greater complexity. After all, I was once an Undead Emperor as well and knew much about them.

While it was normal for other humans to view these SemiGod Undead Emperors as harbingers of destruction, I knew that they actually had their own desires and goals. They definitely weren't the type of idiots who destroyed only for the sake of destruction.

“…Transforming the entire mortal plane into another Undead Plane is definitely impossible. That would mean destroying the entire Cycle of Reincarnation, which would be the equivalent of declaring war against all the Order Gods and Chaos Gods simultaneously. Besides, the Undead Planes' environment should be the most suitable for the undead. But, if they choose to join the Holy War, they have to choose either the side of Order or Chaos. Or at least a temporary alliance with one side. The undead definitely don't have a good relationship with the Holy Light, but they have equally bad compatibility with the demons of Chaos. It doesn't seem likely that they'll join either side, so is there a third option that I'm missing? Or are they intending to fight all on their own with no allies? But they're investing so much into this and paying such a large price. What's their final goal?"

Many thoughts coursed through my mind. As long as I didn't know the final goal of the Undead Emperors, it would be quite difficult for me to think of suitable counterplans to deal with them.

Ask the Holy Church for help? The Holy Church had already declared war against Orloss. Even if I gave the Holy Church evidence of what I just found, that would only increase the speed at which the Holy Church brought war to the Bardi Empire's doorstep.

Disguise ourselves and sneak into the Bardi Empire's capital city? First of all, we were already so busy with other matters. And as long as the enemy wasn't an idiot, the Bardi Empire's capital city would possess an insane amount of combat strength in it right now. Even a True God's avatar would likely find it difficult to survive there.

"It would seem that I'm going to have to use Plan W."

"What!? You're actually going to use that plan that's completely lacking in morals!? You need to think about the consequences. Aren't you afraid of the endless repercussions?"

"I've already thought about them. No matter what the result is, at least it'll be better than now! Right, help me word things and write the report."

"Sure… Just tell me what your Plan W is first, and I'll immediately write the report for you. Just what could this plan be? It actually even needs a report? Who is this report for?"

Seeing how the silly cat was doing her best to not laugh, I knew that she had been teasing me yet again.

"You didn't even know what Plan W was and you still called it completely lacking in morals and having endless consequences? You're such a rascal!"

"You're the rascal! Let's not mention how you never even brought up this Plan W of yours, but whenever you think up such a large-scale plan, when was it ever not insane with endless consequences? Even if I didn't know the details, I know that someone like you will never come up with any normal ideas."

Alright then, she really got me there. It would seem that I had absolutely nothing I could counter her with. Describing my Plan W as completely lacking in morals, insane, and possibly possessing endless consequences all seemed to be right on the mark. The core thought process of this plan was "since the enemy's already flipped the table and is acting ridiculously, nobody can play by the rules anyways, so why don't we just bomb the entire room?"

I thought that this silly cat had spied on my plan from somewhere yet again, but I had only come up with this plan of mine a few days ago and hadn't told anyone yet. In that case, I may as well explain it to her now.

And when I finished explaining my plan to her, just as I expected, that blonde loli revealed an expression of shock and disbelief. That look in her eyes seemed to be angrily roaring at me, "Just what the hell is your brain made of!?" Even drool was dripping out of her mouth without her noticing it. It made her seem like a broken loli.

But, as expected of a thousand-years-old fake loli whose personal accessories were all mega artifacts, she soon regained her senses. After some thinking to reorganize her thoughts and digest the fierce impact she just received, she began discussing the details with me.

“…This report won't be approved if you take everything by yourself. We need to modify it and give our partners the opportunity to receive benefits as well. This way, it maximizes the available benefits for everyone. In that case, even if we don't do anything ourselves, they'll carry out this plan on their own. After all, all you care about is the final result, right? Then it might not be a bad idea to let go of your total control over your plan. If you're too greedy and want all the profits, you need to be careful of the veteran True Gods swatting you to death."

As expected of someone her age; she was truly experienced. She was definitely someone who couldn't be judged based on her physical appearance. With her assistance, my plan's success rate was now projected to have increased by thirty percent. And now that we finished working out the final kinks, we began writing the report. And, when we submitted the report, the skies were already lighting up.

Who was the report for?

"Martial Arts Harem Story Protagonist Mass Production Plan?" One day later, when Ayer looked through the thick letter that Wumianzhe sent him, even he paused in surprise for several minutes.

As long as I intentionally thought about something and focused on it, I could transmit my thoughts to Wumianzhe because of my connection with him. Then, Wumianzhe would logically process whether this plan was workable and effective enough. If Wumianzhe decided that the plan was beneficial for itself and Law, he would naturally accept it and carry out the plan.

And now that the plan had arrived in Ayer's hands, it doubtlessly meant that Wumianzhe by himself was unable to carry out this Plan W singlehandedly. Assistance from other Gods was necessary.

“…How insane. Yet, it seems like it just might work. Elliot, write letters to Patricia, Catio, and Benny. The message should be that 'Our little bro has a nice idea, and we're finally going to have a chance at some fun. Perhaps you all will even have the chance to become Main Gods.'"

But, after some hesitation, Ayer stopped his own subordinate.

"Forget it, call them over here for a discussion instead. Erin, increase the guard level of the Death God's Divine Kingdom. We need to keep things top-secret here. Otherwise, the Order Gods might have an internal conflict first, which won't be fun. Little Roland, you're giving me something mega troublesome here. Heh, it seems like I won't be bored anymore for some time."

Of course, I didn't know that this plan gave certain Gods major headaches, nor did I know about an endless upcoming series of discussions among the True Gods that would test their wisdom and experience. Right now, what I still had to deal with was the severe situation in the Bardi Empire.

A large amount of grains had been tainted with Kasolan's Tears. The moment some large-scale undead magic spell was activated, the consequences would be immeasurably immense, but…

"Who cares? It has nothing to do with me. I'm not a hero who's going to save the world. As for saving the people, let's give that job over to the Holy Church. Besides, with the situation as terrible as it is already, it's impossible to do anything about it even if I wanted to."

Even I, a several-hundred-year-old *chuunibyou* , knew that some things were simply impossible to do. This was a situation where the Undead Emperors had prepared for several decades. Trying now to forcibly do something would be no different from jumping directly into a pit naked and fighting against the Undead Emperors—it would be suicidal.

Besides, there weren't any solutions in the small details, either. The people here had already consumed these grains for over a decade. If I told them now that there was a problem with their food, even if I proved it for them, I would cause nothing other than mass-scale panic and the Undead Emperors' premature activation of their plan since I didn't have any way to rectify the foundational changes in their body. Of course, there would also be a mass famine. The Bardi people had probably long since discarded their original grain seeds.

Slaughter entire cities? Let's not mention the fact that the Undead Calamity hadn't arrived yet. Even if it arrived, with the entire country like this, where would I even start slaughtering from? And if I slaughtered cities, that would be perfect for the

Undead Emperors to start summoning undead, and I would even be made out to be the evil one.

So, since the problem was already huge to the point of no recovery, that meant that it was actually easy to deal with. At any rate, I decided to not care about it anymore and just do what I needed to do. I also reported about the Undead Emperors' plot in my report to the Gods. It was their turn to worry about such things. Yep, I did such an excellent job in tossing the responsibility to others. I refused to be responsible for solving this problem!

Well, of course we had to make some changes ourselves as well. At the very least, from today onwards, nobody in my group was going to be eating any more local Bardi grains anymore. Of course, Harloys and I were exceptions, as the Kasolan's Tears would be excellent for our bodies.

Since we discovered all this, I unhesitatingly left Baron Matt's domain the moment the sky lit up. With the situation at such a terrible state, the undead had probably secretly taken control over the entire country decades ago without the humans realizing it. Continuing to idly travel about in the Bardi Empire had lost its meaning.

While on the road, I did an experiment with Carolyn and some other Bardi citizens' blood but found out something rather unexpected. Everyone from the capital possessed at least three times the amount of Kasolan's Tears in their body compared to the locals here. It would seem that the people in the capital had started eating these grains much earlier, so they were poisoned more deeply.

Still, once again, there was nothing we could do. From now on, we would follow the original plan to continue down this tour of inspection, extorting nobles to enrich our wallets while slowly making our way to Port Victoria… but that was obviously impossible.

Not every noble was one with needs like Baron Matt's. Most local domain lords acted just like emperors within their own territories, and it was only natural that they felt enmity and on guard towards centralized authority. And, the farther out from the capital a location was, the stronger the belief in Holy Light. It was only natural that there would be enmity towards the undead.

Still, we were supposedly the imperial envoy group that represented Emperor Orloss. On the surface, they treated us quite politely. Despite the warm welcomes, however,

there was always a sense of distance between us. Wherever we went, we would be stared at with looks filled with enmity. This caused us to feel complex emotions. In a way, this was a good thing, as it meant that the Bardi Empire wasn't a rock-solid nation with high internal unity. At the very least, these areas far away from the capital still had their own way of thinking. However, always being treated with such enmity was an unpleasant experience.

And, when we finally arrived as planned at the road intersection leading to Port Victoria, we heaved huge sighs of relief. This was a new territory that the Bardi Empire recently obtained so its control in this area wasn't quite as strong. Even if something really happened, we had confidence in our ability to escape.

But, the moment that we stopped at a local Earl's residence, we heard two pieces of headline news.

First was that Pope Caloma had formally set a date for the Holy War against Emperor Orloss. The pope requested for all the countries that believed in the Holy Light to send out armies within the time limit of two months, all to organize a holy army which would formally fight against the Bardi Empire.

"The pope probably became even more determined due to the news we sent out from here."

The second piece of headline news was quite visible, without even needing to hear about it. Under the distant white clouds, the attention-catching sight of volcanoes erupting explained everything already. The fact that we could sense earthquakes and the rampaging of earth and fire elementals from over one thousand kilometers away was indisputable evidence.

"A forbidden spell! And it's even a double forbidden spell with dual elements of earth and fire!"

The news was quite simple, but the content made me contemplate much about it. The Mage Country was the first to accept Pope Caloma's summons in declaring formal battle against the Bardi Empire. With their very first attack, the Mage Country used a forbidden spell to assail one of the Bardi Empire's major forts, Fort Florset. The Bardi Empire suffered major losses, losing over 100,000 elite military forces that were defending this fort.

And, for the sake of revenge, the Bardi Empire's ace of aces troop, their dragon knight squad, had now entered combat. An Epic-level battle between archmages and huge dragons was about to begin, with all-out war between these two mega-countries having broken out.

[Eich's Seven Hells, Prologue: "The Whispering of Demons" has ended. The times are moving forward. Chapter 1: "The Vultures of Battle" has temporarily been sealed due to your efforts in creating peace and unity in the Underground World. The third trial, "The Despairing Calamity," has been activated prematurely. System Reminder: What's scheduled to arrive will always arrive.]

Notes:

[1] TL/N: 'Matt' and the Chinese word for toilet are phonetically similar.

Chapter 275
Dragon Knight Archduke

Nightrain City was formerly the capital of the Seventeen Nation New Moon Alliance, but it was now only a small border town in the Bardi Empire. However, the person in charge here was the Archduke Dragon Knight, Halent Winston, of the Bardi Empire.

Pretty much all mega-empires would have their very own ace military squadrons that had amassed countless years of history and service. The most famous military squadron of the Bardi Empire would be its dragon knight squadron.

The massive dragons were forever at the top of the food chain. They were also one of the few Gold-ranked species that existed in this world. A matured adult dragon, even at its weakest, would be the equivalent of any human at the Gold rank. Once a dragon learned some basic hunting techniques and magic spells, even the average Legend-ranked warrior would be helpless against these flying beasts.

After all, dragons knew how to fly, while ordinary warriors would be stuck on the ground, unable to do anything.

Dragon knight contracts were typically contracts between some strong warrior and a dragon as either master and servant or as equal status companions. Basically, the dragons would only give recognition to the strong, but that created an obvious paradox. The weak that needed the power of dragons were unable to obtain their recognition, while the strong that obtained the dragons' recognition didn't need the dragons' power to begin with. Dragon knights hence became legends in their own right quite easily.

That was why even if once in a while, one or two weak humans managed to gain a dragon's recognition through some coincidental fate or lucky occurrence, they were only exceptions to the norm. With the decrease in humanity's average combat strength, dragon knights, which were considered the strongest of all aerial knights, grew fewer and fewer as well. It was already quite difficult for a strong country to maintain more than one or two dragon knights, and it was common for the dragons in question to be young, immature dragons hired with large amounts of money. The dragons' actual power and will to fight would be questionable.

However, there was one country that had always remained an exception. In the Bardi Empire, the number of dragon knights had never fallen before fifty. Even the weakest dragon knight would be at the Gold rank. Yet it was incomprehensible why they were able to so easily obtain the dragons' recognition.

Some people said that the Bardi Empire obtained a secret artifact from the Dragon Gods, while others said that they had a long-lasting contract with the dragon species. But no matter what the truth was, due to the existence of a large number of dragon knights, the skies would never belong to any of the Bardi Empire's enemies. This was also one of the main reasons why the Auland Empire put so much into the development of floating combat airships—they treated the dragon knights as a potential enemy and threat.

Halent Winston was the subcommander of the dragon knight squadron (as the commander would always be a member of the royalty, so the current commander was Emperor Orloss). He was a famous warrior who was ranked in the top ten in all of Bardi as well as sixty-seventh in the "Eich's Famous Warrior Rankings," as the "Archduke Dragon Knight."

In this current generation, the Bardi Empire possessed a total of seventy-two dragon knights. Only sixty out of the seventy-two would be sent out on campaigns, and these sixty were split up into twelve small teams of five each. Halent personally commanded five small teams, a total of twenty-five dragon knights.

Setting his personal status aside, his personal combat strength was similarly astonishing. And his dragon steed was the adult Blue Dragon, "Dark and Cloudy Windstorms" Sishusler, and was quite renowned amongst the dragons.

Halent reached the Legend rank as a warrior ten years ago and possessed a legendary artifact called the Thunder Horn. He had the astonishing military achievement of single-handedly slaying over one hundred griffin knights in a single battle, and he was a famed fierce warrior throughout all the lands.

One year ago, he quietly left the capital of the Bardi Empire and took all the dragon knights under his command to Nightrain City, which caused quite a commotion at the time.

As a former capital, Nightrain City was a classic example of a well-fortified city. But ever since Archduke Halent started living here, not only did he bring a large number

of military personnel with him but he even personally invested a great amount of money and resources into the city's fortifications. Numerous cannons and towers were constructed, while the city's walls were reinforced many times over. At first, everyone here found it quite strange. After all, constructing a well-defended fort meant that there would be some type of enemy to defend against.

There were no other countries even close to Nightrain City. Halent's actions seemed rather meaningless. However, after the "Port Victoria incident" occurred, since Nightrain City was close to Port Victoria as well as located on the only road to Port Victoria, everyone learned just what Archduke Halent had been on guard against—the undead.

While the Bardi nobles were still shocked at Archduke Halent's decision to leave the capital and come here, he managed to completely eradicate all traces of bandits in the nearby vicinity in just the short time of less than one year. And due to the fact that huge dragons could constantly be seen in the skies above the city, Nightrain City received a new name—Dragonrain City.

The moment we arrived in Dragonrain City a sudden rainstorm blotted out the skies, making it more convenient for us to enter. Since that Archduke Halent was also from the capital, I was worried that we would run into him and he might see through Lilith's disguise, so I had Carolyn and Lilith switch identities with each other, with Carolyn being herself and Lilith being the maid.

Now that Carolyn was playing the part of herself again, there was no more worry about authenticity. But if at all possible I didn't want to have to meet this famous Archduke dragon knight. So, my plan was to enter Dragonrain City as inconspicuously as possible and obtain information first before deciding whether or not I should try meeting with this Archduke.

In fact, if it weren't for the fact that it was on the only road to Port Victoria, I wouldn't have even passed by this city if I could help it.

"Carolyn, what do you know about that Halent? Have you ever met him?"

"He… he's… a bit scary."

Carolyn, who was busy hugging her maid Lilith, took quite a while to answer my

question, and her tone of voice contained an inexplicable amount of fear and anxiety. It was as if she was recalling something terrifying.

After finally hearing everything from her through all that stuttering, I learned the basic view that Bardi nobles had of Archduke Halent. He never participated in any noble parties, nor did he ever hold any social events. If he absolutely had to participate in some formal event, he would always join while wearing military attire. He was even daring to the point of wearing his sword in the presence of Emperor Orloss.

With losses were gains to be made elsewhere. Although he antagonized many nobles, he was deeply approved by the military leadership and civilian military officers. He was a powerful figure and representative of the military faction.

As for why Carolyn was so scared of him, it turned out to be because her father, who was a Duke equivalent to Duke Halent in rank at a time when he hadn't been promoted to Archduke yet, had requested the then Duke Halent to teach swordsmanship to his daughter and son.

This was obviously supposed to be a way for nobles to establish closer relationships and friendly ties with each other. However, Halent took it at face value and strictly trained Carolyn and her younger brother as seriously as possible. He forced full military standards for their training, and the two siblings that were used to an idle lifestyle suffered terribly. Later, even when Carolyn's father requested that Halent go easy on them, Halent still maintained his way of thinking.

"Go easy on them? Since they're currently my subordinates, I can't possibly allow them to be insufficient as military personnel. Even if Emperor Orloss himself requests me, my answer is still the same. You two, you only have two choices—complete the training tasks, or die!"

Halent had a seemingly soft and gentle voice that reverberated throughout the garden, but for some unknown reason, nobody in Carolyn's family dared look at him directly. There was an invisible might about him that seemed like a huge dragon was surveilling its own territory.

"There's no mistaking it—that's draconic might."

I came to a simple conclusion after hearing this description from Carolyn.

While the Bardi Empire's dragon knights might be considered a mystery in the eyes of

the general populace, there were plenty of things that were revealed about them after all these years if you knew where to look.

First of all, their dragon knights were basically hereditary in position, passed down between family members. Not only that, it could be learned from fighting with them that most of these dragon knights weren't pure humans. Most of them had dragons' blood in them, and they were the descendants of dragons.

Unlike the magically created dracons, dragon descendants were far stronger from the time of their birth. Most of them had a true dragon as an ancestor, and they were typically able to inherit part of dragons' strength and natural talents, which made them quite difficult to deal with.

The fact that the Bardi Empire's dragon knights were the descendants of dragons might be a secret to the general populace, but it was an open secret in the society of the strong. The real secret that remained unknown was how the Bardi Empire successfully kept the dragon descendants in their human country for so long, along with how these dragon descendants became dragon knights.

Of course, since dragon descendants possessed the blood of dragons, it would indeed be much easier for them to obtain the friendship of dragons. However, friendship was one thing, and having a dragon serve you was another. After all, would you allow a distant relative of yours to ride on you and command you as they pleased?

And if the dragon descendants married ordinary humans, the power of their bloodline would naturally dilute and decrease. It would only take a few generations for them to be no different from ordinary humans. Just how the Bardi Empire was able to maintain the dragon descendants' bloodline for the past thousands of years was yet another mystery.

To be honest, when I heard all this, I wanted even less to meet with this Legend-ranked Archduke. After all, one of the most common natural talents to dragons was the Eye of Truth, which specialized in seeing through all sorts of illusions and disguises. It was impossible to fool, scam, or lie to Little Red. If we met a dragon descendant who possessed such an ability, all our secrets would likely be seen through immediately.

But, right now, I was in no mood to think about the secrets of the Bardi Empire's dragon descendants. After all, if anyone had been struck by a heavy sword, sent flying, and become embedded in the city wall like me, I'm sure that they wouldn't be able to

think comfortably, either.

One minute ago, the city gate opened and a not-very-tall figure blocked our procession amid the torrential downpour. With large thrums, rain pounded and glanced off his cape, and his naturally curly blonde hair maintained its own uniqueness despite the rain. His golden eyes were glaring at me with a draconic might that would make any living creature tremble.

"Archduke Halent…"

When Carolyn muttered our visitor's name out loud, I was still thinking of what lie to say when in the very next moment, he swung that heavy iron blade of his, which was the same height as him, right onto my body. I didn't even have time to react yet when I was sent flying several dozen meters and embedded into the city wall.

"I said before that filthy undead are forbidden from entering my city. Those who dare to enter shall die!"

He spoke gently and softly, just like Caitlyn had told me in her story. However, not a single person would doubt his will to carry through what he just said.

Since he only attacked the lich in our party, perhaps that would leave room for negotiation, but someone had already lost control of himself as he transformed his killing intent into an actual threat.

"You dare to hit my father!"

Ah Dang, who had been slowly following our procession, had mostly been snoozing, but he suddenly flew into a furious rage. The next moment, his originally large body suddenly expanded to more than ten times in size. An Abomination taller than the city walls appeared in front of everyone.

It was now Halent's turn to be astonished. There was no mistaking the aura of the strong, and the giant Abomination before him was definitely no ordinary Abomination. It pressured him far more than this Legend-ranked lich that he had just sent flying. Could the undead have some plot here?

But even though Ah Dang's tremendous foot was about to stomp on Halent, Halent remained calm. He knew that his old partner wouldn't allow him to be in danger.

Smack!!

Before Ah Dang was able to stomp down, something heavy crashed into him.

That heavy something was a Blue Dragon that descended from the sky. Thunderbolts were twirling around it, and the out-of-control thunder all around it made it seem all the more fearsome. A Blue Dragon on a rainy night would be at its strongest, as Blue Dragons were favored by wind and lightning.

“…Damn it, where did such a monster come from?"

But, the seemingly fierce huge dragon wasn't actually having it easy. It already lost a piece of its flesh from where it touched Ah Dang, as it suffered due to the Abomination's skin containing saws that could devour flesh and bone. Upon contact, Ah Dang's skin had bitten off a piece of the Blue Dragon's skin.

"Ah Dang—Ah Dang is going to eat you!"

The furious Ah Dang didn't intend to hold back as he distorted his body once more and transformed into the most frightening nightmare of all, a gigantic dragonspider, the hunter of dragons. With just a single exchange of blows, the Elder Blue Dragon transformed into an insignificant existence that was viciously sent flying with a single swat.

However, the dragon knight Archduke remained calm. His battle horn attached to his waist was already at his mouth. Since the undead were openly declaring war on him, what came next wouldn't be a small battle. Instead, it would be a battle between the undead and the dragon knights!

"Ah Dang! Retreat!"

As for me, I was absolutely furious. I didn't care if he was an undead or a dragon knight. Since he hit my face, I was obviously going to hit back.

My mana went berserk and transformed into a black mist that twirled around me, with the power of death becoming my pitch-black shadow. That was my servant which

would bring death for me, and I felt that I seemed really like the boss of a video game now that I was immersed in the darkness.

I hadn't been so pitiful in receiving an attack in such a long time. The only part where I still maintained my sense of reason was to continue my pretense of being a lich and only fighting back with a lich's magic.

"Roland, I think something's wrong with this situation. Let's stop for a moment and calm down!"

Harloys was warning me now, but did I really need this silly cat to remind me? It was apparent that something was wrong with the situation. Even though we secretly sneaked in, Halent immediately found and attacked us. Something was obviously wrong.

"I'm quite calm, and I shall calmly kill him… The ender of everything, the frigid winter shall arrive!"

Tremendous ice magic power was gathering on my arm, while my cyan soulfire transformed into pale white icy flames. I was always one who gave what I got back, so since Halent sliced me up as a way of greeting me, then it was only natural that he allowed me to use some combat magic to greet him in return.

"Is this your way of calming down? Do you calm down with your knee and not your brain!?"

Halent saw how the torrential rain in the sky instantly turned into snowflakes and wondered for the first time today if he should have just stayed home. Perhaps he came looking for the wrong person.

Chapter 276
Clash

The unique structure of the nearby mountains along with the climate and the forces of nature caused Nightrain City to be a place where rain clouds commonly gathered. Nightrain City was on the mountainside, but the origin of this rather poetic name lied in the fierce rainstorms that typically came at night when it was colder.

Militarily speaking, there was a height advantage offered by this city's construction, and the rainy weather gave it an advantage in defense. Slippery mountain slopes would make it difficult for anyone to use siege weaponry, after all. Under Halent's command, the entire nearby mountain was being carved out by humans, and this fortress city was expanding at a fearsome rate. Judging by its current rate of expansion, it would likely become a peerless impenetrable fortress within the next two years.

However, what the city guards at the city gate witnessed today was a snowy night that should have been extinct in spring. It was not the typical rainy evening.

First, the snowflakes came down as tiny specks. Then, the snow gradually grew larger in size until it imperceptibly became a flurry so heavy that it was impossible to even see one's fingers in.

The area around the lich had transformed into snowy ground. Changing the environment with one's mana doubtlessly meant that this lich was an incredible archmage, perhaps even at the Saint rank, yet…

"So what? No matter how strong, have we ever feared anyone?"

Halent's heavy sword was trembling, but that was due to his excitement, not fear. After sensing that his opponent was powerful, this draconic warrior had found a worthwhile prey. He let out a low roar, causing all his muscles to naturally overload themselves, as if he was a predator about to hunt his prey.

"FUL!"

He uttered a magical incantation that caused his heavy sword to swirl with blue-white electricity. When the lightning flashes illuminated his face, Halent, who was filled with the will to fight, now had his overly clean face appear more resolute than before. His heavy sword was now enchanted with dragon magic with the properties of thunder and summoned lightning bolts with every swing, further increasing his might by approximately thirty percent.

And not far away, "Dark and Cloudy Windstorms" Sishusler viciously glared at the transformed Ah Dang. He flapped his wings, intending to begin a new round of attacks against Ah Dang. However, a light foot suddenly pressed down on his head; he didn't even notice its presence until it was already there.

"Young one, if you don't want to die, I recommend that you don't move."

On his head was a young human female. However, the Blue Dragon's sense told him that her pressure was like a mountain. Dragons were a species that had their levels etched into their bloodlines, and this venerated Blue Dragon felt true terror for the first time in his life. This was an upper-ranked draconic might that even an Elder Blue Dragon was unable to resist.

"A Dragon Queen of some colored dragon? An Immemorial Dragon?"

Elder Dragons, Ancient Dragons, and Immemorial Dragons. Each type of dragon required thousands of years as the base unit, and there were tremendous differences in power among their ranks. The huge difference in draconic might caused the Elder Blue Dragon to be unable to do anything at all except surrender.

No one would believe it. The famous dragon knight Archduke and his Blue Dragon were completely suppressed right from the very start of fighting against some complete unknowns.

Meanwhile, I was enjoying my battle against Halent.

"Ice Pillar."

I didn't use any incantations, and there weren't even any mana waves sent out from me. My bony middle finger had a ray of white light following it, and right after that, it transformed into a cone-shaped piece of ice as tremendous as dragonbreath would be.

With this right before him, Halent's expression didn't change at all. He unhesitatingly

swung his sword and clashed against the pillar of ice, which forcibly transformed the ice back into snowflakes. That thunder-enchanted sparkling sword of his sliced through my icy attack with surprising ease.

"Hmm? A special anti-magic ability? It doesn't seem to be an effect of the sword's enchantment but rather a natural talent ability."

When fighting with dragon, demon, or Gods' descendants, apart from having to be on guard against their base stats, which would be much higher than an ordinary human's, what one needed to be more vigilant about would be their wide assortment of natural talent abilities that were ever so difficult to defend against.

Snap!

With a snap of my fingers, yet another high-speed ice pillar appeared from the ground to stab at the dragon knight who was rushing at me.

He lowered his head, protected his face, and used his shoulder in lieu of a spear to charge through my ice!

Boom!

The heavy sword wielding knight didn't stop at all and actually crashed through my ice pillar. However, judging from the tattered pieces of his armor and fresh blood on his forehead, he didn't have an easy time. Yet Halent knew that keeping a distance from an archmage who had such a degree of expertise in ice magic would be tantamount to suicide. Only the courageous who took difficult paths would be able to win. Even if he injured himself, he would force himself closer to me.

"You actually like charging through head-on? Alright then, I shall allow you to enjoy yourself to your heart's content. Come, Ice Wall!"

I clapped and caused numerous walls of ice to rise between me and the path he was taking to charge at me. With such an amount of snow falling here, this place had already become my domain and battlefield.

"How is this possible! Does this lich not need any casting time at all or mana replenishment?"

Even though the cold-faced Halent remained calm on the surface, he found it

incomprehensible how this unfamiliar mage was able to cast magic spells that seemed to break all common sense.

But even so, he believed in his own victory…

"I'm within five meters!"

Any battle between a mage and a warrior would eternally be about controlling the distance. Even a mage two ranks above a warrior in power level would easily die if the warrior managed to close the gap to melee distance.

"Ice Circle!"

I was getting more and more used to my own powers as I fought Halent. Although I was still shouting out the names of common ice magic spells, I was actually only using the most basic ice sculpting.

Elemental sculpting appeared simple but was actually marvelous in its countless applications.

I just had to use the easiest elemental sculpting of all to construct a model of what I wanted and pay the mana cost required to have all the basic ice element move into place. Making this one part horizontal would be an ice wall, while making that part vertical would be an ice pillar. Or drawing it in a circular fashion would create an ice circle. Unlike the rigid movements of casting spells I did in the past, the ice and snow here were extensions of my will and my body. It was basically no different from me physically fighting.

Swoosh!

This time, I swung my fist in midair at nothing, and with another swing, an invisible fist of snow suddenly landed upon Halent without any warning at an angle above him; it was impossible for him to notice. It forcefully hammered Halent into the ground.

"Oh my, that looked like it really hurt."

The settling dust revealed a large hole in the ground with stone shards scattered everywhere. Just like what had happened to me earlier, Halent didn't even get the opportunity to shout before he was buried in the ground.

My massive hand of ice and snow began dissipating as well. If you only judged by its outer appearance, it looked like a high-circle ice magic for manipulation, Balof's Fist, but it was actually just basic ice sculpting as well. Although this ice sculpting magic was on a slightly larger scale than others, it was still only an insignificant drain on my mana.

After knowing the foundations, everything would be easier. Before, when I cast magic, I was just imitating mages before me. An analogy would be that someone taught me how 1 + 1 = 2, and I managed to go up to 10 + 10 = 20. However, the current me was at the level of knowing the formulas for how everything worked, so I could easily change basic magic spells' templates as I pleased.

"Forming into solids is the most critical part of gathering the ice element. Although it's sturdy and sharp, its speed is much slower. If I want quicker speed, I only need to gather smaller particles. If I want to shoot out rays or mist, then I also need to calculate the reacting force.

In my hands that appeared to be a lich's bony hands were large amounts of ice, snow, and singing and dancing ice spirits. Under the influence of my mana, they constantly transformed into mist, or ice pillars, or invisible, tasteless frost. Their forms, conditions, and sizes were no problem at all. They could change themselves at will.

With only a thought, I could twist common sense and take so many shortcuts with unnecessary processes. After casting off the restraints of common sense, this completely unreasonable magic of mine which defied common sense was my foundational magic that I could control at will.

"Oh my, this is so fun."

As if I had found a fun toy to play with, I wholeheartedly threw myself into the manipulation of my snow and ice magic. I even sent my own spells against myself to test them, almost forgetting about my opponent who was that really famous dragon knight Archduke.

Clang!

…Well, I almost forgot about him. This painful-sounding clang was the sound of his head crashing against the solid walls of ice encapsulating him. That poor little dragon descendant; I hoped that he wouldn't get a concussion for this. It would be bad if he

injured himself too badly and left some dark history in his heart… Or, should I make him hit himself in the head a few hundred more times so that he would lose his memory?

"Hmph, so easy. All you can do is dig some holes and attempt ambushing me from underground. How many battles do you think I've had against sand worms so far? I long since froze the entire surface of the ground here. I'll simply wait for you to crash into more walls of ice."

From the moment Halent cast a thunder magic enchantment on his sword, I knew that he was most likely of a Blue Dragon's bloodline himself. And Blue Dragons excelled at controlling lightning and thunder and also really loved to build their nests in deserts and isolated hills; they were naturally skilled diggers. Their natural talents involved the ability to move through sand as well as underground, so how could I possibly not be on guard?

The snow kept increasing in magnitude. Although I wasn't at the level of being able to create my own Soul World yet, all my preparations for what I wanted to do were now complete. I transformed all of my mana into the purest ice element. All this ice element would be the paint for redrawing the Northlands' scenery, while my fundamental magic, ice sculpting, would act as my brush. The reoccurrence of my world of snow and ice was under completion.

Snow continued to blanket the ground. A small portion of the snow was transforming into a snow mountain, while magical crystal trees could faintly be seen.

When looking at it from a distance, it was probably just a beautiful scene of snow. But just like the winter in the Northlands, death traps typically waited, hidden in such clean and beautiful scenery. If a traveler who was allured by the scenery and didn't understand the natural laws of snowy mountains acted as he pleased, then that traveler would likely not live to see next year's spring.

“…This is my Ice Treader Soul Imprint? Wow, it's really so suitable for me. I apologize for not allowing you to display your true power until today."

The snowflakes in the air could transform into fatal ice blades at any time, while the accumulated snow on the ground would suddenly collapse or freeze over. The layers of ice beneath the snow would silently form ice blades as well, and the sunlight reflecting off the snow would begin creating white illusions. With a single misstep, one

had the potential of dropping into an endless abyss, sleeping forevermore amongst the pristine snow.

With the ice element continuously falling together with the snow, the ordinary streets transformed into snow mountains. This would seemingly take a lot of mana, but, in reality, all it took for me to summon the ice and snow was a small amount. Since the scenes of snow were already drawn by me, what I had to do after was slowly enjoy.

As I expected, fighting in actual combat with an opponent who was close to my level was an excellent shortcut for improving myself. In the past, all my opponents' power levels were completely unbalanced compared to me. Either they were ridiculously strong to the point where I couldn't win unless I cheated, or they were so weak that I could easily win with one hand tied behind my back. With me being forced to use only ice magic to fight in order to maintain my disguise as a lich, this was the closest even battle that I hadn't had for so long. It helped my many years of accumulated knowledge as well as recently learned knowledge explode all at once, transforming into practical combat strength via real battle.

I could feel that deep in my soul, the newly reassembled Ice Treader Soul Imprint was beginning to glow. It was becoming stronger by feeding on a silvery light. However, it seemed much smaller than before, probably only about one-fourth of its original size.

“…One person only has one soul, which means only one Soul Imprint. Do I have to have all four of my abilities reach the level required in order for me to enter Legend rank?"

I didn't need to say any more, nor did I need to search for a reason. It was as if the heavens had revealed something to me. I already knew that if I wanted to enter Legend rank, I would need to summon four Soul Imprints in total and progress even further than in the past.

"Others only need to reach a sufficient level of understanding once while I need to reach it four times? And I even need to combine all the powers at the end? What type of hellish difficulty is this? Forget about ice magic; I went down the wrong path before, and now I've corrected myself and made improvements. But as for Law, Holy Light, and undead magic, my mastery of these areas is almost at the top of the world already. How am I supposed to progress in these areas? Why is it that for me to enter Legend rank feels more difficult than for others to enter SemiGod rank?"

I had confirmed my future path of personal development but kept complaining

endlessly. I was also beginning to burn up with a nameless anger. After all, I was no masochist who loved taking the most difficult paths, so of course I would object to the mysteriously high difficulty for me to progress in rank.

Yet, I still knew that the harder it was, the greater the benefits to be reaped at the end. There was no such thing as luck on the path of cultivation. It would be only natural that there would be even larger benefits at the end when I broke through these obstacles. Since I had to work four times harder than others, I wouldn't request for ten times the rewards in the end, but it wouldn't be too greedy to want five times the rewards, would it?

[Ice Treader Soul Imprint has been completely activated. Your ice magic's effects have been improved by 20%, and mana costs have been decreased by 20%. You have now obtained the passive ability, Lord of Frigidwinter. System Reminder: Your opponent is still fine, so stop daydreaming.]

[Lord of Frigidwinter (Passive ability): Whenever you're in an environment with plentiful ice and snow, you shall become the lord of ice and snow, which will greatly increase your ability to control these two elements. Once you finish constructing a cycle of ice and snow element in the surrounding area, the entire area shall be viewed as your personal domain. Only a minor amount of mana is required to maintain your domain of ice and snow.]

And along my improvement in understanding, my Soul Imprint was completely activated. With its assistance, the snowflakes increased a little in size yet again, and it became easier for me to control the minute details of everything. It didn't seem to have much impact, but it improved my general abilities and changed me at the foundation.

When two people were battling, if one person suddenly became stronger, it was only natural that his opponent would be the unlucky one.

After this entire area around us fell under my control, all the ice and snow in a radius of one hundred meters acted as my ears. How could that "little lizard" underground possibly escape my senses?

"Ha, Roland's Heavy Fist!"

A fist of ice and snow crashed down, smashing on the dragon knight's head right when he popped out from the ground. He could only swallow his anger and pop back

underground again. When his Blue Dragon saw that its master was at a disadvantage, it started angrily roaring and struggled to get back up, but Little Red, who was sitting on his head, stomped down once, causing the Blue Dragon to writhe in agony and lay collapsed in its place.

As for me, I kept loudly shouting out the names of my spells while having fun playing Whack-a-Mole.

Since these were completely self-created magics, based on mages' habits, I had the right to name these spells as the creator. And adding the spell's inventor's name into the spell was considered one of the greatest honors for a mage. I was quite jealous of "Harloys' Shadow Steps" and "Amelia's Fruit Growing Spell" for quite a long time already, and now that I had the chance, of course I would take the opportunity to enjoy myself.

"Roland's Ice Arrow! Roland's Ice Blade! Roland's Multi-type Ice Palm! Haha, I'm not an idiot mage! I want to take ten of you on at once!"

Since he had failed in his ambush from underground, it was only natural that Halent would have to return to the surface if he wanted to overturn the situation. I kept smashing all sorts of ice magic down at him; it was just like playing Whack-a-Mole with the dragon knight as the mole. Just as I was proudly thinking about how I should get my spells' names patented, that silly cat actually ruined my fun yet again.

"Roland, new magic spells require new magical reasoning and absolutely unique spell models. What do you think your spells are?"

Alright then. Although it was easy enough to fool novices, it was impossible to fool another mage. While I was just randomly making names up, these seemingly different spells were actually all variations of a one-circle magic spell, ice sculpting. Even though it was extremely powerful at restraining and controlling my opponent's actions as well as extremely low in mana costs, it was still only a basic form of magic. The fact that the dragon knight had taken so many direct attacks but still hadn't died was the best evidence that it lacked attack power and still needed improvement.

“…You call yourself a dragon knight when being so skilled at escaping? I think you should change your name to cockroach knight."

A large patch of snow and ice transformed into a gigantic ice blade and split the earth,

directly threatening Archduke Halent who was underground. The most dangerous part of all wasn't even the endlessly spreading ice and snow; it was the fact that this ice blade began spreading like a large tree's roots. It would soon be able to capture its prey.

"It's obvious that Roland's just venting his anger now."

"I think that he's gotten angry out of embarrassment."

"And he calls himself an old adult—but whenever he's displeased, he takes it out on others. How immature! And he even dares to call others immature."

Alright then, I decided to pretend not to hear my own companions making fun of me. Actually, this battle that had started for no apparent reason was basically at its end. While it was a fact that any typical mage would be defeated by a warrior in just a second if the mage allowed the warrior to close the distance, most situations were actually like this one. The warrior would be pulled into the mage's way of battling, and even if the warrior had peerless physical strength, it would be useless unless he could close the distance. The warrior would eventually fatigue and be defeated while being toyed with.

And if the current situation continued, the ice would eventually pierce through the very ground itself and freeze all the earth around us, which would naturally seal off his natural talent ability to move underground. At that time, he'd find it impossible to even leave the ground.

“…This is the dragon knight Archduke? Although it's to be expected, isn't he a little too disappointing?"

However, Harloys seemed to have gotten addicted to going against me all the time and immediately countered my statement.

"Don't make it sound so easy. With your personal equipment plus your Frigidwinter's bonuses, do you think there will be any difference even if your opponent is a Saint rank? That youngster was quite unfortunate, as his speed was continually slowed down in the snow by your Ice Calamity's Chill stacking effect. He was also foolish enough to crash straight through your ice wall using his body. With how-many stacks of speed reduction that are probably on him, his body's time sensory system is probably all messed up now, and we're moving at three times the

normal speed of what he sees. As expected of the bloodline of the speediest Blue Dragons, though; it's already incredible that he's still capable of dodging your magic attacks."

Harloys then seemed to recall something that made her quite displeased. "That ability of yours is just so insidious. Especially the Ice Calamity's Chill that can slow down sensory perception of time, as anyone who doesn't know about it beforehand will definitely fall for it."

"Ohhh, I forgot about it already. So there was that as well! That means this guy's normal speed is three times what he's displaying now? How dangerous!"

Although I was saying it was dangerous, I didn't treat it as anything important at all. However, there were always people who couldn't be judged by common sense. What suddenly happened next proved Harloys' wisdom correct. No matter how much she warned me about the dragon knight's skills, I had still underestimated this dragon descendant I was fighting with.

"Ah!"

Halent jumped out of the ground, angrily roaring and accompanied by rampaging thunder. In order to more conveniently attack the underground opponent, the ground there would unfreeze for a split second when the ice blade inserted itself into the ground. Even though it was only a gap of a few milliseconds, Halent actually managed to leap out of the ground in that short instant together with the dirt around him.

The thunderbolts he sent out along with his furious roar broke my descending ice blade to pieces, while his glaring eyes seemed to breathe fire at me. The next moment, I understood how it was that he had managed to grab that millisecond chance to successfully break out from underground despite the fact that he had been repeatedly slowed.

Halent must have used his heavy sword at that moment to suddenly wield it forcefully behind him, crashing into the earth. He then used the power of reactive force to help propel himself out of the ground.

"So it was reactive force."

I immediately realized that he must have discovered the slowing effect on him. Although he didn't know how to get rid of it, he thought of an idea of his own. Since he

was currently slowed, why not use reactive force to help propel him out? Reactive force wouldn't be affected by the slowing.

When his speed had been slowed to one-third already, doing this and managing to catch a millisecond opportunity truly wouldn't be easy. That would require an almost bestial instinct along with a calculative prowess on the level of premonition. Even without paying attention to any of that, Halent's ability to adapt when forced to the brink was truly something.

But I unhurriedly muttered an incantation. With such a distance between us, I had long since prepared a Dimensional Door spell. I increased the distance between us again and continued my game of Whack-a-Mole.

"Ame!"

The dragon descendant used his own ace as he uttered an incantation and tossed down his heavy sword. Wings suddenly unfurled from his back, and blue streaks of lightning twirled around him. He shot himself directly towards me at top speed, showing off his own natural talent ability as the bloodline of the speedy Blue Dragons. The next instant, his blood-red eyes were right in front of me.

"It's over."

"It's over."

Both dragons said the exact same words. Halent's Blue Dragon had a delighted tone, while Little Red shrugged as if she was bored and didn't care about the result at all.

As for me, I laughed at the shiny Halent filled with lightning. I merely reached out to empty air, causing the heavy top-quality metal mage staff which weighed almost a few tons to materialize in my hands. Then, I lowered my head, twisted my body, and wielded my staff at the person using his own body as a cannon shot to attack me. Home run swing!

"Hup! What manner of monster is this!? Take my staff!" [1]

However, nobody responded to my ripping off of Journey to the West. I indeed made an excellent home run swing, and Halent went flying backwards at twice the speed he came. He crashed into the city wall—yes, the city wall. He completely and utterly sunk into the city wall, causing an entire portion of the wall to collapse. He was even more

pitiful than me from earlier.

"Ha, I'm white-robed Gandalf—I mean Rex! I'm skilled at magic, and my mastery of staves is even better. Who said that mages don't know martial arts!? Hit! You want to compare Strength with me? You're two hundred years too young."

Normal dragons would only have 25 points or so in Strength, while a dragon descendant would probably have at most 23 in Strength. And ever since I equipped that armlet I received from Emordilorcan, my Strength value surpassed the barrier of 30, which put us on completely different levels.

Yet, I didn't have the free time to continue laughing at the person I just defeated. Perhaps I had made too much of a spectacle of things, or maybe Halent had some special method to contact his allies. While I was busy playing with Halent, we were now surrounded by his allies that had arrived under the cover of the weather. Currently, there were over ten visible dragons flying around and perched on the city walls. Who knew how many more were waiting in the shadows?

Vicious glares gathered in my direction, while those threatening dragons flew circles in midair. The dragons weren't impatient; they had plenty of time to enjoy the thrill of the hunt against a strong opponent.

"Should I say that it's my honor? I met an entire dragon knight squadron right from the start? Sigh, this is really such a strange battle for no apparent reason."

But, before I could even consider how to deal with all this, an ancient-sounding voice spoke up in midair. Along with it, a silver dragon descended.

"Your Highness Fina? Aren't you Her Highness Princess Fina? Young ones, what are you all doing! Stop our attacking formation! This is Princess Fina, someone who carries true Bardi royal blood! I'm Jonan, your knight captain guard!"

Hearing this, Lilith trembled with a face filled with disbelief. She didn't expect to meet a familiar face here. But, since this Jonan was a dragon descendant, it was only natural since one or two hundred years was nothing to a dragon's lifespan.

Lilith took a huge step back and seemed to instinctively want to escape. However, when she thought about Amelia whose fate was currently unknown, and how that we couldn't avoid Nightrain city no matter what since the situation had developed in this manner already, she gritted her teeth and nodded, admitting her identity.

"Earl Jonan? It's been such a long time, but please call me Lilith now."

Note:

[1] TL/N: Sun Wukong's favorite quote when attacking monsters in Journey to the West.

Chapter 277
Secret and a Letter

The heavy rain battered the rooftops and didn't seem to show any signs of slowing down. According to the time, it should have almost been light outside, but there was nothing other than the misty blanket of rain that obscured everything.

Spring rains before dawn were always nice and calming. Listening to the rain outside, sitting by a fireplace and enjoying a cup of hot cocoa that truly warmed the body made that fierce battle just earlier seem only a dream… Alright then, let's pretend that the dragon knight Archduke who was glaring at me didn't exist. Meanwhile, I was quite angry at the fact that nobody gave me a cup of hot cocoa. This was clear discrimination against the undead!

"Even if you received one, would you be able to drink it? If someone really gave you one, wouldn't you just complain that they were making fun of you?"

"Silly cat, leave your cup for me."

"Heh heh, don't even think about it!"

Due to Lilith's sudden appearance, the originally tense situation was instantly defused. After all, the dragon knight Jonan was once her personal guard. And in regards to seniority, Halent would need to call Jonan "Second Grandpa."

It was all a misunderstanding to begin with, and since neither side had anyone that was seriously injured or killed during the misunderstanding, it was easy enough to explain it.

Even if the undead were able to appease the nobles in the capital, they weren't able to appease the dragons and dragon knights. It was quite obvious that the dragon knights weren't going to get along with the undead. And since Halent was a powerful faction of his own in the dragon knight squad, the fact that he moved to Nightrain City and took it over was in a way his resistance against Emperor Orloss's will.

Archduke Halent of Nightrain city had famously declared before that he didn't care

about any consequences—as long as any undead dared to enter his territory, they would be instantly executed with no mercy given.

And not long after he said that, we arrived without knowing about it…

Hearing this, I wanted to crash my head into a wall. Perhaps I really should make some free time to go donate some money to the God of Fate's church. At the very least, I wanted to get rid of some of my misfortune.

Especially after hearing that in this time period, Archduke Halent personally patrolled the city walls to search for undead, which meant that I might have still made it past his eyes if I hid myself in a carriage. But I just happened to be sitting on a horse and leading our procession so grandly as the lich Rex. All the scouts on the city walls saw me instantly and pointed me out, which was basically a direct challenge against the dragon knight Archduke's authority. How could he possibly ignore me? And, so, everything that happened after came only naturally.

The part where I was slightly surprised about was that the dragon knights seemed to be quite clear about Lilith's identity as well as that she was a member of the Blood Tribe, but they didn't show one sign of disrespect or enmity towards her.

As for that Earl Jonan who seemed middle-aged but was definitely well over two hundred years old, his expression seemed far too complex as he looked at Lilith. His emotions included reverence, relief, pain, and so on. The numerous complex emotions and speed at which his expression changed made me sigh and think that he could definitely change careers and become an actor.

"After all, we were all present back in the day. Although it's not my place to criticize, that emperor who was Amelia's father, and what he did to Her Highness Amelia… Sigh."

The elderly knight kept reminiscing about nostalgic things, while Lilith was the one who remained calm, as if she didn't even notice the high-spirited dragon knights in front of her. She merely led Carolyn who had an expression of not knowing what was going on around everywhere to eat some desserts, taste some tea, enjoy the warmth of the fire, relax their bodies, and resist against the chilly weather.

I had investigated the matter of Lilith's incident before as well. After Fina Milan became the Blood Tribe Member Lilith Milan, that perverted necrophile prince, Prince

Sinut, was killed off not long after. After that, the throne was given to a child between Prince Sinut and one of the Bardi royalty side family's daughters, which basically broke off the Bardi Empire's direct royal blood succession… If you forcefully tried to find someone, Amelia counted as the person having the most Bardi royal blood out of anyone left alive today, but nobody in the Bardi Empire would dare to make this ridiculously senior princess from so many generations ago take the throne, not to mention bring up the topic of having children for the sake of the royal bloodline.

This was something from just a hundred-ish years ago, and the retainers from back then were now mostly dead of old age. Whoever ruled had the power to write history, and the so-called direct bloodline would only refer to the emperor's bloodline at the time anyways. Three generations later, who would remember an emperor from more than three generations ago?

While normal people wouldn't remember, the dragon knights and dragon descendants from that year were still living quite well. They believed in the chivalric code of knights and still recalled the ruler they had sworn loyalty to so long ago. Now that they saw that their princess who had gone missing over a hundred years ago was "living" quite fine, of course they would be filled with excitement.

It was also thanks to Lilith's status that me and my "undead" were invited inside as well. Otherwise, even if we were so-called imperial envoys, that wouldn't matter to Archduke Halent. If the lich Rex had been executed, all that would be said was that he deserved it. After all, Orloss wouldn't dare to directly go against the dragon knights for the sake of a simple lich.

After spending a short time together with them, it was easy to tell from the way they treated each other that rather than acting like a military squadron, they were more like a big family. That Jonan could use his seniority to lecture Halent for being overly hasty. When seeing how that icy-faced handsome Halent could only helplessly listen and not even defend himself, I felt like I was watching a naughty child receive a scolding from his parent.

And, when I looked around the room, the famous Archduke Halent wasn't even the strongest dragon knight here. There were several dragon knights with stronger draconic might than him. For example, that elder of his, Jonan, was obviously a Saint.

“…Could it be that Your Highness Fina is here for the sake of the undead?"

Jonan's expression was filled with hesitation, but from his position, there were some things he absolutely had to ask. Everyone in the Bardi Empire knew that the dragon knight squadron didn't get along with the undead, as how could the prideful dragons possibly listen to the commands of the filthy undead?

But the current Princess "Fina" before them was now also an undead vampire. Although it seemed like she probably wasn't related to the undead in the Bardi Empire's capital, they still needed to ascertain her motives in coming here with the lich "Rex."

Hearing his question, Lilith directly shook her head.

"I said already, I'm currently Lilith, a member of the Church of Law. I'm no longer Fina Milan. I don't want to meddle in the affairs of the Bardi Empire, nor do I have the power to do so. This time, we came here for a different reason. As for the lich Rex…"

She looked over at me questioningly. The question in her beautiful eyes was quite obvious: "Should I tell them the truth or not? Do you want to talk to them from here, or should I continue speaking?"

I nodded without saying anything. Although the saying that "an enemy's enemy is a potential friend" might not always be correct, it was probably better to explain things to them rather than being misunderstood as the Undead Emperors' subordinates. Otherwise, we'd probably have an unsolvable conflict on our hands where we'd just break out into an all out fight, again, and that would make it impossible for us to pass this fortress city peacefully.

"…This person who was just beating up Archduke Halent is actually the famously petty Roland, Roland Mist."

Before she even finished speaking, Halent suddenly stood up with incredibly obvious shock and disbelief on his face. He obviously knew my name.

I lightly twisted the magical ring on my hand, and a radiance shot out from it that removed my illusionary disguise. The moment I regained the appearance of my physical body, I instantly stole my silly cat's cup of hot cocoa and downed it all in one gulp. Being able to enjoy delectable foods and drinks rather than only being able to watch felt so much better.

The silly cat grit her teeth in anger, but she knew that this wasn't a good time to take

revenge on me.

"The undying Roland!?"

"Yongye! The evil undying king!"

Even though she told them my real identity, this seemed to make the dragon knights more on guard against me, not less. Even that Jonan placed his hand directly on his sword. Was my reputation that bad?

"As the only Undead Emperor in the past one thousand years, not to mention how you've become the representative of all demon kings in the recent centuries' fairy tales, shouldn't you have a little more self-awareness? After all, you're ranked #27 on the Calamity Rankings, dear Roland."

"Indeed, my companion Harloys who's ranked #46 on the same Calamity Rankings. Thank you so much for your reminder. I've heard that due to our recent actions, even though you've disappeared from in front of everyone for so long already, your ranking has even managed to increase. How does it feel for people to fear you even more simply because you haven't appeared?"

"…It's my misfortune as a teacher. I should have kicked you out and refused you as my student from the very start."

Although I kept up my serious appearance, I was actually messing around with Harloys like always through our soul connection. However, the dragon knights weren't calm at all since they had their own information channels and naturally knew that Roland Mist was also Emperor Yongye, the only recent Undead Emperor.

"Has he joined up with the other Undead Emperors? I heard that he was causing some major incidents in the Northlands, so what's he doing here?"

The more famous you were, the more you were feared or respected. In the eyes of dragons, no matter how venerated a mortal was, that would all be short and temporary. Those that truly deserved respect or even fear were of course the undying that took slow steps to the peak of power. And anyone on the Calamity Rankings would unmistakably be considered monsters.

"That Abomination just now was the carnivore, Ah Dang? I managed to escape with my life?"

The blue dragon Sishusler who had currently transformed into a bulky man's appearance was getting scared now. There were more than one or two dragons that had died to this famed Xiluo warrior already. In front of an all-out Ah Dang, even an ancient dragon would be nothing more than some food which might get stuck in his teeth. Killing a slightly famous mature dragon would be nothing to Ah Dang.

By the way, I should mention that one of Ah Dang's forms was also on the Calamity Rankings. It was just that very few people knew that it was him. And, actually, if it wasn't for me stopping him, Ah Dang would have easily killed that Sishusler with a single blow in their battle.

At first, the dragon knights thought that they would have the overwhelming advantage, which was why they calmly welcomed these unwelcome guests inside their own fortress city. But just this former Undead Emperor alone gave them no chance of victory at all from the very start. It would seem that we were instead the ones going easy on the dragon knight squadron that seemed to have the advantage of numbers.

Lilith continued her own introduction of me as if she hadn't noticed the sudden tension in the atmosphere at all.

"Yep, he's Aunt Amelia's good friend as well as disciple. This time, we came here to help Aunt Amelia."

"Relax, this time, at least, we're probably on the same side. I don't exactly have friendly relations with those undead that came here uninvited."

"Lady Amelia?"

The person who asked so concernedly was a rather tall female dragon knight who had blonde hair and green eyes. There were obvious silver dragon scales on her forehead and even two small curved dragon horns. No wonder she would always wear a full helmet when outside.

I recalled her to be a dragon knight from several generations ago named Lucia. Seeing how concerned she was, she must have had some sort of connection to Amelia.

"Yes, at the time, Aunt Amelia and I were both at Port Victoria. I was immune to the Dimensional Descent that occurred there because of my undead body, but Aunt Amelia stayed behind."

"How is that possible! How could Lady Amelia…" The female knight Lucia had an expression of astonishment, as if she couldn't believe something catastrophic could befall Amelia.

"Calamities typically live the longest, and Amelia is fine, I can promise. She's probably just having some trouble, which is why we're here. Can we pass through now?"

I took up the topic here, since my patience and time both had limits. We were quite close to our goal of Port Victoria now, so if the situation permitted it, I wanted to leave as soon as possible.

I thought that after saying things so directly, it would be quite easy for them to let us pass, but the end result was that they all looked at each other awkwardly. It would seem that it would be a problem.

After passing Nightrain City, it would take another two weeks or so of traveling on foot to reach Port Victoria.

However, this road that was easily taken in the past had transformed into a black earth that was poisonous for the living. The faint stench of corrosion would make people want to throw up, and the formerly flourishing port was now completely desolate. Thick clouds forever covered the skies, and even the crows which were considered unlucky all died, collapsed on the ground. This place had become a forbidden zone for the living.

Once, there was a pack of wild wolves that were being chased by a tremendous SemiDragon, forced to the brink. Not long after entering this forbidden zone consisting of black earth, however, they started running slower and slower before finally collapsing. And not long after the wolves, the stronger SemiDragon predator collapsed as well, and the undead added a pack of zombie wolves and a bone SemiDragon to their number.

Actually, according to the Undead Emperors' original plan, if they succeeded in completely opening the Dimensional Door, the area around Port Victoria wouldn't be affected very much even if Port Victoria itself was sacrificed. This was also why Orloss finally agreed to this plan, but due to certain reasons, there was a change in the situation.

Just as how underground plumbing pipes would always erupt with filthy water if they were blocked somewhere, the power of the Undead Plane that found itself blocked by the magical forest changed its direction in which to corrode.

Nobody would be able to tolerate this domain filled with the power of death other than the undead. Although they became stronger in this domain, the undead themselves were feeling quite anxious about it. After all, the dragon knights had sent them an ultimatum: the moment this undead domain crossed into human territory, or, more specifically, Nightrain City's territory, it would be tantamount to a declaration of war on the dragon knights.

This midway region between Nightrain City and Port Victoria had become a buffer zone. Every day, huge dragons and gargoyles would perform surveillance from the skies. Of course, whenever they met each other, some additional broken gargoyles would then appear on the ground.

Not a single sane merchant group would choose to enter this type of area. The moment we left Nightrain City and headed for Port Victoria, the undead would probably discover it.

If we didn't want to put the undead on guard against us, that meant there was basically zero possibility of speedily passing through this area. We could only take things slowly and try obtaining more information. It would be best if we could somehow contact Amelia again. I didn't lie at all, as I truly believed that Amelia would be fine.

And just as we finished our discussion, before I even got to rest up, Little Red came looking for me with a mysterious look on her face that seemed like she could barely hold in her laughter. She must have found out something interesting that she intended to share with me.

"Hey, Roland, would you like to know why they have so many dragon descendants? And about what's going on with their dragon knights?"

"Hmm? Isn't that the Bardi Empire's secret? You know it?"

"Tsk, what secret, I understood immediately with a single look. Didn't you notice how that Halent and his dragon Sishusler resemble each other greatly? In appearance and smell, they resemble each other by over ninety percent. They're definitely twins!"

I recalled how that Sishusler preferred to transform into a buff and muscular man,

while that Halent was so handsome; they were supposed to be twins? I suddenly felt as if there were problems with dragons' sense of aesthetics.

"Wait a moment, dragons' sense of aesthetics? That means to say, in a dragon's eyes, the two of them basically look like twin brothers! Alright then, I understand what's going on now. No wonder all those dragon descendants were of the same bloodline as their dragons. So they were all close relatives."

No wonder Little Red was snickering. If this was revealed, it would become a scandal for the surface dragons.

Dragon descendants typically came about as a result of dragons breeding with other creatures that weren't dragons. In the mortal plane, all sorts of SemiDragons' bloodlines were considered quite valuable for research purposes. There was truth to the saying that dragons were true to their base desires, as sometimes they bred with others for reasons other than affection. In such a situation, the "byproduct" of half-blood dragon descendants would find it difficult to receive their parents' true love.

Still, it was obvious that the dragon descendants couldn't just be left alone. If a dragon descendant used his or her natural powers to do something like take revenge on society, not only would that humiliate the dragon descendant's irresponsible parents, the entire dragon species would feel humiliated.

"That is to say, that so-called dragon knight squadron is actually a type of day care."

Dragon descendants that had a sufficient amount of dragon bloodline in them were able to transform into true dragons after undergoing a bloodline ritual and paying a price as well as receiving their bloodline—their parents'—assistance. But the prerequisite was that the dragon descendant needed to be strong enough, most likely a minimum of the Gold rank, and also needed to be a certain age.

Dragon descendants matured far slower than normal humans and would require a relatively safe environment to grow up in. It would also be easier for them to obtain experience and wisdom in the complex human society.

No wonder this dragon knight squadron never lacked young dragon descendants. It would seem that any irresponsible dragon parents that didn't want to raise their children would bring them here to this dragon knight squadron. The young, long-lived dragon descendants would learn from and be brainwashed by the knightly chivalric

code here, so they wouldn't do anything foolish.

As for those dragons they got to ride? They were all their brothers and sisters and so on that came to accompany their siblings for this slow period before they matured. Spending a few decades or a century or two to play with one's own little brother or sister wasn't much to a dragon.

My guess was that for the dragon descendants without siblings, there would still be an unlucky dragon from the same bloodline sent to protect the dragon descendant, which would count as a small trial for the dragon. And since they were mostly closely-related siblings to begin with, riding on each other wouldn't matter.

"Haha! No wonder they're all novices. So they were all unlucky ones that had to raise young children. Eh, what are you looking at there?"

"Oh, an old dragon gave me this letter, telling me it's from someone I know. Evelyn? Such a strange name. Little Red, do you know this person?"

Chapter 278
Changes

I casually tore open the letter's seal before I discovered that it was actually the highest-level magical seal of all, inscribed into the gray letter with wax runes. If anyone other than the letter's intended recipient had opened it, the letter within the envelope would have destroyed itself or possibly even exploded.

"Evelyn? I don't know this name. Yep, you've never mentioned it before."

Although Little Red was continually shaking her head, there was laughter in her eyes. Even though dragons typically looked down on needing to lie, based on my understanding of her, her expression meant that she was waiting to see something interesting, and asking her would be meaningless.

And, so, I unhesitatingly opened up the letter's envelope ever so slightly and put it down on the table. Then, I stood at the doorway, and used a hand of ice to open it up from a safe enough distance… Haha! I'm too smart! If only the bomb disposal technicians in my previous world had magic techniques like mine, there wouldn't need to be so many sacrifices.

"Wahahahaha!"

I completely ignored that dragon who was intending to watch me make a fool of myself and laughing to the point of clutching her stomach. For some reason, when I saw this name Evelyn that resembled an elven name, there was an itch in my mind that seemed to be instinctively warning me that this name was trouble and that I should be cautious.

In order to avoid any traps, I carefully hid behind the door and canceled my magic hand of ice the moment I used it to open the letter, and then…

"Are you joking with me? Nothing actually happened!"

There was no sudden flash of white light, nor was there the wailing of a banshee. There was definitely no explosion and not even some floating white or green powder. At the

very least, shouldn't it contain a death curse? For a scare letter to not even contain a single trap, how unprofessional.

"Hahaha! You're so funny; just what are you doing? Facechecking the bush? Using your own feet to check for traps?" [1]

Alright then. I decided to continue ignoring that dragon who was rolling around on the floor in laughter as I picked up the letter only to see a few simple sentences.

"The ancient elven language? Someone's actually using this language in this day and age? Let me think; how do I read this again?"

The letter was written in the ancient language of elves that had long since gone extinct. It would have been normal for the letter writer to use the common human language or the dragon language, but what was with using the ancient elven language? Was this Evelyn an archaeologist?

The words were written quite beautifully and cleanly. It was evident that a female wrote them, but the content was so perplexing that I couldn't understand at all.

“…You dare to return?"

When I read this out loud to check my grammar, I was certain that I hadn't made any mistakes translating the ancient elven language. But why was it that I still didn't understand what the letter writer meant? Was this supposed to be a complaint aimed at me?

But, just as I finished speaking out loud, the letter suddenly glowed white, and then…

"Damn it! It was actually the type that activated upon reading it out loud!"

Boom!

The letter indeed exploded. Well, at least the explosion wasn't a powerful one, but it brought a strange smoke with it. When the smoke finally dissipated, I was covered in something blue all over.

"Cough—cough—she actually intentionally used the difficult ancient elven language

to fool me into reading it out loud which would cause the letter to explode. So evil! Cough—cough—cough."

I didn't know what this trap was made of. Even the dust I coughed up was blue. The only part I could feel lucky about was that I could sense this trap was apparently non-toxic.

"Hahaha! I knew it!"

The female dragon behind me was rolling around on the floor in laughter even more vigorously. She seemed to have expected this.

And what accompanied this trap was a sudden flash that jumped outside the room. Apparently, with the letter's opening, something left that informed the trap's setter that this letter had been activated as she planned.

And at the same time that I was smeared with blue all over, a small pendant dropped onto the ground. This was a heart-shaped sapphire that was glowing with a clear radiance, just like the moonlight.

Seeing all this, I knew that this was only the beginning. The truly troublesome part would probably be waiting for me down the road.

"Such a targeted trap aimed just for me; it's impossible to believe that she's someone I don't know…"

Since I was unable to recall who Evelyn was, that made me even more worried. All of this was obviously aimed at me personally, so it could only be someone highly familiar with me. Why was it that I couldn't recall this name at all?

Well, not having any impressions of someone was normal since after so many lives, I'd already forgotten so many things even about myself. But, for even my memory library to not have any records, that was quite abnormal.

After thinking about it extensively, I came up with only two possibilities. Either at the time, I hadn't started recording my diaries yet… I could basically ignore this possibility, though. That left only something that I intentionally didn't want to record, not wanting to remember certain things, hoping that I would completely forget about it after reincarnating.

"Well, if I can't recall it, I'll just stop bothering. Since it was something I intentionally wanted to forget, it's obvious that it's better to not remember."

I directly decided to forget about all this, which caused Little Red who still wanted to see my antics to become displeased.

"You sure live such a carefree life. If you can't remember, you're just going to give up on remembering? Such an envious lifestyle attitude you have. Aren't you worried at all that there's going to be some trouble waiting for you if you can't remember?"

"…There's nothing I can do about it if I can't remember. Besides, if this Evelyn person wants to come looking for trouble, even if I remember, won't she still come looking for trouble anyways? It'll only add more to my plate. Since she's an enemy, I'll just have to deal with things when the time comes. Isn't she simply an 'old acquaintance?' The number of old acquaintances I have that want me dead could probably make a long enough line to reach from here to the western ocean. Why would I be afraid?"

Although I said so, I secretly increased the defenses around our rooms. Of course, it wasn't entirely just to guard against an unknown threat.

When the next morning arrived peacefully, I was reassured slightly. Although the dragon knights acted quite respectfully towards Lilith, and knights were typically a bunch of dullards that only thought about knightly chivalry in their tin can brains, we were still technically in enemy territory, and we needed to take extra cautions. Being on guard was something absolutely necessary.

And as we talked to the dragon knights, I obtained information about the Bardi Empire that I had really been lacking. Local domain lords' information was too outdated compared to the dragon knights who received updated news from the capital every single day.

With the ambitious tyrant ruler Orloss still perfectly holding on to his power, the current Bardi Empire was indeed in Orloss's grasp. However, even if everything appeared calm on the surface, there were torrents brewing in secret. With the old emperor continually increasing in age, the situation in the Bardi Empire only kept increasing in complexity.

Although Emperor Orloss was still considered the overwhelming authority, just about everyone hoped for his death. This especially included his ten or so still living adopted

princes. Although they all seemed pure and kind on the surface, they all had large factions of their own and were waiting to fight it out for the throne after Orloss's death. Of course, none of them dared yet to make any military moves—yep—at least on the surface. Some of the princes' wives' families seemed to be trying to butter up the military factions, though.

As for local domain lords? Does it even need saying? There would forever be insolvable conflicts between centralized royal authority and local domain lords. Although Orloss's method of forcing all the domain lords to send him their eldest sons to the capital as hostages was quite effective, it also worsened the relationship between the royal authority and the domain lords.

This method had been put into practice for twenty years now, and the first batch of domain lords' eldest sons had already grown into adults. However, those that returned to their domains to inherit the position of domain lord were pitifully few. This wasn't because of Orloss refusing to let them go, but instead because most domain lords had chosen their second sons that weren't hostages at the capital.

No second son? They would just do their best to give birth to a second son, then. As for the second sons who got to be the domain lord, they wouldn't have any feelings of friendship whatsoever towards their older brothers that should have legally been the domain lord. Those that truly welcomed a firstborn son back to inherit the domain lord title were fewer than few.

The overwhelming power that the royal authority possessed had caused many complaints to accumulate. And since all these complaints had accumulated, they would definitely explode one day, sooner or later.

After Emperor Orloss's death, no matter who it was that managed to seize the throne, there would be no way that person would have sufficient authority to suppress all the domain lords any more. It could be said that due to the overly centralized power of royal authority, all the domain lords had been repressing their ambitions for the past several decades. They were all looking forward to this emperor, who was pressuring them from above, to die of old age so that they could rise up again.

Simply judging by how everyone was reacting to the emperor's alliance with the undead, there were plenty of internal disagreements in the Bardi Empire just on this topic alone. Although Orloss used his authority to forcibly suppress most nobles' distaste for this, the lack of total unity on this subject caused plenty of internal factions

to be formed.

Apart from all the Gods' churches that directly broke with the Bardi Empire, the fiercest reaction regarding the undead were from the royal mages.

The first day that an official announcement was made regarding the alliance with the undead, the head royal archmage, Wenst, decided to take a sick leave. All the other royal archmages also began to shut themselves inside and work only on researching magic. The dragon knight Archduke Halent and his dragon knights leaving the capital as a form of protest was already considered to be a softer form of protest compared to some.

While Halent and his dragon knights were using their own method to protest their dissatisfaction against Emperor Orloss's policies, at the western border, there was a group of dragon knights that remained loyal to the emperor. These dragon knights were about to enter the battlefield and begin taking revenge upon the Mage Country.

Dragon descendants had a special status. First of all, most of them were half-dragons and could be considered both dragon and human. Yet since they spent most of their lives growing up in a human empire, they were quite attached to their identity as humans during their "growth period." As they had the status as knights, they felt it was only natural for them to participate when their emperor gave the command to go to war.

If at all possible, I didn't wish to see an all-out war between two mega-empires, especially since the Mage Country was intimately connected to me.

That strange Quest I received a while back that forced me to choose between improving my Reputation level in either the Mage Country or the Bardi Empire was probably evidence, even way back then, that the upcoming war between the two countries was inevitable and that I would have to choose a side.

I could already guess that when I arrived at the Cloud Tower to continue this so-called main storyline Quest, I would likely be forced to formally choose a side in this war and participate in the battle.

"I hope that these dragon knights here won't join the war. That would escalate the war's level immediately. The undead invasion is already beginning, and the longer we stall for time, the better our preparations will be and the greater our chances of

victory. Both countries sending in all their high-level combat strength immediately will only benefit the undead that are going to come sooner or later."

I was considering about more than just these issues. Giving the Bardi Empire over to the Undead Emperors seemed like too much of a waste. Since the Bardi Empire had an unstable internal situation, perhaps something would change from within if I managed to stall for time. For example, if Emperor Orloss finally suddenly died, there was a high likelihood of the new ruler directly turning against the undead.

[Congratulations to Host for activating the secret side Quest: Prevent the dragon knight squadron from entering this meaningless battle.]

[Quest Requirements: Stall this dragon knight squadron from entering the battle as long as possible. If you successfully stall them for three months, that will complete this Quest.]

[Quest Reward: A clue to the location of the former Dragon Queen Molly. Quest Failure Punishment: Little Red's anger. System Reminder: Just continue wasting your time doing side Quests. You want Fate Points? Never!]

It would seem that many things related to the main storyline Quest of the two major countries at war could be activated as side Quests. Although there weren't any Fate Points as rewards, based on what I knew, I couldn't leave even a single small detail uncovered in order to properly finish a major storyline Quest. Accumulating as many benefits as possible would leave me on the safe side and would be the most reliable way of all to win.

Something worth mentioning was that although many people rolled eyes at us in disbelief when I warned them about the upcoming undead invasion, after the undead truly arrived, these countries still pretended to act mute and deaf about it on the surface but secretly sent us many envoys hoping to receive relevant information and assistance from us.

Of course, I exaggerated things as much as I could and pointed out all the undead invasion points that were recorded in history. As for whether or not anything would be changed, that would have nothing to do with me.

In "history," the Bardi Empire was one of the largest invasion points of all. After the undead launched their full-scale invasion, the mega-empire formerly known as the

Bardi Empire was completely destroyed in the short time of only three months. This was doubtlessly something unimaginable, but after organizing everything that I knew about the Bardi Empire I learned of the many internal and external threats to it. I suddenly felt like it being able to survive three months would be incredible already.

History didn't record in detail what happened to the dragon knights, but there were records stating that after the Bardi Empire succumbed to the undead, large amount of bone dragons appeared… If I extrapolated based on the current situation, then even if these dragon knights didn't die against the Mage Country, they would probably die later against the undead's invasion. It was to be expected that every single one of them would die off.

But, right now, it would be no easy feat to stop these dragon knights from entering battle. After all, we were still foreigners to them and could even be somewhat considered as enemies. Even if Lilith tried convincing them, the effectiveness of her words was unknown. And since they were Bardi's knights, as long as Emperor Orloss formally gave an edict for them to fight the Mage Country, there would be no reason they could refuse unless Halent and the others wanted to be labeled as traitors to the empire.

"…Especially since they're going to be under the impression that it's all for justice and to take revenge for the Mage Country's premature attack. Unless, of course, we can prove that the Emperor is already insane or has committed some crimes that severely go against their code of chivalry."

But when I realized this, I laughed out loud. Didn't Orloss commit plenty of such crimes?

"Kasolan's Tears will be the best evidence of all; it seems that I need to go have a chat with Halent. Right, the dragon knights would probably join the battle against the Mage Country to take revenge for that forbidden spell. But why do I feel like this isn't the Mage Country's style? I should investigate this as well."

Note:

[1] ED/N: Urban Dictionary explains "facechecking the bush" well. I quote: "In a video game, to gather information on an area hidden in fog of war by charging in. To check for enemies with your face. Seems to have originated in League of Legends where vision-obscuring bushes allow champions to wait hidden from view in very close

proximity to their opponents."

Chapter 279
Reunion Between Old Friends

Rain would typically leave the air fresh. The sudden north wind, however, brought with it a rotten, uncomfortable stench.

The spring rain was unable to wash away the scent of death in the air. For the new residents here, this was the smell of their home, and they hoped for this entire world to be distorted into becoming part of the Undead Planes. Yet the magical forest beside the former Port Victoria remained an impenetrable fortress.

The open Dimensional Door stayed an ongoing threat. Right outside Port Victoria were several dozen colossal Soul-Summoning Towers, endlessly gathering the power of death magic to distort this area. They transformed into pillars of black light that covered the skies.

Surrounding these towering pillars of black light was a patch of distorted space. Within it, mountains, water, and a thick mass of ethereal shadows doing something could be discerned. This was where the mortal plane intersected with the Desecration Plane, and undead were entering the mortal plane here every moment.

With mountains of body parts piled up beside them, the liches were busy at work. Upon arrival, most low-level undead would be missing a limb and required "spare parts" to be installed so that they could walk normally.

When any high-level undead arrived, the first thing they would do was thank the heavens and the God of Fate's protection for arriving safely. Overlapping dimensions would cause their dimensional laws to clash with each other, and moving between them was akin to attempting to navigate through a dangerous waterway in a thunderstorm with only a wooden board. It required not only courage and power but luck more than anything else.

The Undead Emperors weren't idiots and were well aware that this was a critical moment. They had, in fact, spent numerous efforts and prepared endless plans just for this day, but no matter how complete one's preparations were, nothing could resist sudden misfortune.

Judging from the current development, if this Dimensional Descent ended up creating an entirely new mini dimension, then the Dimensional Door leading to the Desecration Plane would have been completely wasted.

A severe situation was now in front of the undead. It was only by destroying this newly-born dimensional will that this area would be completely swallowed up by the Desecration Plane. If the will awakened, it would begin a major counterattack which would render this Dimensional Door useless.

Find a new location for a Dimensional Descent? First of all, how would the undead convince the Bardi Empire to make another huge sacrifice of its citizens when the undead hadn't even achieved any combat results to show yet? The Undead Emperor Aso had paid a tremendous price and risked personally descending upon the mortal plane in order to negotiate for it last time.

And even if the undead were able to suppress the Bardi Empire's negative opinions, the preparations they made at Port Victoria had taken far more than just one or two years. In order to reach the level required for a Dimensional Descent, the Soul-Summoning Towers had been secretly active for many years, and the local citizens possessed more than five times than normal of Kasolan's Tears in their bodies. How many years would it take the undead to prepare another such location for a Dimensional Descent?

And it just so happened that when dimensions were clashing against each other, dimensional teleportation would be like trying to pull a good fortune rather than a bad one. Low-level undead were cheap and plentiful, and there were countless low-level undead of all sorts in the Undead Planes. It wouldn't be considered a pity even if only thirty percent of the low-level undead made it across, but it would be a huge pity for mid-level undead and above.

In the mortal plane, there was no such concept as mid-level undead. Undead without intelligence were considered low-level, while those with intelligence were considered high-level. However, in many Undead Planes, since the dimensional laws there were tilted in favor of the undead, progressing to a certain rank (about Bronze or so) would cause the undead to regain their experience and intelligence. Their overwhelming numbers was a large reason why the undead countries in the Undead Planes flourished far more than outsiders realized. There was even a high degree of culture.

No intelligent life form would be able to tolerate itself being transformed back into a

beast ruled by its instincts. Since mid-level undead were considered as people back in their home Undead Planes, how could they be willing to become beasts and slaves again over here? "Mid-level undead" that lost their intelligence would be nothing more than slightly stronger low-level undead, and their true power would be reduced to less than one-third. This was quite an obvious waste.

High-level undead were probably the most pitiful of all if you only look at their rate of birth. That made them all the more precious. The saying that undead armies lacked high-level commanders more than anything else was quite true, and using thousands of years of accumulation to gamble on a single probability in dimensional teleportation was far too bad of a deal.

Of course, the more powerful the existence, the better the odds of survival. It was only natural that they would have a higher rate of surviving the dimensional teleportation. Yet if they were unlucky and met with something like a time fissure, then even an Undead Emperor wouldn't have the confidence to make it through the dimensional teleportation.

No matter how much of a price they paid, the highest chance they had was only at fifty percent. Gambling thousands of years of accumulation on only a fifty percent probability was tantamount to a definite loss.

But since the battle was at a critical junction, things like downsides and probabilities were ignored. "Even if we lose everything, we have to take the strategic objective" became the rallying call of the undead.

It was quite obvious that the now flattened hills weren't worth trading all those undead lives for, and even if they conquered it, it wouldn't really bring them any benefits. The most important part was the strategic meaning behind it, as "being unable to conquer it" or "conquering it too slowly" would both mean an imbalance in the overall battle situation.

And right now, this half-sealed new dimension that was becoming more and more independent was the strategic objective in question. The Order Gods were likely to intervene at any moment—even though the Undead Emperors knew that using dimensional teleportation at the current time was incredibly disadvantageous, they still sent in everything they had when they discovered that the newly-born dimension was beginning to escape their control.

"Ah, I've arrived! I can see things here! I shall conquer… Roar!!!"

A lucky zombie just managed to walk out of a black pillar of light, but he didn't even have the time to celebrate how he was lucky enough to make it here before he lowered his head and pitifully howled. A large amount of black mist left his body, taking with it his hundreds of years of experience and wisdom.

He was just talking really big, but the next moment he become a drooling zombie. He had become a low-level undead, only interested in crouching on the ground and chewing bones.

“…Yet another unlucky fool that was brought here without understanding the situation."

A lich connected the zombie to itself with a death contract and ordered it to move out of the way. This type of occurrence was exceedingly common these days, and the liches had gotten used to it already.

What arrived next was a death knight squadron that was injured and tattered all over. Many of them had broken hands or broken feet, and they all supported each other as they barely managed to hobble out of the pillar. Judging by how they were able to maintain their intelligence, they were all high-level undead. They were considered elite reinforcements and major personages, so a lich immediately came over to heal them and register them for military organizing.

"The Blood Thorn Knights have all arrived. I'm the leader, Alba."

The leader of this knight squadron was actually a death knight lord on the level of an Undead Lord. The lich cast "Death Breath" to help heal Alba as he registered the squad's arrival, but before finishing the registration, he hesitated. He couldn't help but ask a question.

"All arrived? Aren't the Blood Thorn Knights that incredibly famous knight squadron in the White Demon Valley district? I've heard that there should be over one hundred high-level undead knights…”

The lich was unable to say anything further as a pale white arm grabbed on to the lich's skull. The death knight Alba's face was filled with anger.

Snap!

Should things be described as "everyone was happy in the end?" The lich proved the old saying of why it was suicidal to speak when you shouldn't, and the death knight lord that lost so many of his subordinates found a target to vent his anger on. But, when Alba took a look at his brothers-in-arms behind him that were mostly dead and heavily injured, he couldn't feel any satisfaction from having vented his anger at all.

"Without even arriving on the battlefield, our one hundred and thirty-six knights have become thirteen… that damned Aso! Damned dimensional fissures! And damn this fate!"

But even if he complained, what could he do? That wouldn't change anything about his destiny to be cannon fodder. Since the Undead Emperors had resolved themselves to pay any sacrifice necessary, even the Undead Lords were unable to escape their unlucky fates.

While normal dimensional teleportation worked at a success rate of 40%, that was just an average obtained from countless amounts of 0%'s and 100%'s. There were many who were unlucky, like the Blood Thorn Knights who just happened to meet with a dimensional space-time fissure and become an unlucky group that had less than a 10% survival rate.

Even if he cursed the Undead Emperors that forced them into teleporting here, it wouldn't change a thing. They were the invaders here in the mortal plane, and they could only take this path to the end.

This heavily injured death knight squadron was taken to the Soul-Summoning Towers for additional healing, and then these death knights' natural talent in commanding soldiers would be put to use. They would have to help organize mid and low-level undead for their armies. As long as there was a sufficient number of skeletons and zombies, each death knight was basically capable of leading an entire army.

"Plants vs. Zombies" continued outside, with the battles on the frontline never ending. But if one paid close attention to the combat situation, one would notice that the undead had practically stopped sending out any more high-level undead elites to deal with the forest. Numerous structures were being built around the Soul-Summoning Towers, with large amounts of undead laborers working overtime on them. Fortress-level defense lines would soon be completed.

Since the power of numbers was unable to deal any damage to the forest's combat strength and instead only acted as its experience for growing stronger, not a single intelligent commander would fight this meaningless battle any longer.

The campgrounds were filled with reinforcement soldiers that had just arrived from the Desecration Plane. It was obvious that the undead were accumulating their total forces for a large-scale attack. The small skirmishes with the forest were nothing more than sending out extra unneeded scouts.

Meanwhile, the wood spirits didn't seem like they were going to come out and proactively attack. After all, as a newly-born species, they would suffer a massive decrease in power upon leaving the forest. Attacking the undead's campgrounds meant leaving their home dimension, and they would lose their ability to remain undying. It was only natural for them to not have the ability to proactively attack.

The wood spirits were quite worried as well as they watched the undead continually gather more and more in number. But they couldn't do anything other than continually improve their defense lines, produce more of their own, and develop new weapons for combat.

For the undead, only having strength in numbers would be insufficient. The limitations in dimensional laws prevented the Undead Emperors from descending here and retaining full power. Their direct subordinates were too strong as well, and it would be quite difficult for them to descend. Without a complete descent, the amount of usable power they'd have would be questionable. Yet while it was unfeasible for them, it was indeed fine for others.

"I never thought I would return so quickly."

The lich Feyman strode out of a pillar into the mortal plane. As he exclaimed about how mysterious the world was in its ways, he casually took some bones from a lich beside him in order to restore his lower half that had been destroyed during the dimensional teleportation.

Although Feyman was unlucky enough to meet a dimensional fissure just like the Blood Thorn Knights before him, he had extra protections given to him specially by Undead Emperor Aso and successfully made it through.

As an Undead Lord that entered the Myth rank while in the mortal plane as well as

one of the strongest undead in all of Eich, the former Second Senator from Xiluo, Feyman, indeed had the right to be proud of himself.

Although he finally ended up on the losing side in Xiluo's internal conflict, he was still well trusted and relied on by the Undead Emperors as one of the potential vanguard leaders "familiar" with the world of Eich. He was even taken in as a disciple by Undead Emperor Aso, and he learned many undead secret techniques along with the chance to understand the basic fundamental dimensional laws of the Desecration Plane.

"Heh heh! Omar, Lionheart! There's plenty of time to have a reckoning. Just wait for me to get to you."

He faintly felt like he was almost at the level of breaking through the Three Heavy Doors of Myth. Now that his power level had improved significantly, he really wanted to take revenge. Not to mention that Aso had given him full power of command over the frontlines, so Feyman was quite high up in authority.

As long as he managed to conquer this small newly-born dimension, he could even be considered to be the overall commander of the entire undead invasion. He was looking forward to a repeat performance of the Yongye Calamity; he felt like he could be even cooler than Yongye back in the day. Thinking of this, Feyman laughed out loud; full of pride, he felt as if he was on top of the world. He even thought it was fortunate that he lost Xiluo's internal conflict back in the day.

"Don't be happy too early. Dimensional wills aren't easy to take care of. Let's hurry up and organize our armies; I have an ominous premonition."

If Feyman was delighted simply for having received a key to help him unlock the path to becoming even more powerful, the former First Senator, the far ancient bone dragon Gricasio had benefited even more than he did. Undead Emperor Aso's evaluation of Gricasio was: "give Gricasio two hundred more years, and he'll become an Undead Emperor just like us."

Indeed, Gricasio was able to learn from an Undead Emperor bone dragon, and his plentiful accumulated experience placed him at the brink of becoming a new Undead Emperor. It was only a matter of time before he broke through the third and final Heavy Door of Myth. It was apparent that he would eventually become a new Undead

Emperor.

Although Gricasio was telling Feyman to be cautious, it was only because of his typical habit of keeping a low profile. As the strongest in all of Xiluo, he had always been the strongest undead creature in Eich's mortal plane. Now that his power level had increased significantly as well, would he really be afraid of anyone?

"What a pity as 'that person' isn't here anymore. Otherwise, I could show him my newly-obtained power."

Now that the far ancient bone dragon was finally stepping into the highest power levels, he even faintly felt the ambition to challenge that person who had always suppressed him.

"Ohhh!!!"

"We'll definitely win! The living shall sleep eternally, while an eternal night shall arrive!"

"Lord Gricasio has finally arrived. We can charge forth again!"

Various cheers attracted the two Undead Lords' attention. It happened to be that above one of the undead campgrounds, there was a tremendous bone dragon circling around. Most normal bone dragons wouldn't even be as large as one of this bone dragon's claws, and its wings of death covered the entire sky. The pressure that came from such a top-level undead was naturally viewed by all the high-level undead as their own reinforcements, which caused all the cheering.

The undead armies here had constantly been suppressed, and one important reason was that there wasn't a top-level undead that could take overall command here. Now that they saw a far ancient bone dragon arrive who was at minimum a Myth rank, of course they would be excited. There were some who possessed the information that even shouted out this veteran bone dragon's name of who they were expecting.

However, not far away, the real Gricasio had an expression filled with surprise. He never heard of the Undead Emperors intending to send any other top-level bone dragon here. And why did this bone dragon's figure seem so familiar, as if he had met them somewhere before not long ago?

“…Gria!!"

Feyman was the one who shouted out in surprise. Gria, who loved her own beautiful appearance, hated to show off her bone dragon form. But in that final battle to decide Xiluo's royal authority, Gria, who suddenly descended in her bone dragon form, almost managed to destroy his entire darkness conference by herself. With her familiar mana waves in front of him, how could he not recognize her?

Those with grudges would be easily overtaken by their feelings, and Feyman intended to rush out and take revenge right away. However, Gricasio stopped him.

"Wait a moment, there's someone on her back."

"Who cares if someone's on her back? With you and me fighting together, who would we possibly be afraid of?"

“…You should know Gria's personality. Would she let just anyone ride on her back? The only person possible would be 'that person.'"

"Could it be…”

The lich Feyman was scared to the point of jumping in fright and hurriedly cast a distance-viewing magic. What he saw was a certain lich sitting on Gria's back.

This lich was casually resting on a lounge chair, enjoying the sunshine while wearing magical crystal sunglasses. He was even proudly waving down to the undead below, as if he was the real leader observing his own subordinates.

Suddenly, he seemed to detect Feyman's vision spell spying on him, and he smiled directly at the invisible eye. He started saying something, and as he pointed his finger, Feyman's vision spell was canceled out.

"Long time no see. You've been taking care of my children, so this time, allow me to personally play together with you. Let's have a good game."

Gricasio who was still far away in the distance read those soul words out loud. The unique waves of mana were indisputable evidence of that person's identity, but Gricasio and Feyman didn't need evidence to begin with.

Although the waves of mana he produced weren't particularly fierce, only that soulfire

that seemed calm on the surface but was actually maniacal inside along with the strange actions that nobody ever understood made Gricasio confident that "that person" had finally returned. The existence that even all the Undead Emperors feared was actually still alive in the mortal plane.

With so many years having passed by, he had only faked his death? What has he been secretly plotting all this time? Why did he appear now, at such a critical moment?"

"Yongye…"

"Impossible, impossible!"

Gricasio was still able to maintain his composure, but Feyman collapsed. Since Feyman had once been one of Emperor Yongye's strategists, of course he knew how scary Yongye was. Before, he had only dared to set up his own conference and tried to usurp royal authority in Xiluo because he was one hundred percent certain that Yongye would never return.

Meanwhile, Gria and Yongye seemed to have received enough cheering and applause to satisfy them. Gria changed direction and began flying towards that distant patch of green forest.

Gria slowly glided past the clouds. When she flew over the two Undead Lords' heads, she even stopped to fly in a few circles here.

Gricasio and Feyman could clearly see on the bone dragon's back that "that person" was joyously waving at them and even sending them flying kisses. That passion made it seem as if they were old friends that hadn't seen each other in such a long while.

"Hey!"

Even his passionate greetings were sent down.

"…Hey!"

Feyman was so scared that he hurriedly waved back at that familiar soulfire. This wasn't the effect of any magical spell. It was merely his instinctive reaction from having been suppressed by Yongye's pressure for so long over the years.

That lich in the sky nodded in satisfaction at having received a response and patted

the bone dragon on the back. Only then did Gria slowly continue flying towards the forest.

The undead in the campgrounds were under the impression that their reinforcements were going to attack the enemy right after arriving, so another explosive round of cheers erupted for the bone dragon's expedition.

"Lord Gricasio, may you live forever!"

"May Emperor Aso live forever!"

The two new undead commanders stayed behind in a stupefied daze. Gricasio, who was being praised by the undead, had an expression filled with hesitation, as his newly-born ambitions to rise above had already vanished into bubbles. He had been scared by that person's arrival.

Gricasio and Feyman could only watch as their enemy left in the distance, completely forgetting their responsibilities as the undead commanders.

Neither of them was able to work up the courage to stop her as Gria vanished from their sight. After all, that would mean directly facing off against "that person," an existence who suppressed them for hundreds of years even after his supposed death.

"Sigh. We should first go out there to reorganize the armies. Otherwise, those young ones might impulsively rush out after them."

"Yeah, yeah, let's not make them wait. Let's go right now. How ridiculous! They actually couldn't even recognize the highest-ranked leaders of their own army!"

Alright, then. When a certain lich reappeared in front of them, he was able to make these two Undead Lords that even True Gods would have headaches about into nothing more than scared dogs with their tails tucked in. After all, they had been living in that person's shadow for far too long.

Chapter 280
Forest of Dreams (Part 1 of 2)

Eich was home to a large number of forests. Some were famous, and some were unheard of. The most dangerous of them all, Fantasy Forest, was located in the Bardi Empire and was a land upon which even I wouldn't dare trod. It was a forest of peace—there were no goblins—but any forest where elves resided would hide their countless treasures and secrets. They would be a forbidden ground to other species, but among the forests, there were still differences.

An example was the Silver Mirror Forest of the silver elves. If you walked among those trees, you would be able to faintly see elven scouts and rangers beneath the leaves.

Fully equipped centaur knights would be patrolling around, along with holy, powerful and armed unicorn knights. If you had excellent hearing, you would be able to hear the sounds of knights practicing and bows firing in the distance. But you had to be careful. There would always be eyes on you and whispers about. You could walk for half a day in the Silver Mirror Forest without meeting a single elf; it was obvious that humans were viewed with much distrust there.

Yet looking at things from a different standpoint with the other elf species in mind, many things would be different.

Should I say that it's to be expected of upper-ranked elves that transformed themselves into a fighting species? Rather than calling it a peaceful forest, it seemed more like an elven style military campground. Their bows and spears might be overly exquisite, but the enchantments and materials used were of such a high quality that they would make anyone jealous—even Legends. Well, their unicorn knights' extravagant equipment even made me want to rob them.

The moon elves' style was to make everything beautiful and to have plants flourish to the point of unnaturalness. In a moon elf forest, one would be able to see all sorts of sculptures of the Gods along with other types of artwork everywhere. Even their hereditary elven treehouses were sculpted with endless runes and designs, and they would only live in the most comfortable environments.

Unlike the Silver Mirror Forest where it would be impossible for a human to meet with a single elf, ordinary elves were seen everywhere in moon elf forests. They weren't nearly as wary of outsiders, and they even sold their products in streetside stalls. Yep, I'm talking about the former Tassel Kingdom.

Now, although these elves still had their elven magical techniques and artistry even after transforming into grayblood elves, their equipment was still overly decorative and impractical, while their expensive enchantment materials were only for the sake of making their products look more beautiful.

For me, unless they were able to abandon those useless decorative elements in their equipment, their products could only be sold off as artwork. It would be far more effective to buy some dwarven products with the money made instead.

As one of the final species of upper-ranked elves that still survived, the wood elves had already lost their own kingdom. They no longer lived in forests that belonged solely to them, nor did they possess their power to change a forest's environment. Still, they would forever be the children favored by the forest.

They didn't use any nature magic to change the environment as they pleased, but they would typically live in the most natural environments of all. Walking through such a forest would be no different from walking through an ordinary one, but you would always be able to see powerful creatures rarely seen in the outside world, such as mountain giants, treants, druids, redcaps, and chimeras. Those creatures weren't the wood elves' subordinates but undertook the important responsibility of protecting the forest.

The peaceful wood elves were also the elven species with the best reputation. They were one of the few upper-ranked elven species that didn't treat other species arrogantly, and many wood elves had the habit of traveling far and wide. They loved all forms of life, and these wood elves who were so fond of traveling were typically welcomed by all species. There were even some royalty that would invite them to become outstanding teachers.

However, this world didn't have only kind intentions. If they didn't stay on guard, perhaps the wood elves would have long since become extinct, as certain people treated them as treasures to be harvested. Any natural forest would be the best refuge for them, and the powerful creatures living within it would naturally become their allies. All the trees and plants would become sentries that watched unfamiliar

invaders. In front of a living forest, those with wicked intentions wouldn't even be able to find the correct path to the elves.

Wood elves weren't easy to deal with when in a forest, but that didn't mean that wood elves were easy to deal with outside, either. If a roaming wood elf was forced to the brink, she could potentially use Nature's Wrath, a wood elf natural talent ability usable only once in her life, which would transform an entire nearby forest into a living weapon for revenge that wouldn't rest until its target was dead. Although not every wood elf possessed the ability to use Nature's Wrath, any that did could cause damage on the level of a forbidden spell's destructiveness. That was why every country strictly forbid any illegal activities against the wood elves.

And today, the moment I stepped into this forest, I felt like the entire world had changed around me. The strong sensation of being in a different world gave me a headache and dizziness which just wouldn't go away.

When I looked around me, the currently breathing plants and trees around me gave me the strong sensation of life. Yes, that's right. Life. This entire forest was living, it was breathing, it was sleeping, and from the moment I entered, it opened up its countless eyes and was silently watching me.

"Oh my, how unfriendly."

It was obviously unwise to be flying through a thick magical forest, so the bone dragon Gria stopped at the forest's edge. But right when she transformed into her human form, a purple-green wall of thorns suddenly rose and blocked Gria's path. The forest detected Gria's undead nature, so it unhesitatingly closed the door to her as it was battling against the undead, refusing to let her in.

As for me…

A pathway suddenly opened up in the forest just like a secret path from a fairy tale. On the path's sides were brilliantly blooming flowers that seemed to be welcoming me as a guest.

The moment I walked on this grassy path, that wall of thorns suddenly rose up behind me, making Gria almost crash into it when she tried following me. This obvious difference in treatment made Gria almost choke in anger.

But as I walked into this forest, I was secretly astonished. This strong sensation of being in a different world transformed into something more and more tangible, while the ridiculously strong signs of life in the forest's plants were doubtlessly the best evidence: this forest was the ruler of this world, as well as the core of this world.

What astonished me the most of all were the plant lifeforms that lowered their heads to me and smiled in greeting. Although their physical appearances were quite different from all other living creatures, and their thin and wooden bodies made them have strange and abnormal shapes, their souls and expressions indicated that they already had independent thinking and intelligence of their own. They were intelligent creatures just like humans.

"It's wonderful that you were able to come. Mother will surely be delighted."

A young-sounding voice echoed in my ears. A small wood spirit was waiting for me on a tree branch not far from me.

Seeing that I noticed her, she jumped down. I noticed that she appeared much younger than the other wood spirits, more like a child elf. However, her head reached my waist.

"You are?"

"I'm mother's second daughter, Diligence. We've all met you before in the past. It's just that you've never seen us in this form before."

She had light red hair, much different from Amelia's colors, and a more exquisite face than even an elf's. Her thorny flower petals were the best accessories, and a thorny miniskirt covered only the most important parts. There were even flower petals on her feet, and she would spread the fragrance of flowers as she walked, as if she was a forest fairy from a fairy tale.

Although the face really resembled Amelia's, I would say that her overall physical appearance only resembled Amelia by thirty percent. That's because in my impression, Amelia herself had never, ever smiled so brightly and sunnily in her life. Either she would laugh maniacally, completely out of control, or she would secretly snicker, hiding her laughter behind her mage robe. Meanwhile, this little cutie before

me had the purest kind intentions on her pink face. This was a lively child that anyone would have a good impression of upon their first meeting, so how could she possibly seem related to Amelia?

"The Seven Virtues…"

I was surprised for a moment as I recalled the frightening Piranha Plant garden, but then I felt that it was only natural. Since Amelia had already reached this level, it was expected for her Seven Virtues to become completely independent.

With complete independence, they even had the possibility of betraying their creator. In that case, the first thing I needed to do here was…

"Do you not have a name yet? How about I help you come up with one?"

Don't get any mistaken impressions of me. Since I intended to go out with—er—I meant communicate with her, how could I possibly not know her name? Of course the first thing would be to give her a name.

"…Um, that's not necessary. It's really not necessary! I already have a name. My big sister helped come up with it. I'm Rosa."

Rosa seemed to have gotten scared by my passion as she hurriedly backed two steps away from me, tossing a flurry of flower petals. It seemed like she was planning on escaping at any moment.

"How uncreative. Since your foundational form was a rose, she directly used that as a name for you? How insincere! Shouldn't your name at least adhere to your color scheme? How about I give you a new one? What do you think of True Red? Right, you said you have an older sister? Is she white? How about calling her Mercury?"

Perhaps she had never come into contact with outsiders since her birth, as she was filled with embarrassment and panic when I walked up closer to her. However, she suddenly calmed down and seemed to be listening to something.

"…My sister wants me to ask if you're intending to gather a seven color combination? But, right now, there are only three of us sisters, and she's not white, either. Nor is there a possibility of having seven of us in a short period of time, so we appreciate but politely reject your intentions."

I wanted to say more, but little Rosa seemed to hear something else as she covered her ears and vanished into the forest, leaving behind only one final sentence: "Sister wants me to go help her with something; you can find mother if you just follow this path, so go."

She left, while her clear bell-like voice echoed throughout the forest. As expected of a rose's transformation, her faint aroma naturally allured others, making me want to inhale that scent as much as I could. However, I directly left; after all, I knew that Amelia's "Diligence" naturally excelled in poisons, so if I accidentally inhaled too much, that would be the end of me.

However, as I walked down the forested path, I somehow began feeling like I was quite pitiful. I created five Deadly Sins, and each of them were far stronger individually than Amelia's Virtues that were only three in number; I excelled in creation compared to her. But I felt that I had lost utterly from the very foundation when I saw that cute little girl.

"I lost… forget about the fact that apart from that silly cat, they're all male… why is it that there's not a single normal one among them? A dumb dog that doesn't even know how to play fetch, a zombie that preferred to be a male battleship, a silly fatty that could never eat his fill, and a muscular bastard who had strange ideas about beauty. If I compare them to Amelia's new Virtues that are like something out of shoujo manga or an idol drama, not to mention in a fairy tale style, while mine are all from comedy manga and horror movies, not to mention that they're idiots, how can I tolerate it!?"

In the end, my extreme pity for myself caused me to shout out loudly.

"Amelia, there's such a large difference in the drawing style! Can we switch? I know that you hate males, so I'll give the silly cat to you. If you think that's not enough, I'll throw in a doggy that can transform into anything you want, like a beautiful woman or whatever. I don't have too much for my requirements! I just want that little Rosa from earlier!"

Clang!

A huge pinecone suddenly smashed down on my head with enough force to knock me over. It representing a certain someone's attitude. I even heard "you stinky bad man that hurt mother's heart, go away" from above me. When I lifted my head to look, I saw a tiny purple figure secretly leaving through the trees.

"Another one of the three sisters? Is that Humility or Temperance? Why do they all have the form of young girls? Does Amelia object that much to adults and males? Forget it, since I'm here already, I'll learn sooner or later."

As I walked down this path, I was astonished by more than just the "Virtues" from earlier.

Mature wood spirits were chatting with each other in the forest. Some of the younger ones were messing around and having fun with each other, while other wood spirits were cultivating new magical plants. Some enjoyed the sweet fruits from the trees. They used shiny leaves as a currency to trade amongst themselves; this forest world filled with life had its own society and market. Perhaps, I had lost in more than just the physical appearance of my creations.

It was obvious that this patch of forest originally didn't have a path in it as there were many tiny obstacles on this path. However, the flowers would lower themselves and avoid my steps, while the gigantic trees would suddenly pull up their roots and move themselves. The thorny fences would automatically bury themselves in the ground, and the further I went in this forest, the more I could faintly detect a certain will summoning me.

"Amelia?"

As I went through the forest, I saw a green-haired sleeping beauty, deep asleep on the petals of the largest blooming lotus flower. She was floating on a peaceful and calm lake, surrounded by trees on all sides.

A light breeze kept her cool, and moonlight from an unknown source illuminated the lotus petal boat. Stars glittered in the sky above, and Amelia's snow-white skin appeared rather weak under the starlight.

"I'm here."

Before I even finished speaking, countless memories and illusions created a new world, and I was instantly drawn into a fantastical dreamlike world that had surpassed the boundaries of reality.

Chapter 281
Forest of Dreams (Part 2 of 2)

"I don't want to grow up…”

Every child has had such a thought. Adults couldn't understand the words of children, as the little ones had their own way of looking at the world that was drastically different from the more practical adults.

Scary demons would hide under the bed, a grandmother wolf would come when it became dark, and the story of the dragonfly and the rabbit would continue tomorrow. If they secretly shut their eyes, the fairies that lived in their shoes would help them complete their annoying homework, despite the fact that the payment was only some vile vegetable juice.

In the eyes of children, topics such as the end of the world were matters best left for adults. The worthiest topics of all were the fact that they had that disgusting celery for lunch today, Mary next door purchased another doll, and that Little Black from the blacksmith's enraged his dad and got beaten again.

But children would eventually grow up into adults. When they became parents themselves, they would treat the fairy tales they heard about the love between the grasshopper and the hamster as nothing more than a joke. They would toss their former dolls and toys created from dirt into storage rooms.

Childhoods were typically beautiful, but people were destined to grow up. A child's former treasures stashed away ever so carefully would eventually be treated as nothing more than trash taking up space by the person themselves.

Some people, however, were destined to have no childhood at all. Amelia Milan was one of them.

"I want playmates…”

Her insane personality stemmed from her lonely heart. When Amelia discovered that all the adults around her had nothing but dirty thoughts and endless desires, and that

even the other children were nothing more than puppets for adults to fight over benefits, the young princess closed off her own heart and refused to mature.

"I refuse! Refuse, refuse, refuse!"

The young adult-hating girl established thick castle walls around her heart, stubbornly living on in her safe and isolated fortress. If anyone insisted on approaching her, poisonous thorns would instantly steal their life away. Yes. From the very start, Amelia was much like the Sleeping Beauty from the fairytale, sleeping away for many years.

Everything stemmed from the soul; even magic was a reflection of the soul. A child's dream would always be the most fantastical—but also the cruelest. As the years passed, the young princess turned into a witch and entered human society. But her fairytale-like Forest of Dreams, which was Amelia's Soul World as well as her home, retained her true nature.

Under the purest of coincidences, Amelia's physical body transformed into her own fairytale kingdom. After she gained the power of Creation, she kept wanting to create her own Divine Miracle, and then all this happened.

"I want family…"

Her past stubbornness caused her to detest the overly complex humans. Plants, who were much simpler, were the real true friends to whom she was willing to open her heart. Yet plants lacked intelligence and were far too simple in nature; the lack of ability to communicate wouldn't help alleviate Amelia's loneliness that came from the depths of her heart. And that was how the wood spirits were born.

"Men aren't trustworthy, and adults aren't trustworthy, either…"

Her adoptive mother, as well as her own sufferings (everything was Roland's fault), were the best explanation. And with her natural talent of Communication, the depraved desires of men were easier to see than practically anything else. She always felt that it would be better for all men to die, and as for women… after ripping off their fake masks of friendliness and politeness, the jealousy uncovered made Amelia feel all the more uneasy.

The only part I never understood was that the witch Amelia actually treated children quite well—especially little girls. Yet it was probably because only little girls wouldn't

have any wicked thoughts in her eyes. As for little boys? The moment that she thought about how they would eventually grow up to be a stinky gentleman like Roland, Amelia would impulsively want to feed them to her piranha plant flowers.

This Creator was just that willful, but after she gained the power to control this entire dimension, she also gained the power to transform her strange fantasies into reality. And so, due to Amelia's influence, this wood spirit species' physical appearances turned into little girls like Rosa.

The tremendous plant giants and treants over three meters tall were nothing more than strengthened outer shells under the wood spirits' control. Their true bodies were hidden underneath these tremendous outer shells, and all of them were young girls… This species, which consisted of only young females, was inconceivable and caused this forest to become a holy ground in the hearts of a certain group of people.

When I approached this lake, countless memories and thoughts along with a gentle voice echoed in my mind. That was the blessing of the Creator to her new species. Her words' gentleness and motherliness made people naturally feel warm and comfortable.

"Children, my first present to you is the Virtue of Humility. Only with humility can you have progress and understand your own insufficiencies. This will give you the potential to fully grow. Children, as part of Humility's reward, I bless you with the wisdom to learn beneficial things from other living creatures as well as absorb and imitate other creatures' special abilities to help yourselves evolve."

Amelia's blessing reverberated throughout the entire forest. With their mother's blessing, every single wood spirit gained the natural talent ability of high-speed learning.

"Children, my second present to you is the Virtue of Charity. Only by sharing a sweet fruit will it taste even sweeter. And as part of Charity's reward, I bless you with the ability to mentally communicate with each other. Under my protection, not a single person will be able to cut off the soul connections you have to each other. The forest shall become your most trustworthy ally."

Speech was unnecessary for the wood spirits, as they inherited part of Amelia's ability of Communication. They only needed to mentally communicate with plants and other wood spirits.

"Children, my third present to you is the Virtue of Purity. Pure young girls don't need to be tainted by adulthood, and pure love doesn't need to be polluted by physical desires. Beautiful love is the sweetest candy of all. As part of Purity's reward, I bless you with the ability to forever maintain the willfulness of youth. And if any of you are really cursed by love and decide to leave behind the fruit of pure love, you will be able to reproduce in a unique fashion as descendants of the forest without needing to rely on the boring physical traits of genders."

As for this, I found it impossible to comment on… it was most likely due to Amelia's distastes. In the future, just the studies on how wood spirits reproduced became a major area of research on its own.

"Children, my fourth present to you is the Virtue of Kindness. You must learn how to understand how difficult it is for others and respect their hard work. Blind conflict will only bring about even more troubles, while a calm attitude will help you to become true victors. As part of Kindness's reward, I bless you with the fortune to be undying. Not a single person will be able to steal away your souls from me. As long as you're under my protection, death is nothing more than a temporary rest."

The battles so far with the undead had already proved this point. As long as they were within this forest, the wood spirits were truly undying.

It was now that I understood the mystery of the wood spirits' evolution. The Seven Virtues was the path that Amelia's soul took, and the blessings that she gave to her children stemmed from the Seven Virtues. They helped her children to evolve to a great degree in such a short period of time.

But Amelia had only been able to complete four blessings. She no longer had enough power left to bless them with "Temperance," "Diligence," and "Patience." Otherwise, the wood spirits could become a truly independent species that wouldn't need to stay in this patch of forest.

Not a single mother wouldn't want her own children to be healthy and kind. Amelia opened up her heart and gave them the best blessings she could think of as their Creator, and the wood spirits grew to this degree based on their mother's will. In that case, the reason they summoned me here was probably an instinctive way of seeking my assistance.

“…It looks like I'm going to have to do a lot of work this time."

I gently touched the sleeping Amelia's face and felt her skin, which seemed abnormally soft. There were even tears in her eyes. The formerly maniacal witch's soft appearance made her seem so pitiful.

I sat down by her bed of petals and closed my eyes, opening up my soul to this world as well.

I now knew what it was that I should do after receiving all those memories from Amelia. I was going to continue Amelia's incomplete blessings for the wood spirits so that this newly-born species would be able to leave their mother and truly become independent, becoming able to travel by themselves to other planes.

"Temperance? Diligence? Patience? I apologize; I don't have any of those. Amelia, if you're willing, I shall use my own method to bless these children. It's no good to only spoil children with love as your educational method for them is obviously too unbalanced. A species that's too pure will actually die off easily, instead."

The lake started glowing, and the dimensional will transformed into a fundamental power that granted me the power of Creation within this world. I had received an answer of agreement, so I gave my "blessings." Or, perhaps, it would be more suitable to call them my "curses."

"Blessing of Temperance? I apologize; I only have a curse named Gluttony here for you all. However, please don't ignore the usefulness of eating for one's growth as a healthy body is the foundation for everything. Children, when you receive my present, you shall receive an endless desire for nourishment and the ability to take root in any land and absorb nutrition from the earth. You will also receive the special ability to devour other creatures and even non-creatures to cure your injuries and continue your evolution."

When the power of creation shone in the forest, the wood spirits continued on their path of evolution and grew even stronger. As for the numerous extra roots and tails that grew on their backs? That was to prepare themselves for taking root in the ground. The ugly, strengthened outer shells of the plant giants and treants grew several dozen more roots as well. From now onwards, whenever a wood spirit was heavily injured, she now had the ability to take root in the earth, which would speedily help her recover. That additional ability of devouring would be considered a forbidden technique, to be used only when a wood spirit's life was in danger.

"Blessing of Diligence? Ha, I only have a curse by the name of Sloth for you all. While Diligence sounds nice, being overly concerned with getting involved in others' lives will be nothing more than a bother to others. Don't allow others to disturb your rhythm and maintain your Sloth. You shall all become used to being treated coldly, so you won't require others' recognition. Your wills will become as resolute as the hardest stone. Not a single fantasy will be able to stop yourselves from your original intentions of self-perfection. You shall be as unyielding as steel, and your minds shall be able to live on forever."

A silver light flashed in the wood spirits' eyes as the power of creation shone once more. From now onwards, they became the natural enemies of illusionists and psychological-based techniques. They could ignore mental magic that fed on their silence, fear, and shock.

"The Blessing of Patience? Hmph, that's the Virtue that I look down upon the most! Is tolerating others supposed to be a Virtue as well? I shall give you all the present of the curse—Wrath. If there's something that displeases you, why bear with it? Tolerating the unjust is nothing more than appeasing them. You should just viciously punch them in the gut! Take this present from me, the blessing that stems from a certain hound of Wrath."

The power of creation shone one last time, and the wood spirits gained the power to strengthen themselves based on their emotional states. Sharp thorns for piercing grew on their outer shells and weaponry, and from now on, the wood spirits became known for suddenly exploding with power far beyond their typical level. Their physical might was once again increased by the power of the earth, and not a single creature in the future would be willing to engage in melee combat with these seemingly small weaklings.

"Right, I should give you all a name as well… How about wood spirits? Wood for the forests, and spirits to represent all lives."

With the seven "blessings" complete and their "true name" having been confirmed, the creation of the "wood spirits" was finally completed. This Forest of Dreams that was just glowing so much earlier suddenly dimmed, as it was now time for her children to rest and grow in their sleep. The forest entered nighttime.

"Thank you, our father."

"Wait a moment! Don't call me like that! Hey—hey—hey—don't go to sleep! Quick, clarify what you mean! This misunderstanding will be the end of me!"

But nobody responded to my words. All the wood spirits, including the Three Virtues, were entangled by the forest's roots that suddenly reached out. They slowly sunk underground and, along with the magical forest, into a hibernation. This would help them complete their final changes.

I, however, hadn't completed my work yet. I should say that the most troublesome part was just beginning.

Amelia opened her heart and soul to help these little wood spirits grow, but she obviously lacked sufficient combat experience. Her own soul had sunken into a deep sleep so the wood spirits could only grow through their own experiences and instincts. And since the wood spirits were still relying on their own instincts for battling, if it weren't for their undying bodies and the fact that the undead lacked high-level combat strength, they probably would have been defeated by the undead armies long ago.

Just having undying bodies didn't mean that one was undefeatable. There were countless items and spells developed specifically for dealing with those with undying bodies.

I just met two familiar faces earlier. Although I had always suppressed them back in the day, they were both Undead Lords with thousands of accumulated years of experience. In fact, they could even be considered my seniors in term of experience, and since they were both my collaborators in name, of course their power levels would be significant. They also knew countless undead top-secret techniques and spells—our opponents wouldn't be easy to deal with.

But who was I? I was the former Undead Emperor. I refused to believe that anyone in this world could possibly surpass me in my understanding of undead troops types and undead high-level combat strength. Since Amelia had already selflessly shared all her experience to help these children of hers grow, of course I wouldn't be stingy.

Right now, what I needed to do was open up my soul and connect myself to the wood spirits' webbed soul connections, sharing my past combat experiences, giving them

advice, and directly interfering in their evolution. I would improve their combat strength as well as give them anti-undead strategies. Although it wasn't practical for the wood spirits to evolve much further within a short period of time, the defense lines in the forest, the magical plants, the wood spirits' strengthened outer shells, combat techniques, and way of thinking all had massive room for improvement.

“…You're all so kind. Since all the trees' roots are on your side, why don't you make them into sudden traps that will trip the undead? Also, don't place all your important structures and residences on the ground. That's too dangerous. You'll have to be afraid of wide area-of-effect magic spells and assassins. It's much better to place these structures in the wide underground."

"Since your enemies are the undead, come believe in the Holy Light together with me. Relax—you don't need to really believe in it. Allow me to teach you all how to fool that divine automated computer that the God of Holy Light has become. Come, let's first learn how to praise the Holy Light while cursing the God of Holy Light at the same time."

"You need to be cautious of bone dragons' corrosive dragon breath. It's basically the mortal enemy of all plants. We need to prepare some specialized anti-dragon nets. Although they're gigantic, they actually have far weaker ability to control their bodies compared to living dragons, and they have far weaker senses. We can easily deal with these blind idiots using traps."

Amelia's information to the wood spirits contained far too little about practical combat, while I had an endless amount I could provide to them. Soon, even though they were hibernating, the wood spirits that obtained my combat experiences and information began discussing new plans and recommendations of their own. In the cover of this night, the entire forest began its own path of evolution.

Perhaps the next time that the undead came here, they would face an opponent that was utterly unlike before. It would surely give them a happy surprise.

After I finished all this, I stood up and stretched my body that had been covered with leaves and vines. Perhaps those silly wood spirits would believe that this was my way of avoiding catching a cold.

The sleeping beauty seemed like she was having a good dream. She was smiling faintly despite the fact that she was still in a deep sleep.

“…Since she's become a complete dimensional will, she still needs enough sacrifices and souls to replenish herself in order to awaken; is that it? Alright then. It seems that those sacrifices will come here on their own, soon enough."

I could see a pitch-black army gathering on the horizon. At an estimate, they would probably have enough soldiers to start a new battle before dawn.

"Relax and sleep well. I shall help you prepare enough sacrifices for the sake of these wood spirits of yours."

Chapter 282
Uninvited VIP Guest

The Military Sword Strait received its name for being long and narrow, shaped just like a sword. Its water currents surged at high speeds and sheltered numerous low-lying corals beneath the sea that could wreck any ship. Still, if this was a normal situation, there would be endless ships sailing to and fro in the Military Sword Strait. It was a sea route necessary to conduct sea trade with the Bardi Empire. Golden opportunities were here to be had.

The Military Sword Strait was also known as the Strait of Silver to the merchants who traded on these sea routes. One could double their personal wealth by conducting only three years of business along this route. Much profit could be gained.

Going west after passing the narrowest point of the straight would take you to the Mage Country, where you can buy and sell all sorts of magical ingredients and products. Going east would take you to the countries of the New Moon Alliance as well as numerous ports in the Bardi Empire. Simply transporting the local special products along this trade route was highly lucrative.

But the changing political situation in the Bardi Empire caused there to be much fewer ships sailing this strait. After the New Moon Alliance was conquered and annexed into the Bardi Empire, trade became profitable no longer. Another reason was that a battle between the Mage Country and the Bardi Empire might explode on the sea that separated them. It would be too pitiful to get accidentally caught up in the crossfire of such a fire, becoming cannon fodder.

However, this relatively peaceful area of the sea wasn't quite so peaceful today. A medium-scale sea battle was occurring here. Yet neither side had anything to do with the main countries controlling this area.

Yep, they were neither from the Bardi Empire nor the Mage Country. It was a pure coincidence that they happened to be battling here.

One side involved two tremendous sea beasts. If Roland had been here, he would have recognized one of them, as she was an old familiar face. She was a seven-headed

dragon that was glowing blue all over, while the other sea beast was a ridiculously strong and huge sea giant.

By now, you're probably able to guess that this was that Queen of Storms who was always around, famously petty, and never able to let go of a grudge. In fact, she was basically half a God of Revenge in her own right.

Not only did these two sea beasts transmit her enmity, but they were also mediums for her divine power.

The Seven-Headed Sea Dragon's heads roared at the sky, while the ethereal figure of the Queen of Storms appeared intermittently on the largest dragon head. She was currently summoning a storm to aid herself, and the sea giant was treading upon the ocean waves. Every time he smacked the sea with his gigantic battle hammer, a large wave over ten meters tall would smash into his opponent.

Currently battling with the two sea beasts were two gigantic combat airships. One was mostly constructed out of iron and steel, with fully outfitted mage towers and engineered cannons shooting endless amounts of cannon shots and magic spells. Meanwhile, the hydra skin around its deck was glowing but its use seemed to be in suppressing the wind and the waters. When the Seven-Headed Sea Dragon witnessed this scene, its eyes on all seven of its heads became blood-red. It let out an endless roar and even made the waves one meter taller than earlier. Its crazed state made it seem as if it had met the slayer of its father.

Alright then. Technically, there probably was some sort of connection. Nine-headed hydras were an evolved form of Seven-Headed Sea Dragons, and just based on the Borealis's hydra skin and heart on its deck alone, that would probably make for a huge grudge between the two.

Top-level magical beasts were rare to begin with. Many of the same species would have some type of relation with each other. Judging by how much of a fervor that Seven-Headed Sea Dragon had worked itself into, perhaps that nine-headed hydra really had been its father or husband.

Since the Borealis was here in battle, it would be only natural that the other battling combat airship was its brother airship, the Mizar.

"Sigh, so difficult to deal with."

On the deck of the Borealis, Marsolit, who acted as the entire command system for the Borealis, had a calm expression. He gave his commands in an orderly fashion and calm voice that echoed throughout the entire Borealis. Meanwhile, the temporary airship fleet commander, Pierre Papin (Runa Papa-san), [1] was quite tense and nervous.

The windstorm had already continued for over two hours. The moment the Seven-Headed Sea Dragon saw the Borealis, it started summoning windstorms as if it had gone insane.

With windstorms and large waves attacking it simultaneously, the dark clouds had already made this area of the sea into a pitch-black area where one would be unable to see the back of their own hand. These clouds not only covered the skies and blocked out normal vision but even hindered magical senses, making it obvious that these clouds were unnatural.

"This is no good. Decrease our engine's focus on floating by 30%. We're going to enter the sea. Tightly close all hatch doors. We're diving!"

The continuous thunder and magical beast attacks made the Borealis choose to enter the ocean. Its broken parts on deck automatically began repairing themselves, and any cannon towers destroyed by the thunder began would soon be ready for combat. The underwater recovery natural talent ability of the nine-headed hydra helped restore some balance to this battle.

The windstorm and tremendous waves had constantly been buffeting the airship. Although it was supposed to be daytime, not a single speck of sunlight could be seen, and the airship's furious shaking could make anyone out on deck fall into the sea. Even confirming the direction the airship was going in required a compass, and the most dangerous of all was still that maniacal petty Goddess above the clouds.

After luckily coming across her enemy, she discovered that one of her favorite pets' skin was actually spread all over the enemy's airship. The Queen of Storms who was always in a wild state to begin with went utterly out of control. She didn't care how much of a price she had to pay for using so much divine power as she summoned endless thunder and torrential downpours.

If it was a normal ship, it would force any veteran sailor to the brink. After all, waves that were over ten meters tall would be capable of overturning even the largest and heaviest of ships. But they were nothing more than annoying tiny waves now that the

Borealis had entered underwater. When deep below the waters, how scary the thunder and waves were became meaningless.

With most of the Borealis submerged underwater, it was forced to stop its cannon fire. Only the mage towers on its deck continued to toss out ice-blue crystals. In an underwater environment, only a few magic types would be able to continue performing at maximum power. After all, the Borealis wasn't designed with underwater combat in mind, and the cannons weren't stocked with waterproof ammunition specially designed for underwater usage.

"Report, #6 Storeroom is beginning to flood with water. There's likely a tear that needs repairing."

"Report, the starboard side #3 cannon has malfunctioned and can no longer be controlled. Recommend complete abandonment of #3 cannon."

"#2 mage tower has been struck by thunder. All the mages have been recovered safely and no personnel has been lost. But it's too passive to sit back and let them hit us!"

"A message from the Mizar: 'Is that insane Goddess ever going to take a rest? She's too tough to deal with, so hurry up and think of something. If the first airship becomes the last airship, wouldn't that be so unfortunate?"

If it was only the two top-level sea beasts, it wouldn't have been a problem for the two aerial battleships. However, since the Queen of Storms who recently promoted successfully in rank for her Godhood was going all out, no matter how strong the two floating airships were, they were still only at the level of mortals.

Not only that, the Seven-Headed Sea Dragon was willing to sacrifice an endless amount of its own blood to act as a medium by which the Queen of Storms could channel her divine power. This helped her to utilize more of her full power, and the endless amounts of thunder that she summoned forced both battleships underwater.

Still, being underwater meant that they could only passively receive attacks, which obviously wasn't good. Nor were those top-level sea beasts going to be easy to deal with. As time passed, the Queen of Storms who was also the Mother of Sea Beasts would definitely have other subordinates reinforcing her, which would make the situation even more difficult.

The Queen of Storms had received an enormous increase in power after promoting in

rank to a powerful Goddess. The two aerial battleships from East Mist were already having a hard time facing her endless attacks that seemed to stem from pettiness.

Numerous pieces of bad news were transmitted to Marsolit at high speeds. He immediately deployed repair personnel to the necessary locations and used his own control over the ship's mana systems to try and repair the damaged portions of the Borealis.

While the living airship was doing its best to heal itself, the forehead of the overly muscular fleet commander's forehead was glistening with sweat. Although Marsolit was assisting him, taking over the command of a mega airship fleet (of 2) was obviously too much to handle for a normal captain.

"Something heavy has struck our starboard side. It's that damned sea giant! He tossed his battle hammer at us!"

On the bridge was a blueprint of the Borealis, and a large part suddenly lit up red denoting those areas which were damaged. The situation was rapidly descending in a downward spiral so Commander Pierre instinctively looked towards the other individuals on the bridge. The look in his eyes implored for assistance, an indirect cry for help.

“…Let us go out there and slay them! As long as we eliminate that Seven-Headed Sea Dragon acting as the Queen of Storm's medium, the endless windstorms can be stopped."

The young knight Madi requested to go out into battle. Madi was the leader of a medium-sized squad of the Aurora Knights. In order to deal with the situation that I had expected, the Borealis had taken an entire medium-sized squad of fifty Aurora Knights with it. Fifty Gold-ranked aerial knights were more than sufficient to slay a dragon.

The young knight had the confidence to win even in the face of the Queen of Storm's fury and thunder. The Aurora Knights believed in themselves as the pride of the Mist Kingdom. Even in front of the fury of the Gods, they felt that they would still be able to obtain miraculous victories! Their young hearts would never fear any challenge; instead, they thirsted for adventure and challenges.

"What a joke! Trying to rush out there and ambush them in such a situation? It would

be normal for more than half of you to die. Are you trying to force me to the brink here?"

Yet, Pierre didn't dare to accede to this young knight's request. It wasn't that Pierre didn't believe in the Aurora Knights' capabilities. With fifty Aurora Knights working in tandem to rush the Seven-Headed Sea Dragon, they would definitely have high chances of victory. But Pierre knew even more that Aurora Knights were a precious resource. If some Aurora Knights were killed off in such a chaotic battle by the Queen of Storms' thunderbolts that contained her divine power, Roland would surely skin him alive. It was evident that this strategy would end in a significant amount of Aurora Knights' deaths, even if it was a winning one.

From the very start, Pierre's imploring look for assistance wasn't aimed at Madi. Madi was only the sub-commander of a more major personage who was currently pretending to act dumb and watch a show. Only she was the highest in-name leader of the Aurora Knights.

But since she was continuing to act dumb, Pierre, who was being forced to the brink, could only steel his resolve and beg for help. "Your Highness, what do you think of the current situation?"

The true leader finally acted astonished, as if she had just woken up from a dream.

"You're asking Reyne? Reyne doesn't know anything about naval battles. How about we just try running? I don't know. Would those two big sea beasts really just let us go?"

Reyne spoke a bunch of gibberish that nobody believed—she even stuck out her tongue and spoke in the third person, trying to act cute. This princess that resembled Princess Peach so much in physical appearance had actually learned how to act cute, which, indeed, possessed its own charm. But right now, Pierre only wanted to spit out a mouthful of blood, especially on her face.

After the Port Victoria incident was discovered, I gave the order for the Mizar and the Borealis to take the sea route and head straight for Port Victoria to support me. This would give me an extra retreat option later on and also provide aerial cover to attack Port Victoria if needed. I would gain many flexible options.

As for why I chose to take the sea route instead of a land route? The airspaces of the Bardi Empire and the Mage Country were both dangerous forbidden zones. Upon

entering them one would attract a barrage of trouble. Passing through smaller countries' air spaces was far easier, but these two countries possessed dragon knights and high-level archmages respectively. Unidentified flying objects would not be left alone.

This was similar to my previous world. There, one could fly through African airspace as one pleased, unchallenged, as most African countries didn't possess air forces of their own. However, if a warplane suddenly entered, unannounced, into a major country's airspace… well, it would suffice to say that only its wreckage would remain.

Originally, everything had been proceeding smoothly. But the moment the Borealis and Mizar entered this area of the sea, the petty, grudge-remembering Queen of Storms noticed them and proceeded to personally come looking for them along with her two sea beasts.

Out of boredom, a certain princess had forced Pierre into becoming the overall aerial fleet commander instead of just the Mizar. Because of that, and the fact that she wanted a commanding position for herself sans the responsibility that came along with it, Pierre was roaring in his mind: "You—could you possibly make others suffer more than this? Stop learning how to be unreliable from His Highness Roland!" Yet it was unfortunate that he could only continue to act pitiful on the surface and, on the inside, pray for Reyne's sympathy.

The final individual on the bridge was a complete and utter VIP. After his sudden arrival a few days ago, it had become Princess Reyne's main task to accompany him in chatting and drinking tea.

However, Pierre didn't even dare to speak up to this seemingly young guest of theirs, and this was in spite of the fact that he was well aware that this person had the power to turn the entire situation around. Since he saw how Princess Reyne still displayed that "innocent expression" of not wanting to do anything at all, Pierre could only grit his teeth. Yet just as he was about to continue dishing out commands, the VIP guest, who had boarded their airship halfway into the trip, spoke.

"Oh my, little Angie is just so much. She's always messing around with the young ones, not caring about being unsightly. No wonder her reputation keeps getting worse and worse. You can all be my witnesses. She was the one who attacked the airship that my incarnation was in of her own volition. All I'm doing here is justified self-defense."

Everyone around him nodded eagerly as they all looked forward to receiving his assistance. After all, this person's true power was a mystery to them. Reyne, however, couldn't help but laugh because of an entirely different matter.

"Angie? A name that means angel? There's far too much of a contrast. No wonder she never uses her own name, and even her Goddess name is just her title."

Angie, a name that meant 'angel' or an 'angelic girl.' This was an extremely common name in many human countries. Yet when used for the Queen of Storms, who was famously petty and notorious for forever holding on to a grudge, it seemed to serve a stark contrast.

"Young one, you dare laugh at a True God's real name? Aren't you afraid of a divine punishment?"

The black-robed young man was smiling, but his smile didn't contain any threat. The past few days this girl before him had been constantly trying to test him. As for himself, he had, of course, been trying to test the person behind her: the legendary person whose feats matched—or even surpassed—that of Roland's.

"I'm not afraid. My Brother Roland will protect me."

Even though Reyne was dealing with one of the top-level existences in the world, she remained as direct as always. With her experience, she had gotten used to dealing with all sorts of existences.

“…Perhaps there's more than just Brother Roland who will protect you. Well, I suppose you're lucky since I just happened to need to find Roland to discuss something. And, even for my incarnation, it's impossible for me to descend directly in that location…”

While casually chatting and smiling, the black-robed young man twisted his hand, causing a white rose to materialize in midair. Then, with a flick of his finger, the flower began to wilt; its petals floated off and vanished in midair.

Reyne—or, more accurately, Karwenz—contemplated much about this little action. While it appeared quite simple, as if he hadn't done anything at all, it also seemed like he did a lot, as in that instant, some of the world's rules had been completely distorted, and certain things were forced into the Cycle of Reincarnation.

As if the brink everyone was forced to had been nothing but a joke, the windstorms in

the sky instantly transformed back into white clouds and a blue sky. Bright sunshine returned in the very next second. The only thing that still proved how the maniacal Queen of Storms was still around was her pitiful wailing and angry roaring that everyone could hear.

"Ayer!? Why!? Ahh, why would you be here? This is a plot, a plot against me… Don't, don't, don't! Don't kill me!"

Nobody knew what Ayer did, but everyone could hear the Queen of Storms' pitiful wails along with her shock and disbelief. The next instant, the windstorms calmed down, and peace and quiet were restored.

The two sea beasts froze on the battlefield in stunned disbelief. When Angie, the Queen of Storms, escaped at top speed, these two unlucky fellows naturally became sacrificed.

The next moment, apart from Death God Ayer's incarnation's chuckling, only Reyne's voice could be heard.

"Everyone's worked hard today. Let's do just a little more, and we can feast on a sea dragon buffet tonight. Right, remember to leave behind the sea beasts' useful parts as they'll be perfect for leveling up and perfecting the Borealis. Also, remember to obtain any materials with divine power that you can. Brother Roland will definitely praise me for being careful to not waste anything!"

According to the Gods' laws, even a True God's incarnation wouldn't be able to attack as he pleased. The stronger a God, the more this was true. But since the Queen of Storms had attacked the airship that Ayer was on, it was basically equal to a direct attack on him personally, which made her truly unfortunate.

And now that both sides' True Gods had exited the battle, what remained was only a battle between mortals.

Right now, the Seven-Headed Sea Dragon who had lost the Storm of Queens' divine power didn't even have the energy to escape. Its earlier maniacal actions had used up all of her life energy. The sea giant, on the other hand, had been dragged into the deep ocean waters by the Mizar where a cruel battle was currently taking place.

As everyone got busy, Ayer lightly touched the three scrolls on his waist, causing various divine colors to flash and disappear in an instant. He breathed a sigh of relief

at discovering that everything was still normal.

These scrolls were made of unidentifiable materials, and the mana waves coming from them indicated that they were no mere ordinary objects.

As for the Queen of Storms' belief that this had been a plot against her, that was simply her thinking too much into things. We couldn't have possibly invited Ayer over just to deal with her. The fact that Ayer was on this ship had truly been just a coincidence.

True Gods' incarnations wouldn't easily appear in front of mortals' eyes. This time, Ayer risked breaking taboos by appearing here—it was obvious that there was something important. Due to the Undead Planes' cutting off of certain divine avenues of communication, Ayer had been unable to directly appear before Roland using their contract. This was the way he thought of by which he could reach Roland personally.

Something that was important enough for Ayer, who almost never went anywhere, to go to such great lengths was evidence of how significant this matter was.

Mortals had mortals' frustrations while True Gods had frustrations of their own. This time, the True Gods were intending to make a major gamble. If everything succeeded, perhaps the entire world's situation would undergo a complete upheaval, which was why Ayer personally came to the mortal plane.

"How about joining us? If our plan succeeds, things would surely become difficult for you.

One of the Main Gods of Order actually invited one of the Main Gods of Chaos to join him. However, Reyne (Karwenz) shook his head. By this point, there was no need to even test the waters. The nature of Chaos itself had determined that it would be impossible for Karwenz to participate in this plan.

"I'm not interested. We have our own ways of having fun as well. Besides, I really do want Roland to become stronger."

"You actually still have brotherly feelings for him?"

"No, I just want myself to not be bored when I defeat him completely."

"Aren't you afraid of losing?"

"That's fine, too. As long as I had fun, the result wasn't important to begin with."

"That's why I hate you demons. All you know is to fight and kill every day, and you act far too willfully. Even your acts of robbery involve zero finesse… yes, that was a quote from Roland."

"Ha, that's indeed his style. That's why I really hate those hypocrites of the Order Faction that act so nobly every day… that's a quote from Brother Roland as well."

"That guy, he really dares to say so much."

"Indeed."

Notes:

[1] TL/N: A euphemism for the fact that he's still wearing the magical girl uniform.

Chapter 283
Ambush

"They're all gone? How is that possible? We just sent an army of ten thousand undead at them. Although they were mostly low-level undead, they couldn't have been eradicated so quickly, could they?"

Liches' expressions were typically hard to read, but Feyman's flickering soulfire and the way he loudly popped his fingerbones indicated his incredible shock and disbelief.

Immediately after receiving authority he had unhesitatingly organized an undead ambush. Even though it consisted of mostly newly-born skeletons and low-level zombies that could be barely passable as undead soldiers, the fact that they reached ten thousand in number meant that they were still a threat. A teeming, endless mass of pitch-black undead would be quite the frightening sight by itself. However, some high-level undead were mixed in to help control the situation, with two liches serving as the army's commanders—this wasn't a case of purely sending cannon fodder at the enemy.

Unlike any other species, the strategies that the undead could use in using cannon fodder to scout their enemies were simply that arrogant. Their advantage of numbers alone could suppress any medium-sized city, and even if they stood still and allowed the enemy to hack at them, it would still take at least several hours to defeat ten thousand undead. So how could they have been eradicated so quickly?

“…Holy Light?"

Although none of the high-level undead present verbalized their astonishment, they all had expressions that said "Are you joking with me?" and "Do you think I'm an idiot who will fall for that?"

"Our enemies are a bunch of plants—not exactly Holy Knights. How could they possibly have the Holy Light? Could it be that you saw only normal light and then fled in fear, thinking it was the Holy Light? Where did this third-rate observer (photographer) come from? I'm going to reduce your experimental funding (chicken legs) to zero, damn it!"

The lich being angrily roared at didn't try to defend himself. Instead, he only lifted up his arm. His bone was already shattered, and there was some silvery dust left in the fracture.

"It really was the Holy Light!"

"There's no mistaking it. It's even relatively pure Holy Light. Could it be that the enemy has high-level Holy Knights?"

As the mortal enemies of the Holy Light, the undead could recognize their natural enemy in a heartbeat. Any place or thing that was attacked by Holy Light would automatically be cleansed of anything unnatural (which included the undead). So, of course, the places where this unlucky lich had been struck by the Holy Light were now considered useless.

The Holy Light wouldn't let go of anything unnatural. An undead would need to sacrifice a part of himself by deleting it and connect an entirely new portion that was completely unrelated to the original part. Yet as for how things would go after that… whether the new body part could be gotten used to, or be as useful as the original, the God of Holy Light wouldn't care about such things at all. He was only in charge of purifying the unnatural.

Cough, I definitely wasn't complaining against the God of Holy Light, nor did I have any complaints against this world that was believing more and more strongly in the Holy Light…

Now, after this unlucky lich showed his own injuries to everyone, it was obvious to everyone that his injuries were, indeed, caused by the Holy Light. Everyone present was astonished.

"Could the Holy Church have arrived and interfered?"

"How is that possible? The Bardi Empire has exiled all the Holy Light job class members!"

"No, perhaps they crossed from the sea! They might be scouts from the Mage

Country?"

"Don't be ridiculous. The mages have a terrible relationship with the Holy Knights. For a mage to request assistance from a Holy Knight? That's impossible!"

"Don't rush. First, let's find out if it was an individual or a full squadron of Holy Knights."

All these mid-level cannon fodder from the Undead Planes were mostly considered major personages where they came from, and they only paid their respects to their commanders for just a few minutes upon the introductions. Now, everything was chaotic to the point of having gone out of control, but Feyman and Gricasio didn't have any intentions of caring too much about this. They simply exchanged glances and felt that everything was truly just like Roland's style.

"Don't rush. What exactly happened? Tell us in detail. And, did you see a very unique lich there?"

The injured lich Adrei hurriedly nodded when he saw that the undead army's overall commander had spoken, and he began to tell his tale.

Not long ago, he was one of the two liches assigned to take the force of ten thousand low-level undead over to attack the magical forest. He had been chosen because he had experience fighting against those plants.

Yet the situation he encountered was far worse than the last time he fought against them. Things went wrong since the moment they arrived at the forest's border.

"The trees are taller than before by at least ten times? Are you joking?"

"I definitely didn't make any mistakes with my memory. Before, the trees were only at a normal forest's height. But this time, when we entered, it was as if we entered a giants' country… When I lifted my head, I couldn't see the treetops, and even the flowers by the roadside were taller than we were. And then…"

"And then?"

"And then my entire squad was instantly vaporized. If it weren't for the fact that I had prepared a teleportation spell that would be triggered and bring me back to the forest's entrance if I was in danger, I would have died as well."

Alright then. The end result was instant vaporization. But, at the very least, the lich Adrei survived, so it wasn't too pitiful of a loss.

After Feyman gathered information from a variety of sources, he finally discovered the origin of the Holy Light, but it was one that made everyone feel rather helpless.

"Damn it, they're too tall. What are we supposed to do!"

What fired beams of Holy Light at the undead were specially cultivated magical plants known as "Golden Flashy Spotlights" (named by Roland). These unique magical sunflowers were hanging down those supremely tall trees that reached the clouds and would periodically shoot down strong beams of Holy Light. And that incredible height advantage made it certain that no normal method would be able to reach them. If the undead sent out aerial troops…

"It wasn't that I didn't do anything, but all the bone dragons and gargoyles I summoned were tangled up by a strange net of vines. Those vines were actually capable of growing using bones and transformed the bone dragons into its own nourishment! My lords, this time I lost so much!"

Medusa's Hair (named by Roland again) was the name of this unique parasitic vine. They fed on bones and could absorb nutrition from bones to propagate more Snake Vines (the wood spirits' name for these vines).

There were many other similar plants. For example, the Conqueror's Self-Destructing Pumpkin Carriage / Fire God's Carriage (as named by Roland / the wood spirits), the Strength God Hydra Fire-Breathing Grass / Fire-Breathing Grass, the Secret Male Demon Pea Sharpshooter / Peashooter, and so on. The wood spirits previously had access to so much combat potential but didn't know how to fully utilize it. Now, they had begun their evolution towards an insanely powerful warring species under the guidance of a certain person.

Every combat plant was controlled by a wood spirit inside. They were grateful to Roland's assistance towards them and also viewed him as their entire species' father.

However, they were forever unable to understand one of his certain hobbies, so they were deeply afraid that he would suddenly appear at any time.

"Hurry up and run! Father's coming from that direction. Last night, two more of us fell victim to him. You didn't see it, that scene was too demonic… the victims just collapsed there and kept crying! He—he—he'll give you some incredibly strange names! And then all of us sisters will be laughing at you."

Yes, the strange habit they were referring to was to utilize that naming sense of his. During these past few days, Roland had gotten quite excited over seeing so many cute little girls with no names and kept giving them names of his own volition. But not even mentioning how his naming sense was terrible to begin with, since there was a significant number of wood spirits, his lack of creativity was soon drained, and he could only come up with all sorts of random names in the end.

"Teehee, Nest Nesthead, I truly sympathize with you. I've noticed that Father really likes to use hairstyles as names."

"Do you have any right to laugh at my name, Bun Card? At the very least, I'm named after my hairstyle. Even though you clearly have a pink ponytail, isn't your name stranger?"

"…Actually, both of us got off quite lightly. It seems that Father has run out of vocabulary words to use, since Little Red #157 and Blue Smurf #228 actually appeared yesterday. How frightening."

"That's nothing, I even met Red Saber, White Saber, and Black Saber… what's Saber supposed to mean? Why does Father love this name so much? I heard that the Saber name series has reached #1024 already. Just think about it, having the same name as more than one thousand others, just someone shouting for you will cause the entire street to come out and take a look if it's them. It's so pitiful that I can't even imagine it."

"Cough."

I was finally unable to withstand listening to this conversation anymore as I walked

out from under the shade of a tree. At the very least, I only used three colors of the Saber name and didn't create a Saber combat squad. I still had my limits!

"Father…"

"Please punish us, but please, please, don't give us some even stranger names! I'm quite pleased with the name Nest Nesthead."

"…Are you really that afraid?"

Seeing how Nest Nesthead and Bun Card were so afraid of me, I slightly self-reflected for one second, wondering if I had gone overboard recently. However, I immediately erupted in anger.

"Stop calling me Father! Have you ever seen a father that's unmarried and still an old virgin? I still intend on becoming a winner in life, but if I suddenly have a few ten thousand extra daughters that are this big already, who would dare to get married to me!? Are you all intending on being obstacles to my search for happiness in life!??"

Alright then, let's stop talking about how angry I was at being poked where I hurt the most. At the very least, my specialized anti-undead strategies had been effective against the undead armies' first invasion since the wood spirits' evolution. All the magical plants' properties worked as planned, and their continuous evolution would surely give the undead commanders an even greater surprise.

What the undead didn't know was that this Forest of Dreams before them was far more skilled at wars of attrition than the undead were. Those low-level undead's bodies would become nutrition for the forest, and it wasn't only that: even though the low-level undead's souls were already in tatters, their soul shards would be absorbed by the forest's cycle, undergo a new Cycle of Reincarnation to be cleansed and combined with each other, and finally become newly-born wood spirits, furthering increasing the overall power level of this new species.

All that the undead currently knew was that their opponent was rather difficult to deal with and that their cannon fodder scouting army was viciously defeated, reaching almost 100% eradication.

After receiving all the pitiful reports on how they lost their armies, the high-level undead in the temporary command center discovered that nobody had even witnessed the former plants that were their previous opponents. They interpreted

this as meaning that the plants were still keeping them in reserve and that the plants hadn't even needed to use their full might to eradicate the entire undead scouting army of ten thousand.

Without having even discovered the enemy's ace cards, the cannon fodder didn't even have the expected value of cannon fodder before they were all destroyed. This type of sacrifice was obviously meaningless, so sending out a similar scout army would bring nothing more but the same.

Without a strategic objective, only using the force of numbers would be a waste of their combat strength. Rather than sending waves and waves of troops out for the enemy to eliminate for free, it would be much wiser to conserve troops strength and attack in one overwhelming attempt. And that was how the undead continued requesting assistance from the Undead Emperors while sending out only small scattered forces of cannon fodder as scouts, with various high-level undead mixed among the cannon fodder in order to attempt at scouting out some useful information.

As for the current me, I had just received a response from Wumianzhe that caused me to sink into contemplation.

"Ayer has personally come to the mortal plane? It would seem that everyone really views my Plan W with such great importance. How about I try using those undead for a little experiment?"

"Why does every Holy War in history cause such a huge chain reaction of events? Do all the countries and species' leaders not even think about how their own country or species might be extinguished because of battle? Has nobody ever tried to mediate for peace and conciliation?"

I didn't believe that anyone who had the ability to become such a leader would be so foolish. However, it only took a little bit of thinking for the answers to such question to become obvious.

"It's all because of so many potential benefits to be gained. What a great headache."

Was the Holy War a bad thing? Obviously, it was bad for the victims and losers, but it was another story entirely for those who benefited from it.

War has no benefits for either side? Heh, impossible. Those who want war more than anyone else weren't the insane ones. Instead, they would be the most practical of all. Arms and munitions merchants would profit greatly, those in the military would receive chances at gaining achievements in battle, nobles would have the opportunity to expand their territory, and not a single king would think that his own crown was too regal. Even a normal blacksmith would be happy that he was receiving more orders than before, and a regular farmer would be secretly pleased that his crops were selling at a better price.

The Holy War wasn't supposed to be like this? It was supposed to be a clash between Order and Chaos? Well, the Holy War was just like any other war in the end. Those who truly fought for the purpose of some cause or concept were in the significant minority, while most people instead fought for the sake of tangible benefits.

For the True Gods, the Holy War was the only shortcut to greatly increase one's own divine power and Divine Obligation's influence. For a species such as humanity, the more they were forced to the brink, the more they would pray for the Gods to save them. In addition to this, with countless Gods fighting over Divine Obligations and believers, as long as they managed to survive a Holy War, it would save any God at least thousands of years of cultivation.

After all, in order to break a stalemate in the current balance of power, it would be impossible to do so without a battle.

At the very least, the God of Holy Light had obtained all his power and faithful believers in the same way. Based on a report from the fairies, compared to the start of the previous Holy War, the God of Holy Light was able to increase the number of his believers more than tenfold by the Holy War's finish, which helped him to directly become the Main God of all the Main Gods of Order after the conclusion of the Holy War.

Meanwhile, just like how human rulers had the right to start battles, in the Holy War, the God of Holy Light was just like the ruler of all the Gods of Order. If strengthening himself was one of his goals, it was only natural that he would start yet another Holy War. As long as he 'cleansed' undead and demons, his believers would devotedly pray to him for protection and salvation. With enough faith in him, he could obtain even more Divine Obligations, causing his status and power to further increase.

This didn't only involve the God of Holy Light's personal benefits, however, as there

was one other reason that caused him to become destined to be mortal enemies with Chaos.

His personal "Concept" and divine teachings were all about "Cleansing." His definition of "Cleansing" was to "erase" (destroy) all that was distorted by Chaos. As a Concept born in the Holy War and strengthened by it, he was limited by the Holy War as well. In his instinctive judgement, he viewed the undead that twisted life and death and the demons that were the embodiment of Chaos itself as mortal enemies that absolutely required cleansing. This was the very basic fundamental Concept of Holy Light at its core. To deny this would be making a light, whose purpose was to dispel darkness, useless. If the Holy Light lost its meaning of existence to correct (destroy) the distortions of Chaos, then the Holy Light wouldn't have any more meaning to continue existing.

The God of Holy Light didn't immediately eradicate the undead of East Mist because his logical processing told him that turning on us right now wouldn't have any benefits from him. A clash with the God of Law, who was also an Order God, would be utterly pointless for the time being. However, when the Holy War ended, it would definitely be time for a reckoning.

"I can't let him be the only one with speaking authority. At the very least, I have to have a third voice appear other than the voices of Order and Chaos."

This was the agreement I came to with Ayer from the very start. Since continuous warfare would help the God of Holy Light to become even stronger, the God of Holy Light wouldn't possibly stop the Holy Wars no matter if it was because of his own Concept or a simple judgement based on personal benefits.

"If he makes a proclamation to kill all living creatures other than humanity, I wouldn't be surprised at all. If he declared every single one of his opponents as worshipers of evil and heretics, that would be plenty of 'fun' for everybody."

While the Holy Church often went overboard enough already as it was, if the God of Holy Light himself declared someone to be evil, then all of human society would truly view that person as evil. And, according to his automated logical processing, perhaps everything on the side of Chaos and even all his allies that obstructed him could be viewed as evil. In that case, the Holy War would never end, and that would truly give us a lot of trouble.

In "history," the God of Holy Light indeed acted as the main pillar of support for the side of Order. The Holy Church acted loyally as the vanguards of the Holy War. First, they fought against the Elemental Lords, various heretical countries, the beastmen and other species, and then they fought against the Underground World. Without even finishing these battles, they continued to forcefully fight against the Undead Emperors, followed by the demon armies.

Although it sounded cool for them to face off against so many enemies, if one thought over it more carefully, it was mainly because of the God of Holy Light's pure enmity towards other Concepts and species that many factions that could have joined us became our enemies. Potential allies instantly became enemies, and the number of enemies only kept increasing while friends became fewer and fewer.

The stark contrast was in how my efforts had already achieved some results. At the very least, the Underground World's forces had been successfully combined and pacified under me, which helped not only to avoid dozens of years of unnecessary warfare but also strengthened our own forces to resist against the upcoming fights.

"At the very least, I can't allow the God of Holy Light's teachings about how 'undead, demons, and all non-human creatures are evil, so we should kill them all' to keep spreading. If that happens, the war will truly never end."

In summary, as I saw it, the God of Holy Light's teachings were far too extreme. His teachings needed to be replaced by a more moderate God's teachings. Originally, this should have been a terribly slow and difficult process, one I wouldn't even have the chance to see during my life. But, due to certain reasons, it would seem that I could begin this process prematurely.

"Directly stealing elites straight out from under him? Ayer, if I'm the one who dares to think and say anything I want, then you're the one who dares to *do* anything you want."

Chapter 284
Small Determination

"The world before us changes every day."

This was doubtlessly the most suitable explanation for what was happening in this Forest of Dreams. It was just that, perhaps, the words "every day" should be changed to "every instant," instead.

Under the dimensional will's control—fine then, Amelia was in deep hibernation, so it should be said that under my guidance—this forest was changing at every moment. What was a forested path one second would become a deep pit the very next instant.

Not only would this confuse any attacking undead armies, but even the wood spirits themselves would get lost in their own forest.

Let's not mention those so-called natural talent abilities that go on about how children of the forest would never get lost in a forest. As far as I knew, those druids and rangers would only show off their pretend knowledge after memorizing some maps.

In the end, memories were limited in capacity. If, for example, someone slept by a lakeside in the night but woke up, the next day, and saw a flourishing city, it was only natural for that person to feel that their circumstances were unfamiliar. It would be strange, instead, if that person actually knew their way around.

“…Why has the market disappeared yet again? Why is Blue Smurf #356 who lived next to me now living on top of the tree? Also, most importantly, why am I in the middle of a lake! Ahhh! My collectibles have all been ruined!"

This unlucky child spent half an hour hauling all her belongings out of the water. Yet it wasn't a rare occurrence; those who were sent to the very tops of the trees after waking up were the unluckiest of all.

Wood spirits had the ability to communicate with trees, and it would require no effort for them to descend from the treetops—as long as they didn't have acrophobia, of course. However, it was another story for transporting their collectibles—that, indeed,

was a huge headache.

Collectibles? What would the newly-born wood spirit species even like to collect? Indeed, it was truly peculiar that this newly-born species had hobbies of collecting various useless items, similar to a squirrel. They would collect all sorts of seeds and fruits, and subtle items, such as their victory loot from the undead—lich hip bones or zombie cavities—were especially gathered.

They didn't seem like calm forest spirits whenever they discussed their favorite collectibles; instead, they acted like shoppers arguing over discounts at a store having a major sale. This was all the more so as they felt that the best treasures came from outside the forest. In fact, the first thing they would do after a battle with the undead was to try and obtain as much victory loot as possible.

“…This is a good thing. At the very least, they have their own hobbies. This is the behavior of an intelligent species displaying their independence."

Although I said that in my mind, the subtle feeling of discomfort became stronger and stronger as I watched how the little lolis around me were bragging about Abomination guts with those cute and innocent smiles of theirs.

"Forget it. Since they're Amelia's species, it'll be even more inconceivable if they were too normal."

[You're talking as if it totally has nothing to do with you, father of a species. Right, should I give you a "glorious title" that's impossible to hide? "Father of Ten Thousand Lolis." That way, everyone will get to know the joyful news that you became a father!]

"Please don't!"

Alright then. I immediately surrendered. That System of mine was too vicious. If I wore this title out every day, wouldn't everyone laugh at me forever? That would be pure torture.

Cough, let's get back to the main topic. Since the geography of this region changed far too rapidly, the first thing each wood spirit would do after waking up was use their mental abilities to communicate with the other wood spirits and the trees around them to download the newest map to their minds. Otherwise, they'd surely get lost in the surrounding area.

Spending all this effort of mine in helping evolve this forest obviously meant that these changes weren't meaningless. In fact, it was the opposite. This was all evidence that the entire forest was evolving.

"What type of opponent is the scariest? The fastest? The strongest? No, the one who's one hundred times larger than you is the scariest. One step from him will equal several hundred steps from you. Can your speed possibly top his? If his little finger is as large as your entire body, no matter how strong you are, can an ant possibly lift an elephant?"

Actually, that was just how it was in real life. If you miniaturized a dragon by a hundred times, it would be nothing more than a tiny fire-breathing lizard. Miniaturizing a titan giant would make it into nothing more than a slightly large doll. But if you expanded something like a scorpion, ant, or cockroach to the size of a dragon, an ant's strength for its body proportion, a scorpion's poison, or the undying nature of a cockroach would become peerless terrors.

That was why, in order to completely increase this forest's overall defensive attributes, I believed that all I needed to do was increase this forest's size by ten, one hundred, even one thousand times. In that case, all the various magical plants created here would naturally grow larger as well, greatly improving the power levels.

Actually, the results were better than I expected. Those pinecone bombs that were ten times larger than me were utterly impossible to assess. Their explosions could reach the clouds, and I suspected that they were on the scale of the small nuclear weapons from my previous world. The roots that were originally for the purpose of tripping our enemies became webs of death that could kill anything. Even those large strengthened outer shells that the wood spirits liked to wear became titan giants that reached the clouds.

With the support of a dimensional will, things were just that unreasonable. Still, there were limits.

Dimensional laws could overwrite the natural laws of a dimension. These lifeforms that far surpassed the natural laws, however, thrived in this dimension—it was their natural environment. The moment they leave it they would be drastically weakened. Yet, within the forest, the dimensional will was the strongest existence. As long as they

remained in the forest, Amelia would be able to help them and transform what shouldn't have been physically possible into reality. The unreasonable would become the reasonable.

This was indubitably a massive advantage for us when defending. It seemed that the gap between us and the undead would only keep growing as time passed. If I was the undead commander, I definitely wouldn't have allowed the dimensional will to continue evolving. I would have taken everything to a full-out battle as early as possible.

Perhaps my existence gave the two familiar commanders on the other side too much pressure. Perhaps they didn't have experience in this area. Or perhaps they were simply slacking off. Although they kept probing the forest's defenses, they never truly sent their main forces. The way they were treating things seemed far too conservative in my eyes.

This obviously seemed unreasonable. Before, the dimensional will had been in hibernation, and the forest had defended itself instinctively. Now that I was here and acting as the forest's strategist, the evolutions were obviously heading in an anti-undead direction. They should have sent everything they had as early as possible, which would have given them the greatest chances of victory.

Of course, the overly high speed of evolution did bring about a few small problems. For example, the wood spirits who were still too slender and small would occasionally have difficulty balancing and controlling their strengthened outer shells. Some would have great adventures when finding their way home every day. After all, the wood spirits were now truly an independent species of their own—they were no longer able to change themselves at will. A young bird that had left the nest wouldn't return.

However, this also meant that these wood spirits were an intelligent species equal to humanity and the elves. As one of the very few newly-born species in the recent generation, they had limitless potential for development. I did some very rough estimating and figured that the average mature wood spirit combined with a strengthened outer shell usable in the mortal plane would be able to easily reach Silver rank combat strength. This made them equal to the upper-ranked elves, a newly-born Silver rank species. Amelia was destined to leave her name in history just by creating the wood spirit species.

"You've accomplished something incredible without realizing it, Amelia."

These past few days, I had been resting at that core lake where Amelia resided where it was more convenient for me to guide the forest's evolution.

I lightly brushed Amelia's slightly messy hair. The seemingly pure sleeping princess didn't seem to have any intentions of waking up. Her features, while she slept, were unencumbered by traces of her typical insanity. Instead, it bore a look of weakness, which was rare for Amelia, and resembled the softness of drenched white lily flowers post the rain. It really made me want to care for her.

"If she doesn't talk, she's actually quite cute."

I lightly brushed off the leaves that had fallen on her, attracted by her face that had regained some of its normal complexion.

Ever since she fell into a deep sleep, Amelia had been smiling almost childishly. The typical dark circles around her eyes had vanished, and the natural color of her skin was more resplendent than even the best makeup.

With a pure appearance that would cause anyone to calm down, her formerly pale lips had become red and luscious. It was as if she was a sleeping angel that shouldn't be desecrated.

Yet even while I admired the beauty before me, I was thinking about a topic which ruined the idyllic scenery.

"It would seem that I still need more sacrifices to help wake you up."

Souls were the source of everything. The two highest Goddesses of Order and Chaos needed to absorb nutrition from soul shards that entered the Cycle of Reincarnation to help themselves recover. Amelia, too, required a large number of souls to recover after becoming a newly-born dimensional will. And the undead were undoubtedly the best source of souls for her.

"You owe me, and I'm going to remember this debt. You better pay it back to me later."

I lightly flicked her upturned nose, but to my surprise, it felt rather good, so I took advantage of her and rubbed her nose two more times…

While I was sighing to myself that she actually became so easy to pick on, Rosa sent me an urgent message through our mental connection.

She informed me of a new wave of seemingly different enemy attacks. When she told me that she surprisingly lost control of the situation, I knew that it was time for me to leave.

"It's far more fun to pick on you when you're awake. I shall help you wake up again."

It wasn't an oath, nor was it a promise. It was just something that I wanted to do—a decision that I had come to.

I didn't notice how the sleeping beauty's mouth seemed to arc upwards, as if she was secretly smiling as I left.

Leaves fluttered down the trees—a delicate message that revealed the beauty's inner thoughts about the dense block of wood that had just left.

"I shall use everything I have to return my debt to you, dear Roland. You're not allowed to refuse. As long as you don't leave me, I shall stay by your side during my life and in death."

This Forest of Dreams had become an independent dimension of its own and was incredibly difficult to deal with because of the dimensional will's existence. However, its true enemies were more than just some mid- and low-level undead.

Feyman didn't have enough experience with dimensional wills so he didn't know anything about what was going on. However, the former First Senator Gricasio had both power and experience. He had long since figured out that dimensional laws were at work here. Yet he didn't intend to say anything.

After all, Gricasio knew that if he pointed out the situation, and everyone found out that this was a time-limited battle where the best strategy would be to rush the forest as quickly as possible, he would most likely be sent out as the vanguard. At such a time, unless he was willing to resist against the Undead Emperors' wills, not only would he have to face that person head-on, but his own gigantic body would be the best target of all. There was a ninety-nine percent probability of him becoming cannon fodder.

Fighting that person on his home turf? While simultaneously challenging a newly-born dimensional will? Gricasio could be considered quite wise, and he still wanted to

live much longer.

"Who cares. It's not my matter to worry about anyways. Even if the sky collapses, there's someone higher than me who can shoulder things. The Undead Emperors aren't going to personally come out so why should I work my hardest and risk my life for someone else's benefit?"

The First Senator Gricasio, who was at the doorstep of the SemiGod rank, was indeed incredible in power level. However, the Undead Emperors had underestimated his own selfishness. Since he could become a SemiGod by simply waiting for two hundred more years, why should he risk his own life to fight for others? Gricasio was never a good person who would sacrifice himself for the sake of others, nor was he some brave warrior who believed in the concept of justice. Otherwise, he wouldn't have survived until today.

And that was how the sly Immemorial Dragon intentionally did nothing at all and watched as Feyman anxiously tried to think of solutions. But, when Gricasio's only companion could no longer stand waiting and intended to personally go in the forest to fight, Gricasio stopped him and secretly told him about dimensional laws and secrets. And then… both the top-ranked commanders of the undead army intentionally sat around and did nothing!

From a certain standpoint, Undead Emperor Aso from the Desecration Plane truly chose the wrong people to lead his army. Both Feyman and Gricasio had respectable power levels but lacked the courage to go out and fight. The two of them added together had both brains and power, but how would they have gotten to only where they were if they were capable of great things?

Gricasio was a natural-born steed. He had undergone all sorts of hard work and humiliation. "It's fine if I'm treated like a dog or a steed. Everything's fine as long as I'm alive" was his quote about how he wanted to live as a dragon. Making him fight with his life on the line was practically impossible. This was all the more so after the Undead Emperors were foolish enough to reward him with the knowledge that he wanted beforehand, so he wanted even less to fight with his life on the line.

“…As long as I live on, I'll enter the SemiGod rank! Aso wants me to face that person head-on? Impossible."

Yet someone was finally unable to watch this situation continually worsen. Despite the

fact that he spent so many resources on transferring these two Undead Lords over here, the Forest of Dreams had become only stronger and stronger.

When another undead squadron left—they seemed more like they were going over to feed the forest rather than scout it out—the black pillar of dimensional transportation violently trembled. The entire area around it began to shake, while dark clouds gathered at a furious rate. The earthquake was so strong that large fissures opened up in the ground, burying many smaller undead alive. The aerial troops managed to escape to safer locations, but even the strong bone giants were forced to take refuge.

And then… the black pillar of light which reached the sky vanished. Yes, it vanished entirely. Although there were still some traces, the dimensional connection had obviously been severed.

What remained where the black pillar had been was only a bone-white skeleton. When the cyan soulfire ignited itself in that skull, the entire world appeared to change. Frightened souls fled with all their might in every direction while innumerable bones crawled to the surface by themselves. In the pitch-black night, the joyous dances of the undead could be seen—the undying emperor had finally descended!

"Emperor Aso!!"

Feyman and Gricasio hurriedly rushed over to give their reports, but Aso didn't even so much as glance at them. It was obvious that their intentional stalling couldn't fool Aso. Even though Aso didn't intend to point it out directly and turn on them at the moment, he was still filled with anger.

Well, that was only natural. Aso had paid a price in order to be able to descend to this plane. He lost so much that he would never be able to regain his losses.

"Only death is eternal. When the undead control the lands, souls shall become the new master of this world…"

A low voice reverberated across the lands, and every living creature felt as if their deaths were approaching. The moment this Undead Emperor descended, he began uttering a eulogy to himself—"The Song to End All Souls."

"A forbidden spell!!"

Although I was in the forest, the mana waves sent out by that forbidden spell caused

the very air itself to tremble. How could I possibly miss it?

"Damn it! This is the worst possible result."

If a city was unconquerable, then all I had to do was eradicate the entire city. That's what I did back in the day as Yongye, and Aso was evidently intending to do the exact same thing. Although this type of development was within my expectations, it definitely wasn't easy to deal with.

"I said before that I hate how Undead Emperors can just toss out so many forbidden spells as they please, taking advantage of their undying natures and ability to switch bodies to ignore physical repercussions. It's basically no different from flipping the table if you can't win a board game! There's no finesse to it at all!"

"…Do you ever take a look in the mirror? You have the nerve to make such a statement? Do you know who tossed out more forbidden spells than anyone else in this generation? That would be you, you bastard!"

As expected of Harloys who was getting more and more skilled at making sarcastic comments. Dishing out those jabs at me were part of her very nature, and it was her first reaction upon waking up.

"Was that Holy Light hammer delicious?"

"It was terrible, worse than even your stinky shoes."

Hearing this, I covered my face and pretended to be embarrassed.

"Ah, you actually sniffed them secretly? You pervert! Did you lick them as well? Oh, sorry, I forgot. All cats lick in order to taste things. Instead, I should ask: how was the taste?"

In a normal situation, the silly cat would have been furious at this point, but right now, Harloys had no intention of playing around. The tremendous waves of the forbidden spell in the distance had already attracted all her attention.

"The Song to End All Souls? This is a mega AoE forbidden spell that will kill absolutely everything. [1] [1] It's ranked in the top ten for attack power. Based on current developments, it should take Aso slightly less than ten hours to finish chanting it. Do you have the confidence to reach him within this time limit?"

This was a rather silly question that caused me to chuckle.

"Until we actually fight, who knows? Only the courageous will come out victorious in the end. You think those pieces of trash can block me? Those useless cowards? What a joke."

We finished our combat preparations after a few minutes. I put on my armor of ice and snow and held a shiny silver hammer that had materialized out of midair. The ancient bone dragon Gria descended from the sky for me to ride on her.

"Right. Harloys? Since we're facing an Undead Emperor, should we shout 'For the Holy Light' at such a time?… but why does it feel so wrong? It somehow feels too unlucky."

"Ridiculous! Back in the year, we were the unlucky ones that others charged at to attack—all because of the situations you forced us into. Did you ever bring us good luck?"

"As expected, asking you was a mistake. You're shaking our forces' morale before the battle? I'm going to have you executed, you silly cat!"

"I doubt our forces' morale will be shaken at all. Just look behind you."

When I looked behind me, I saw that the wood spirits had finished their combat preparations as well. These young-appearing girls entered their powerfully enhanced outer shells, their soft-seeming eyes filled with the resolution to defend their home. Now that their mother and home were threatened, these wood spirits had prepared themselves to leave the safety of their forest for the sake of defending everything dear to them.

"For Mother!"

"For our pinecones!"

"For my bone collection! Nobody is going to take away my lich rib bones, skeleton fingerbones, and Abomination skulls from me!"

I shook my head rather helplessly. Just as how parents never understood their children, I was destined to never understand these young ones, either. After some hesitation, I spoke softly in a voice that only I could hear.

"For… for Amelia."

"Heh, I heard that. I'll be telling Amelia." Whoops, I seemed to have forgotten that the hammer I was holding was that damned silly cat's transformation…

"Hmph! I heard that as well." Fine then, Gria was currently right under my crotch… Even though I was supposed to be doing something as cool as riding a dragon, why did my description of it sound so awkward?

[I also heard you.]

"That's enough! Why the hell is even my System joining in!? Isn't it too overboard that you only think about how to make me suffer with your comments every day? Can't you do something proper and learn from other protagonists' systems for once!?"

[Are you certain? Actually, I was considering whether or not I should change myself into a limitless System for challenging the Main Gods. If you don't complete your Quests, you'll be deleted. For your first Quest, how about challenging Ayer to single combat?]

"I apologize! Please—no!! That's no different from suicide!"

"Hey—hey—we're about to start fighting. Can you be a little more serious!?"

Alright then, even Gria was getting tired of me.

Note:

[1] ED/N: Area of effect (or AoE) is a term used in many role-playing and strategy games to describe attacks or spells that can affect multiple targets within a specified area. (Source: League of Legends Wiki)

Chapter 285
Shameless Bone Dragon

Dark clouds blotted out the sky. It would seem that whenever there was a fight against a super boss of this level, a dark environment such as this was only natural.

Black dust drifted down from the sky. It contained a hint of corrosion that obviously wasn't conducive for healthy air. Large complex spell arrays were visible even from here as the SemiGod Undead Emperor, who was floating in midair, manipulated that death magic forbidden spell of his which would drain all life.

Before us was an endless sea of undead.

Of course, Aso had others he could rely on in order to dare to directly cast a forbidden spell. Thanks to the Undead Lords Gricasio and Feyman slacking off, the undead armies' accumulation had reached a state where just their number alone took up most of this small area. The constant reorganization and training that these undead did while waiting was the best pre-combat preparation for them to become slaughtering machines.

Once the SemiGod Undead Emperor descended, any idle chatter or slacking off vanished completely—Aso was watching them. Under the lead of liches and death knights, the undead had completed their military formation as they rushed our vanguard.

A random assortment of skeleton soldiers that were barely under control was tossed out in front as their vanguard. Their tiny souls were filled with nothing more than the desire to destroy everything in their path. This countless sea of skeletons charged towards their enemies, enjoying the feeling of slaughtering or being slaughtered.

This entire area was filled with the clacking sounds of bones against each other. Since skeletons were far too low-level as a troop, no matter how many of them were lost, it wouldn't hurt at all—more skeleton soldiers than any other troop type had been teleported over. Their number couldn't even be described using the word endless. My entire vision was filled with grayish white bones. The clacking sound of bones served as the angry roars of war for this otherwise silent army.

An ordinary skeleton soldier wouldn't even be able to defeat a slightly trained farmer in a one on one fight. However, one definitely couldn't underestimate the skeleton swarm. That endless sea of skeletons was forever the most fearsome part of the undead army. As long as they were sufficient in number, even ants would be able to overcome an elephant. Not to mention that I could also faintly make out that special skeleton troops and high-level undead were mixed in among them. The overconfident would be given a deadly lesson.

The undead army, which consisted of over ninety percent skeletons, started spreading out, with dangerous skeleton archers, skeleton mages, skeleton knights, skeleton assassins, skeleton giants, and various distorted skeleton beasts mixed in among them. This earthshaking army was sufficient to make any courageous warrior feel afraid, and any that died while fighting the undead would become yet another member of the skeleton army. In history, countless powerful countries and heroes had perished to this lowest-level of all swarm of skeletons.

But, today, these skeletons were destined to meet their most dangerous mortal enemy, an existence who had specially evolved to counter the undead's low-level swarm tactics.

Humility of the Seven Virtues, who was now also known as Jill…

This young purple-haired wood spirit stood at the forefront and glanced over at the skeleton swarm before her with a dissatisfied expression. She then disappeared into the wind, before transforming into a purple plant that grew at a speed that seemed to pick up with the wind.

10 meters, 100 meters, 1000 meters. The top of this plant reached into the clouds, as if it was a certain magical beanstalk from a fairy tale. The next moment, Jill bloomed.

Countless seeds explosively shot into the earth and took root, sprouted, and bloomed. In just a short instant, the skeleton swarm's path was blocked by a field of flowers.

The seeds had deeply embedded themselves into the ground, and large sunflowers suddenly emerged from underground with large mouths filled with sharp teeth that instantly devoured countless skeletons. With this nutrition acting as the fertilizer, parasitic vines began growing thanks to the nourishment from these bones, and a familiar scene from Red Maple Castle reenacted itself here, with the reappearance of a frightening piranha plant garden.

Just like my Seven Deadly Sins that were still undead, the Seven Virtues were both a unique species of their own as well as wood spirits. However, the difference between the Seven Virtues and a normal wood spirit was like the difference between a Seven Deadly Sin and a normal skeleton soldier… Fine then, perhaps I should say that apart from their physical appearances being similar, nothing else was same at all.

"Humility" had been born as a moving piranha plant garden to deal with "Pride" Omar's low-level skeleton swarm tactics. And now, the current "Humility" was no longer an assassin who could only ambush others from the shadows. She was now a moving wood spirit fortress.

Piranha plants and magical vines were familiar members of her garden, while peashooters that shot all sorts of magical projectiles, suddenly erected firm nut walls, and various other plant types from "Plants vs. Zombies" could all be seen. Every magical projectile was capable of exploding a large group of undead. A sea of magical plants would deal with the sea of skeletons, as magical plants were of slightly superior quality, and bringing the battle to one of attrition where the magical plants would endlessly steal souls and nourishment from the undead to continuously create new plants was Amelia's chosen strategy for "Humility."

After this flower garden was developed, several large fissures appeared in the ground. Numerous gigantic roots emerged and spat out various gigantic strengthened outer shells and magical plants as reinforcements.

"They're here! They're here!"

"For Mother!"

The wood spirits cheered as they jumped into the gigantic strengthened outer shells. With this flower garden and their mother forest's support, plant puppets as tall as mountain giants resembled historical beasts from epics stood up. They began attacking the undead that were being restrained by the flower garden.

Skeletons began fighting with plants, liches and peashooters exchanged ranged attacks, Abominations and vines began melee battles, and green plant giants went on a rampage, stomping hordes of undead to death with each step. But then arrived a Bone Dragon, who knocked over a green giant.

The battle was currently at a stalemate. It appeared that the wood spirits might even

have the upper hand. However, I knew that the undead still retained the advantage.

Most liches and great liches were still hiding in the rear safely. They were either using all their power to connect to the other Undead Planes to continuously summon new undead or simply summoning undead from the energies. Some were constantly casting death magic on the undead to heal their injuries as well. Meanwhile, most of the death knights and other high-level undead were guarding Aso, staying behind as backup.

Since this was an all-out final battle, this strategy of theirs might seem a bit too conservative, but I understood their choice. After all, their only goal was simple: to stall for time!

The Song to End All Souls was a siege battle level forbidden spell. This forbidden spell would open a large dimensional portal to the Undead Planes, summoning countless souls and death magic to baptize the world. The moment that this forbidden spell was finished casting, everything in a huge AoE around the caster would be transformed by death magic into a land filled with negative energy. All the living would undergo repeated attacks by the most powerful instant death magic. Not a single living creature would be able to escape becoming yet another undead soul.

This spell had only been successfully cast three times in history and caused the deaths of several million in total. It was also the signature forbidden spell of Undead Emperor Aso from the Desecration Plane.

What I was most concerned about was how long he would take to finish casting this spell. After all, when his incantation finished, that would result in all our deaths.

As for what I was currently doing…

"I'm riding a girl, I'm holding a girl in my hand, and I'm leading a group of girls on a charge. I suddenly feel like I've become such a winner in life… Hey, don't bite me!"

Alright then. I didn't even get to feel proud of myself for two minutes as I watched the battle unfold before me when my weapon, which I was holding, suddenly bit me. I suppose that only someone like me could experience such a thing.

"Can't you be a little more serious!? We're in the middle of a battle here!"

Well, I suppose that Gria was justified in being so angry. Gricasio, who she was fighting

with, wasn't easy to deal with at all. The two gigantic Bone Dragons clashed against each other, causing cracks to appear on Gria's finger bones that she had just polished, which really pained her heart.

An aerial troop's greatest advantage was doubtlessly in high-speed aerial ambushes. The moment I showed up, Gricasio led several Bone Dragons to attack me.

"Hey, long time no see, Gricasio. You've changed employers now? You're having fun acting as a lapdog for the Undead Emperors?"

How could I possibly miss the all-too-familiar sensation of fear in Gricasio's soulfire? It would be the most astonishing thing of all if this sly old dragon was willing to fight all-out and risk his life. I figured that Gricasio's personality was unlikely to change; he probably had hidden motivations.

"…Your Majesty, how could you say that of me? Am I not making things more convenient for you? I've already found out so many secrets and information about the SemiGod Undead Emperors for you!"

Was this supposed to be Gricasio's way of betraying the Undead Emperors right in the midst of battle? I had underestimated his lack of limits once again. He was more shameless than even I expected.

To be honest, even though I already knew that Gricasio was so shameless, I was still rendered speechless at hearing him say what he just did so proudly.

At the very least, Gricasio was supposed to be an Undead Lord, not to mention the strongest undead in all of Xiluo plus the First Senator for many years. Could he possibly get any more shameless?

"You should know that I'm actually not the ambitious type. Working under you is definitely my best choice."

From Gricasio's standpoint, he was actually telling the truth here. As a rare existence who didn't have any beliefs or honor that he lived by, the only thing he really wanted out of life was to live comfortably. The only reason why he sought to improve his power level was to help him live even better and safer.

"Surviving by simply relying on someone else stronger than me will require just a slight loss of face. Such a great deal!"– Gricasio

When Gricasio had still been alive, he had been a Gold Dragon with a truly unique personality. He was utterly different to those other Gold Dragons that were filled with a sense of justice, busying themselves every day. Instead, Gricasio spent every day thinking about how he could live longer and live comfortably to the end of the world.

That was why, back in the day, he was willing to be a steed in order to rely on the God of Holy Light's protection. During the Yongye era, he served me in order to rely on my protection. When he himself became one of the strongest around, he actually basically did nothing every day, simply spending his days idly as time passed by.

The only reason he would join and serve the Undead Emperors from the Undead Planes would be because he felt that they were powerful enough to serve as his protection. Not to mention that in this land of Eich, where the Holy Light was the prevailing religion, it would be suicidal for an undead to try joining most factions. However, things were now different for Gricasio.

The Undead Emperors were invading the mortal plane, which doubtlessly meant tremendous large-scale battles. Since Gricasio could freely move about in the mortal plane, he knew that he was likely to become part of the front-most vanguard. As an old Bone Dragon who was a lover of peace (self-proclaimed), this was far too dangerous for him—whoops—he meant this was too unjust. How could he stand for such a thing?

Gricasio had also heard about what happened in the Northlands. He detected traces of "that person's" familiar plots and trickery and also heard about how the undead were capable of living out in the open under the sun there. In that case, perhaps the Holy Church was no longer the only option available to him in the mortal plane, and he could choose another way of living that would be the most relaxing and safest for himself.

Perhaps, he could even sleep out in the open on a street and bask in the sunlight one day. Gricasio felt that he would definitely sleep wonderfully if he tried it out.

"Your Majesty! I have all sorts of information on all the various Undead Emperors. As long as you give me a safe territory and try to refrain from sending this old dragon into the front lines of battle, I shall serve you loyally once again. Besides, I believe that you currently need my assistance."

I never knew that an Immemorial Bone Dragon could smile in such a depraved fashion.

Meanwhile, behind Gricasio was a black spell array that was continually increasing in size—it was tremendous to begin with already. Undead Emperor Aso's forbidden spell was a ticking time bomb.

"Gricasio, you bastard! You're a shame upon all dragons! Can you have at least a little pride as a dragon!?"

Even though Gricasio's betrayal of the Undead Emperors was beneficial for us, even Gria was unable to withstand Gricasio's shamelessness.

"It's better to be alive as a coward than dead as a hero. Little Gria, all of those famous and heroic dragons from our generation are now nothing but dust, while someone like me that you refer to as a shame upon dragons is still living just fine. What's reputation supposed to be? Can I eat it? What's a dragon's pride supposed to be? Can that help me live forever? I have just one question for you. Can any of these formalities help me to live longer?"

Gricasio's words seemed to have some twisted logic to them that rendered me speechless. Gria also paused in surprise at Gricasio's utterly shameless words. Or, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that she was completely blocked off from saying anything more due to his lack of shame.

"Fine. Show me your sincerity. How about being my steed again after all this is over?"

As for me, I quite welcomed someone who knew which side he should be supporting.

"I knew that Your Majesty would be magnanimous! Steed? Wonderful, this is what I'm the most skilled at! I still have a saddle left behind from Xiluo that I've been keeping as memorabilia. I promise it's quite comfortable to ride on."

The delighted Gricasio immediately turned around and started smashing himself into the other Bone Dragons, spewing out dragon breath at his own former undead army. Even the typically silent undead army was thrown into a huge commotion by this.

The sudden turn of events shocked Feyman so much that even his chin bone fell off. This was utterly unexpected. The death knights that suddenly surrounded him was the best evidence that Feyman was now in an awkward position as well.

Meanwhile, Aso, who was in the distance, laughed out loud. No Undead Emperor was any kind person filled with trust so how could he have possibly not been on guard?

He didn't stop his incantation at all, but pointed with his fingerbone and lightly flicked the air using the dense power of death magic.

Grawrl!!!

A magical accessory that Gricasio had obtained from Aso exploded, causing Gricasio to fall out of the sky, injured by the sudden explosion. When he fell, he smashed a large amount of undead to death and created a large hole in the ground.

"The Emperor is the mightiest!!"

"Damned Gricasio! I knew he was unreliable."

"Milord, please know in your wisdom that I knew nothing about what Gricasio was intending. I'm your loyal and wholehearted follower!"

Feyman was eager to prove his innocence and obtain recognition as he attempted to suck up to Aso. However, Feyman didn't notice the displeased look on Aso's face. The explosion Aso caused just now was far smaller than he'd expected, yet that powerful Bone Dragon had fallen too quickly and pitifully.

At the current moment, I was clicking my tongue as well.

"That damned sly old fox."

Just like Aso, I had seen through the Bone Dragon's acting. Gricasio was simply pretending to have fallen!

"So shameless, so contemptible, so base, so uncaring about his own reputation. It's better to be any dragon other than Gricasio!"

Gria was filled with anger. As a fellow Myth-ranked Bone Dragon, it wouldn't possibly escape her eyes that Gricasio had simply been acting. Later, in the future, "it's better to be any dragon other than Gricasio" became a famous phrase across this land, just like my other phrase, "it's better to be a naïve idiot than it is to be Emordilorcan."

"Forget it. I never counted on this bastard to begin with. Who would dare ride such a steed?"

When I looked over at Aso, he, too, just happened to look in my direction. There was no mistaking his killing intent. What was about to happen next would definitely be a hard battle.

And, so, I moved my thumb across my throat, which represented my intention to take his head.

"Senior, let us have a fun battle to the death."

I used this method to express my respect as a junior to my senior. Meanwhile, Aso responded with uproarious soundless laughter via soul communication.

"Death shall accompany us for eternity! And you shall be the first to embrace death!"

"Senior, please speak something I can understand."

"Brat, you're dead!"

Chapter 286
An Undead Emperor’s Stubbornness

The gigantic Bone Dragon whirled around in the air and crashed into the ground like a falling meteor. Dust plumes from the collision rose several dozen meters high.

However, the higher-ups of both sides knew that Gricasio was definitely pretending to have fallen. Still, neither side had the time to deal with him right now.

And what surprised and satisfied me was that he sent a message to me before he fell.

"Aso currently isn't in his best condition. The method he used to descend in the mortal plane was to seal himself using magical insects. He forcefully used them to absorb his own power and decrease his power level, which will cause the mortal plane's dimensional will to make a mistake in judging his power level. The moment the seal is broken, the mortal plane will immediately expel him. His personal seal should be located on his waist! Emperor Yongye, you're the dark light for all us undead. Hurry up and kill Aso!"

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry at this. To be honest, I had never seen such a proper traitor before. I didn't even know how to get angry at him.

If my inference was correct, Gricasio probably gave some information on me over to Aso as well. This way, no matter who won in the end, he would still act as if he was really intending to help the victor.

Still, I quite welcomed his information. After all, from the very start, my target was Aso!

This Undead Emperor had already been exiled by the mortal plane itself, and his body had been changed by another dimension's dimensional laws. The difficulty for him to return to the mortal plane was pretty much on the scale of a fish trying to fly in the sky or a bird trying to swim underwater.

Not to mention, his descent this time was obviously something irregular. The fact that the Dimensional Door suddenly disappeared was doubtlessly the best evidence that

he had to pay a painful price in order to forcefully descend here.

As an analogy, it was as if rather than taking a normal transportation route, Aso rode here on a one-way rocket. Although he reached his destination in the end, he paid a tremendous price and probably wasn't even his complete self anymore.

It was impossible for him to be at his full power level right now. Half? One-third? Maybe even one-tenth! If I counted the fact that he sealed himself here, perhaps it was even possible that he was only at one percent of his real power.

Perhaps only the True Gods knew just how difficult to deal with and powerful the Undead Emperors were. After all these years, all the killable Undead Emperors had basically died. Only the undying ones would end up being exiled… As for Aso, he ruled an entire plane by himself, which was the best explanation of all. He was doubtlessly the type that would be most difficult to deal with.

However, even the Undead Emperors had to obey certain natural laws. Just like Rex's head currently attached to my waist, Aso was a lich as well. His phylactery wouldn't be able to remain in a different dimension from his physical body. If Aso died here, it would probably be eternal.

Perhaps this was an opportunity before me to truly eliminate an Undead Emperor right here and now. If the creator and ruler of the Desecration Plane died here, then this connection point to the Desecration Plane would naturally collapse on its own, and the Undead Emperors would need to find some other method of coming to the mortal plane.

"Aso absolutely has to die here!"

No matter what Aso was thinking, I wouldn't possibly let go of this chance since he was personally taking the risk by coming out here.

Gria, the Immemorial Bone Dragon, didn't meet any undead that was her match. We were now close enough for me and Aso to be able to physically see each other's facial expressions.

Even though he was the one that should have been in danger, Aso actually laughed, as if we were the ones in danger.

"Something's wrong."

Aso slowly lifted his head, and the soulfire in his eyes suddenly vanished. What remained were only two dark eye sockets. All the light around him suddenly distorted, as if a time-space distortion had appeared here.

The next instant, he started floating up as part of his body mysteriously vanished. Broken bones scattered in the air and kept vanishing, and it felt as if something was descending from the void. An endless void was devouring and consuming him. Aso was currently heading towards death of his own volition!

Many dimensional tears started appearing behind him. The entire sky trembled, as if some great demon was about to descend.

"Soul Sacrifice? He's trading his very soul for power? What he wants is worth so much to him?"

Of course I was familiar with this ability. Back at Sulfur Mountain City, I merely used the lower-ranking ability Soul Immolation, which already caused me to approach death.

Soul Immolation was like a candle that would slowly burn out one's own life force. Soul Sacrifice, on the other hand, was akin to a destructive, hellish fire. The end result of Soul Immolation would only be that one's soul would be scattered, while Soul Sacrifice required using one's own soul as food to trade for power from some unnamable existences in the void. The painful death of having one's soul devoured by those existences would last for tens of millions of years.

Yes. Death. A true eternal death. Just like how I was destined to die when I used Soul Immolation on myself back in the day, Aso was destined to die right from the moment he used Soul Sacrifice.

A fiery soul was the most foundational source of power. As long as the soul remained uninjured, one would be capable of utilizing their full potential. Aso was an Undead Emperor. And now that he was using Soul Sacrifice, he would obtain temporary power several times that of his full power level!

Why? Why was he willing to pay such a price!? Just what did he intend to do with this power? Why would an undying like him be so willing to sacrifice everything? I truly didn't understand.

"I said that death shall accompany us for eternity. Young junior of mine, let us taste the sweetness of death together."

In the void, the manically laughing SemiGod lich placed his hands together. With an explosive magic power, he began destroying everything around him, utterly distorting the natural laws.

In the void around him, tens of figures appeared. One had the head of a minotaur and the face of a horse, another had the head of an eagle but a human body, while others resembled demonic asuras—some even looked like cute girls. All these faces spoke as one. "Everything ends with death; death shall always descend. Death shall accompany everything for eternity."

"Death…"

The horse-faced soul messenger with the head of a minotaur chanted these words with a deafening voice. Yet the language of death surpassed any boundaries of language no matter the dimension.

"Shall accompany…"

"…everything for eternity."

The eagle-headed, human-bodied God was able to control Time. The moment he spoke the word "eternity," the entire battlefield froze.

I suddenly heard the chuckling a demonic asura sounded right in my ear and felt an icy breath right by my side. Chills ran down my spine—it felt as if death was literally descending right behind me. Perhaps this demonic asura was a type of Death God.

"I shall die, so you will die as well."

Aso was calm as he proclaimed thus, as if he was telling a story about daily life. The resolution in his words, however, was as unshakable as a mountain.

Powerful magic started to distort the rules of time and space as endless amounts of undead vanished from the battlefield into the void. These undead were all Aso's subordinates. Since he was willing to even sacrifice his own soul for greater power, why wouldn't he sacrifice his own subordinates' souls as well? All he needed to do was offer the souls connected to him to the void, and the existences in the void would

naturally seek out the sacrifices on their own.

What happened next was the most abnormal scene of all. The vanishing of the undead meant that endless amounts of undead died, all because their master willed so. Both sides of the battle sunk into fear and panic.

"Emperor, no!!"

Feyman had signed a complete soul contract with the Undead Emperor Aso more than twenty years ago in order to obtain his trust. Although he received a large amount of magical knowledge because of the contract, he was now the highest-level subordinate present here. He was also not trusted by Aso—was there any chance at all of him not being sacrificed?

"Ahhhh!"

The answer was obvious. The old lich Feyman's pitiful screams caused everyone who heard him to tremble in fear, yet Aso didn't even glance over at him. Soon, all that remained of Feyman was a still burning soul torch.

The former highest authority of Xiluo was, in an instant, transformed into a soul sacrifice that Aso absorbed for his own power. Feyman's unaccomplished ambitions and goals had all vanished into oblivion.

"I… I curse… this world…!"

Feyman, who was pitifully screaming, didn't manage to finish his curse. However, it was easy to tell from the maniacal look in his eyes that he was cursing all lives to perish together with him.

Aso had made the decision to toss all these souls as nourishment for his Soul Sacrifice in order to power up his forbidden spell.

On the wide, open ground, the multitudinous soul runes had finished being inscribed, while the soul messengers were opening the doors to the gates of hell. A curse of death, with endless amounts of enmity for life, was about to arrive in the mortal plane. All the living would soon be the dead.

This forbidden spell that should have required another ten or so hours to complete was actually finished in an instant with the power of the Soul Sacrifice spell. With its

completion, all that remained of Undead Emperor Aso was a manically laughing skeleton head.

"Hahaha, I've finally done it! I've finally done it! It was worth everything!"

Everyone else on the battlefield could only stare as all this unfolded.

"F***! All the Undead Emperors are insane!"

"Girls shouldn't say dirty words."

Although I was telling that to Harloys through our soul connection, I had no way to counter what she said. It would seem that Aso was truly, utterly insane. What was with him wanting to kill everything together with him!?

"The Song to End All Souls…"

"…has been completed."

Even I could do nothing. Time had been frozen, and I was unable to move. How could I possibly prevent all this?

Aso finished the final incantation and completed his Song to End All Souls. Soon, the Dimensional Doors to the Undead Planes open, and the power of death would baptize this world. Not a single living creature would be spared, including even me.

"How is this possible!? Why has this happened!?"

I still had too many things I hadn't accomplished yet. How could I possibly allow myself to re-enter the Cycle of Reincarnation just like this? Besides, if I died here, what would happen to our goals? I still had far too many things I wanted to do.

"I won't stand for this! I definitely can't be stopped here! If I die, what will happen to my country, my goals? This time, I'm no longer by myself."

Silver flames tore through all the magic restraints on me, while freedom returned to me with the power of ice. Were Undead Emperors all insane? Could only the insane reach the peak? Fine then. Let's have a competition to see who's more insane.

"An eternal eon of ice shall arrive, which shall end everything…"

I began uttering the Ice Aeon forbidden spell which would bring eternal sleep. A world of snow and ice descended upon us. After all, only a forbidden spell would be able to fight against a forbidden spell, and since my mana was insufficient to pay the costs for this forbidden spell, I would simply have to do the same as Aso and pay with my life and soul.

Soulfire began burning in my eyes. Who cared? Wasn't it just burning up my soul and competing in life force? Wasn't it simply being devoured by the void for tens of thousands of years? I'll play with you to the end! Until I reach my goal, I'll always crawl back up from hell or the River Styx as many times as it takes!

"Hah, what an amusing junior. Alright then, I suppose I should stop joking around with you… Since you were respectful enough to address me as your Senior, then I'll go ahead and give you this gift as a present from Senior to Junior."

Just as I was about to use my own soul as fuel for my forbidden spell, I received an unexpected message from Aso. It contained vast amounts of valuable magical knowledge and even included the ultimate forbidden spell he was casting—the Song to End All Souls.

"This is…"

I was busy being astonished by the content of the message I just received and stopped attempting to exchange my soul for power. Meanwhile, the Song to End All Souls suddenly changed its form slightly. Numerous portals to all the Undead Planes opened wide. However, what came out weren't souls filled with negative energy, nor did death arrive for everyone.

Bzzzz.

Along with a tremendous buzzing sound, six black pillars of light covered the skies. Indeed, they were the exact same as the earlier black pillar of light connecting the mortal plane to the Desecration Plane. These were six Dimensional Doors connected to the six Undead Planes that were invading the mortal plane!

All six Dimensional Doors were wide open, and untold amounts of undead swarmed into the battlefield. It was then that I understood everything that just happened thanks to the magical knowledge I received from Aso.

The Song to End All Souls was a siege battle-level forbidden spell. It would open a large

dimensional portal to the Undead Planes, summoning countless souls and death magic to baptize the world. The moment this forbidden spell was finished casting, everything in a huge AOE around the caster would be transformed by death magic into a land filled with negative energy, and all the living would undergo repeated attacks by the most powerful instant death magic. Not a single living creature would be able to escape becoming yet another undead soul.

That was the understanding that Harloys had of this spell. Although she was close to the truth, she had actually been slightly off.

Just from the foundational workings of the Song to End All Souls, it was easy to tell that it was actually a mega AOE space-type magic spell. One of its foundational aspects was indeed to open up the Dimensional Doors leading to the Undead Planes that possessed immense amounts of negative energy and death. Typically, Aso would have connected his forbidden spell to the Requiem Plane, which was an Undead Plane filled with souls and the power of instant death. That was an Undead Plane in which even the undead that had physical bodies were incapable of surviving. As long as he connected his forbidden spell to the Requiem Plane, all the living would naturally meet their demise. However, this time, he connected his spell to the six more-normal Undead Planes.

Yes, the six Undead Planes that were planning on invading the mortal plane.

Corpse, Ice, Desecration, Blood, Darkness, and Deathmist. With the six Dimensional Doors to these planes ajar, toxins, frost, plague, and many more elements of death entered the mortal plane. Along with the undead armies, the Undead Calamity had arrived!

Aso finally closed his eyes for eternity, in satisfaction as he watched all this occur. His skull, which was all that remained of him, dropped to the ground. That was the only thing he left behind.

Undead Emperor Aso, an existence which anyone in the world would fear, had perished.

He had sacrificed his own soul to forcefully open all the Dimensional Doors to six Undead Planes. He borrowed the unsteady nature of this area to allow a forbidden spell that should have only been able to connect to one plane to connect to six planes instead!

Behind these six Dimensional Doors were twelve more Undead Emperors ready and eager to get into the action. Although they would still be unable to personally descend right away, most of the undead armies from the six combined Undead Planes were now able to directly descend. This was a huge problem for the mortal plane.

[The Undead Calamity has arrived. Your Legend-ranked Quest "Battle of Two Dragons" has failed. 20,000 Fate Points have been deducted from you as a punishment. Legend-ranked Quest "Infighting Amongst Three Snakes" has been activated. Please hurry to the Cloud Tower to continue the main storyline Quest as quickly as possible. System Notification: For once, things don't seem to be your fault so there's no punishment for you apart from a Fate Points deduction. But if you keep taking your time with this, you won't need a punishment anymore.]

All I could see was an endless sea of undead. My feeling of depression and helplessness caused me to not know whether I should laugh or cry. Undead Emperor Aso gave me an incredible gift of knowledge. Not only did he give me all his magical knowledge as well as past experiences, I also learned why he made such a huge sacrifice. However, now wasn't the time for me to be mulling over such things or feeling empathy for him.

"Damn it, he pulled one over me."

Throughout the years, this was the first time I had lost so pitifully. The senior Undead Emperor taught me a painful lesson using his experience. From the very start, he had intended to sacrifice himself after descending to open up six Dimensional Doors connecting to the Undead Planes. No matter what I did, this would still have been the final result.

No, the only difference was that because I voluntarily came out and attacked, I actually trapped myself, heavily surrounding myself by undead. The senior used himself as bait to make the junior suffer incredibly so.

I could see nothing but an endless undead army. These were the elite undead soldiers from six combined Undead Planes. These ancient undead warriors that swore to take back everything they had lost had no sympathy, no strategy, no pity, or even anger. All they had left was loathing for the living and a desire to slaughter.

Their black battle flag was right before me. At this instant, I understood the Undead Emperor's final action.

"He didn't want everything he had ever learned to be lost, so he gave all his knowledge to me, the only possible recipient who could accept it. And if I can survive this gigantic army's onslaught, I'll be a passable successor in his eyes? Oh man, what a strict senior he is."

I slowly raised my battle hammer and gathered Holy Light. I opened up my golden angel wings, giving me limitless power. This was no time to be giving up.

I was forced to the brink? That was something I had long since gotten used to. Besides, this situation was still much better than the one I was just in where I couldn't even do anything other than attempt to cast a forbidden spell.

Death? I'd already faced death countless times. No, I should say that I'd even experienced it several times.

“…I shall live on! I swear it!"

I decided to skip over any big words. Since I was burning up passionately, all I needed was my iron resolve to be unwilling to die here like this.

"Gather into the defensive formations! We still have reinforcements on the way! We haven't lost yet!"

I shouted as I gathered the wood spirits into solid defensive formations. As for whether or not we really had reinforcements? I wouldn't know. Perhaps the Bardi Empire's security forces would come here to take a look, so I wasn't completely lying. After all, I first had to raise our morale for us to have hope in persisting. However…

Boom!

Boom!

There was the sound of cannons in the distance that caused large amounts of the undead army to go up in smoke. This could only have been caused by more than one hundred heavy cannons.

"There really were reinforcements after all?"

"There really were reinforcements after all!!"

Only when Harloys' retort overlapped with my astonishment did I deepen my understanding of just how well this silly cat understood me.

I turned around to look and felt incredibly moved. Before my eyes was the Borealis's familiar blue and white paint, while the Mizar, too, was such a reassuring sight with its cannons that were firing upon the undead.

"They're finally here."

Weren't they our reinforcements that came from far away? When I calculated the time, they should have arrived long ago.

However, they weren't our only reinforcements. There was a welcome surprise, too. A Bone Dragon was struck down by those gigantic figures in the sky that were displaying their outstanding slaughtering skills.

With one spewing of dragon breath, a large patch of undead would be cleared. More than ten dragons using dragon breath together caused the entire ground to fissure, with everything both living and non-living transformed into nothing more than scorched earth.

"Dragon knights? Halent is here as well?"

Those dragons of an assortment of colors began attacking this visiting undead army from the Undead Planes. The dragon knights had made their decision.

Perhaps it was the mana waves sent out by the forbidden spell that drew them here. Regardless, the dragon knights were currently fighting with their backs to their own home city. They were following ancient knightly traditions, and at this moment, they had the resolution to pay any price necessary.

"Your Highness!"

Not only that, but a red dragon landed next to me, bringing my companions Krose, Eaglestorm, Yawen, Cohen, Lilith, and the others. They had all arrived!

They all unsheathed their sharp swords. Even if the number of opponents we were facing were endless to the point of despair, my companions were all filled with combat

fervor while retaining calm expressions.

Yes, just like me, they had also experienced brinks far too many times. Be it Sulfur Mountain City, Red Maple Castle, or Antuen, we had experienced such things together. How could this type of battle possibly cause them to lose their calm?

"Wait a moment! Boss, why is everyone calling me Wait-Wait?"

Alright then, even at such a time, Beifeng sharply detected that there was something different about his treatment and immediately protested.

"Stop wasting everyone's time, Wait-Wait."

"Wait-Wait, get out of the way!"

"Wait-Wait, remember not to drag us down!"

"Wait-Wait, stop intentionally changing the mood of the scene. Be a little more serious; we're in the midst of a battle here."

Alright then. Should I be delighted here? Even when facing such opponents, they still had the mood to joke around. Only this type of warrior would always perform at their one hundred percent in any situation.

Only that unfortunate Wait-Wait, who apparently picked up a new nickname somehow, could only grit his teeth and swallow down his anger as he prepared to vent it on the enemies, instead. When he implored me with an innocent-seeming expression for assistance, I ignored him and charged at the forefront as the vanguard with my battle hammer.

"For the Holy Light! That enemy is worthy of a fight! Wait-Wait, if you dare to make a mess of things, be careful of my hammer's might!"

Chapter 287
Justice

From Aso, I learned of a story that had been seldom told before—how he had walked the path from nothing to the peak, from a nobody to a SemiGod Undead Emperor.

An equally few number of people knew about the true, illustrious history of the undead kingdom that arose after the immemorial great demon empires. Thousands of years ago, there once existed a country that had now long vanished in the tides of time—the Tark Republic.

A republic? Indeed, it was a country founded by escaped slaves, farmers who had lost their lands, and artisans who possessed nothing. It was one of the rarest types of countries of all, a country without a ruling class.

Perhaps this country had never been recorded in history mainly because it was a country of undead and magic.

Aso F. Milanton was Aso's real name. Slaves weren't supposed to have family names, and he only obtained the name of Milanton after he was freed. Milanton was the family name of the priest who had saved him from slavery, and F was a special middle initial commonly used in the Tark Republic to represent a person's freedom from slavery.

Yes, that's right. The powerful Undead Emperor Aso had been born as a lowly slave.

"I was born as a slave to serve the great demons. When I'm old enough, they'll eat me. That's all the value I had in life."

The great demons had personal power levels, natural talents, and cultures far surpassing that of humans. Humanity naturally became their livestock. With traditions and culture breaking down for humans, it would only take three or four generations for any intelligent creature to be reduced to the primal times.

Even thousands of years later in the present, plenty of great demons still had the hated habit of eating humans. This was the best evidence that they were related to the ogres who also ate humans.

Slave, servant, thing, and backup food source. This was the life set out from Aso. Aso had been forcefully injected with such a way of thinking ever since his birth. He also used to treat this as his only value in life. Until one day…

"Don't eat my mother! Damned monster!"

When the great demon named Wok that Aso served intended to make Aso's mother into a meat pie, it was perhaps that which had awoken the slight remnant of resistance in Aso's body. Or, perhaps it was the most basic instinct for all creatures to want to protect their mother. Even though the great demons and "common sense" told him that it was only natural for humans to be eaten, and that it was the fate of all humans, Aso still acted instinctually.

Aso lifted up a meat knife and ambushed the great demon from behind, cutting off Wok's head. Then, he poured oil on Wok's body and burned it to ashes in order to truly kill Wok off and prevent him from regenerating.

In that generation where an adult great demon like Wok would easily be able to kill several tens of adult humans, this was an incredibly heroic feat. However, Aso didn't receive his relatives' gratitude or respect from other humans…

"Why did you do that! Why did you kill Master Wok! What are we supposed to do now? We'll all be killed off without even having gotten fat yet! No, we won't be fed, and we'll starve to death first!"

If you attack a person who's abusing his pet, perhaps the first one to bite you would be the pet that you were attempting to save. After many years and many generations of being raised as slaves, these humans, whose minds were basically empty, were no different from pets.

The end result was that Aso, who had saved his own mother, was actually angrily roared at and loathed by his own family and other humans. Finally, they even tied him to a board, intending to sacrifice him in order to appease the great demons' anger.

However…

"Kill them all and hang them up in the plaza to dry as cured meat!"

Even though the murderer Aso was already captured, how could the slave masters possibly allow a group of slaves related to someone that killed a slave master to be

forgiven? Otherwise, if news of this spread, the entire great demon society would be shaken—especially if more slaves tried copying them.

The vicious great demon slave masters intentionally let Aso stay together with his own family, locked up in the same room before execution. They also told everyone that they were all going to die because of Aso. And so, when the next day arrived and Aso was the first one to be hung up on the executioner's rack, he already had several hundred injuries on his body and had lost an eye and a foot.

Vicious slave masters like these would meet rebellion and resistance? How was a tamed cow, sheep, or pig supposed to resist? All they knew was how to cry when faced with the slaughtering knife, and then obediently offer up their necks.

Aso's family didn't protect him? His mother that he tried so hard to protect was the very person who carved out his right eye, and his own father was the person who broke Aso's right hand for daring to slay Wok. Meanwhile, his starving family ate Aso's foot as their final meal.

When humans didn't even treat themselves like humans, it was truly something to sigh about… it was pitiful, laughable, hateful, and sad…

When Aso was hung on the rope for his impending execution, his single bloodshot eye observed his family and the other humans that were all numb to his fate without any hatred for them or fear of his impending death. The only thought he had was: "They're all so pitiful…"

As the noose tightened on his neck, Aso still didn't have any fear of death. He simply pitied them even more.

"Ah, you all aren't the only ones to be pitied. I'm quite pitiful as well. No, I should say that all of humanity is quite pitiful."

Right before Aso lost his consciousness, he saw a black flag waving in the distance. This flag was a strange flag with a black hand holding a lamp. Under the flag was a group of black-clothed people with strange appearances.

"Child, are you alright?"

When Aso finally woke up again, he discovered that he had been saved by a group of strangers. They called themselves the "Black Will," and seemed like a strange group to

Aso.

They told Aso that humans weren't born just to become food for the great demons. They told Aso that each human had the responsibility to fight for their own survival. They told Aso that ogres and great demons could be defeated after all. They told Aso that not every person had the courage to fight, and that they came just for him!

These black-robed individuals gave the young Aso a choice. Either he could continue staying together with his family, and they would help him to find a safe valley to live in, or he could choose to join Black Will.

Aso took one final glance at his family whose expressions were filled with fear and blankness. How could a natural-born predator like him possibly stay together with cattle and sheep like them? Aso unhesitatingly chose to join the Black Will.

"Idiots, we are justice!"

The Black Will had gotten used to using that as their catchphrase to talk to other humans who were numb to their fates. This seemed like an angry denunciation of others, but, in truth, it was filled with hope as well. They hoped that their fellow humans would be awakened.

But, most of the time, they received nothing but blank looks. They wouldn't force anyone to join them, either, as that would be bad for everyone.

Despite being betrayed countless times by fellow humans, they still chose that as their catchphrase. However, only those who willingly resisted on their own would be able to become their companions. Otherwise, it would be better for those who couldn't resist continuing being cattle and sheep.

After that was a bloody battle that lasted several hundred years. The slaves had no will to fight, no matter how strong or fattened they were. They remained simply as cattle and sheep waiting to be slaughtered for food.

Even those that awakened to becoming tigers or cougars instead of cattle and sheep still didn't have any resources to help them become stronger. They had no weapons to fight with. Things were truly difficult.

Meanwhile, the humans' enemies were the previous victors of the Holy War. The great demon countries covered the entire continent, and their voodoo spells, curses, and

magic spells were all considered absolutely top-class. All that the "Black Will" organization possessed were their own souls and physical bodies. Of course, they also had the resolution to change everything, no matter what it took.

But in the world of Eich where souls were the source of power, having a soul, a physical body, and resolution was enough.

Indeed, they may not have been able to obtain precious magical knowledge and ingredients, thus they were unable to become wise mages. Nor did they know hunting techniques passed down through the generations, so hunter and ranger job classes were impossible for them. It was already difficult enough to eat well and sleep well. Weak bodies that suffered from malnutrition made it quite difficult to become outstanding warriors. The great demons' True Gods were the Main Gods of that era, so it was even more unfeasible to obtain divine favor as a priest or divine job class. The mysterious druid job class was still an elven secret in this generation. However, there was one job class which only needed one's soul and flesh and blood.

Yes, the job class known as the undead mage. This so-called evil job class known for toying with souls and flesh and blood had long since been forgotten that it was the job class that represented hope for the entire human race.

Perhaps it was a joke by some demon, or some secret plot but a certain Death God, but part of the knowledge regarding undead magic that came from the far ancient demons was obtained by the Black Will. They then spread this knowledge to all who were willing to resist against the great demons.

The Black Will's pitch-black flag of a raised lantern came from this as well. They viewed themselves as the guides for humanity in a pitch-dark night to firm humanity's resolution.

Aso was the same. He was only twelve years old at the time when he joined the Black Will and began learning undead magic as a dark warrior…

The Black Will allied with the elven species and traded for precious magical knowledge from the annoying long-ears. They sowed seeds of discord amongst the great demons' countries, pitting them against each other. They used evil blood sacrifices to appease True Gods not associated with the great demons, giving birth to the first group of dark warrior job class members. They allied themselves with the dragons and became dragon knights. Aso grew together with the Black Will,

experiencing all these things.

After experiencing countless battles, Aso's power level grew past the Legend and Myth ranks, but all his companions from the very beginning when the Black Will had recruited him had long since perished. With members of Black Will continuing to fall left and right, the pitch-black flag was finally left for him to carry alone.

Aso F. Milanton became the Third Senator of the Tark Republic and held this position for 172 years. Indeed, by the time the long battle between all other species and the great demons finally ended, the formerly impulsive boy had already become an undying lich king.

The Tark Republic viewed cultivating undead magic as glorious. The boundaries between life and death had long since been broken here, and undead magic was even commonly known by all its citizens. When the Tark Republic was at its strongest, it possessed several hundred SemiGod undead and had sufficient power to even challenge the Gods. However, out of all things they could have possibly done, they broke an incredible taboo that they shouldn't have. The Tark Republic invented an absolutely perfect undead magic spell with no drawbacks which could transform any living person into an undead.

When all the living were easily capable of turning themselves into undead to receive limitless life, and the Tark Republic only kept increasing in population but never decreasing, the Cycle of Reincarnation had evidently been broken. This was something that the Gods were unwilling to overlook.

And so, calamity visited the Tark Republic. The elves that had been the Tark Republic's magic teachers and allies suddenly betrayed the Tark Republic and ambushed their capital. A forbidden spell transformed the entire capital into a tremendous canyon. This canyon was actually the famous "Fissure of Betrayal," although the origin of this canyon's name had long since been forgotten by history.

The Tark Republic that lost the protection of the Gods became all other species' public enemy number one in a single night. All its cities were surrounded and attacked, and the Dark Warriors lost their divine powers. The dragons mysteriously abandoned the Tark Republic. Only the undead mages were still capable of fighting (death knights hadn't been born as a species yet at this time). The top undead mages weren't in any way weaker than the strongest elven mages and could definitely hold their own.

However, they ended up meeting their mortal enemy. The elven mages made a new discovery during the war against the Tark Republic. There was a special golden energy and ringing sound that could directly turn any undead into nothingness. Yes, that was the original form of the Holy Light.

Luckily, or, perhaps, unluckily, an undead archmage discovered a way to open Dimensional Doors and even succeeded in teleporting to other planes that possessed only negative energy and death. These became the first few Undead Planes to have been discovered.

The few remaining elites of the Tark Republic escaped to these Undead Planes as their combined enemies were far too strong for them to stop. The perfect spell to transform anyone into undead was put into use once more here as no living person could possibly survive in the Undead Planes. Every living person of the Tark Republic willingly chose to become undead.

The elves betrayed them, the dragons betrayed them, and the Gods plotted against them. Undead magic had once represented glory and freedom, while the origin of Holy Light had such a story behind it that couldn't see the light of day. With all these factors combined, it was quite natural for this piece of history to have been "forgotten," as history was always written by the victors.

Was it Aso's nostalgia for his home country? His hatred of all those who betrayed the Tark Republic? His fondness for his people? Or was it simply being unwilling to be forgotten, and that he didn't want the Tark Republic to be forgotten by history? Aso had unhesitatingly sacrificed himself to build the portals necessary for his people to return to the mortal plane, along with giving me his memories and experiences as the final evidence that he had once existed. Perhaps, it was to make his junior learn about this already forgotten country and its justice.

Hordes of undead arrived through the six wide-open Dimensional Doors like an unstoppable flood. All the undead from these six planes had all sorts of different appearances and species. However, they all came from the same original place: the Tark Republic that had already been forgotten for millennia.

Today, these forgotten ones had returned. They proudly lifted their pitch-black flag of the raised lantern and, in unison, shouted out that same old catchphrase with a deafening roar.

"Idiots, we are justice!"

Chapter 288
Working for the Interests of One's Country and a Choice

Nobody could have expected that right after the war against the beastmen ended in the Northlands that next year's spring would have so many major events in succession. All of them were long-term events that would have major impacts on the entire world.

When did these changes start occurring? Was it when Undead Emperor Aso personally descended and sacrificed everything, which made the undead invasion utterly unblockable?

Was it due to Amelia's coincidental arrival at Port Victoria and unintentional creation of the wood spirit species?

Or was it due to Roland and Ayer who rushed here and allied with various True Gods, making a world-shaking proclamation?

At the time, probably nobody could predict the future. The most important thing of all was that there were six black pillars of light absorbing souls here. When Aso used his own life to open up all six Dimensional Doors to the six Undead Planes, countless undead silently arrived from these Dimensional Doors, and the scariest Undead Calamity had arrived.

Next to the pillars was a pitch-black battle flag that waved in the wind. Black-robed knights rode on the skeleton warhorses, and there were hordes of liches equipped with bone staves. There was a sea of skeleton mages, and hundreds of great liches floated across to the mortal plane. The amount of undead casters arriving was far above the norm for an undead army.

These undead were in no hurry at all. They merely organized themselves into squads.

The undead filled all corners of my vision with no end in sight. The elite undead had accumulated for over thousands of years in the six Undead Planes and now continually arrived with constant reinforcements. Although I recognized countless high-level

undead troop types, there were also many I did not. Numerous imposing gigantic undead beasts made the earth tremble with every step they took.

"It seems like we probably won't win…"

We definitely didn't lack combat strength on our side, with two aerial battleships, Borealis and Mizar, plus the wood spirits and twentyish dragons—more than enough to conquer a small country. Still, that was no guarantee of victory against this endless stream of high-level undead.

"If only my Red Hunting Hounds were here, or if only I could use the 'Infallible Diffindor,' then the result would definitely…"

"Still be the same! Just look at how many liches there are! Look at all those complete and orderly combat squadrons! No matter how strong your Red Hunting Hounds are, they're only one military squadron in strength, while we're facing the level of an undead empire here, not to mention six combined empires' total strength. Only your Yongye army from when you were the strongest might possibly be a match. No, since there were too many internal factions within the Yongye army, while our current enemy is far more highly unified, with liches being as common as dogs and Myth ranks everywhere, even your Yongye army would probably lose in the end."

Alright then, the silly cat already made it her innate nature to retort at everything I said. Still, everyone present knew that what she said was the truth. Our opponents' strength far exceeded our expectations.

When an ancient undead kingdom like the Tark Republic was reborn, and when they chose to return to the mortal plane, they became a force that no single person or military squad would be able to deal with. Their opponent would definitely be the entire world.

However… I stared at a certain person!

"Why are you looking at me? Don't you all know that a True God's incarnation in the mortal plane can only reach a SemiGod's power level? What can one SemiGod possibly do in this situation?"

Although I didn't know why Ayer sent his incarnation here, it was evident that the

scrolls attached to his waist were no ordinary objects. Perhaps they had the power to change the combat situation, not to mention…

"SemiGod? A mere SemiGod can defeat the powerful Goddess, the Queen of Storms, in a single attack? Who the hell do you think you're fooling?!"

Alright then, nobody actually dared to say that out loud, but it was quite obvious that everyone who had traveled together was thinking this. It was written all over their faces.

"Cough, these are simply the basic dimensional laws. Even I must obey them. Rather than saying that I defeated little Angie, it was more like I scared her away."

Ayer was already being quite kind to explain things to us. What else were we supposed to say?

But, from how I saw it, Ayer's expression seemed to be a bit off ever since he arrived here.

Ayer's expression was quite complex as he kept glancing over at where Aso had perished, leaving behind only his skull. He seemed to be waxing nostalgic as well as hesitating about something. Finally, he sighed helplessly and didn't do anything at all.

Perhaps other people thought that he was frustrated about the Undead Calamity, but I just received Aso's memories and knew that the origins of how the Black Will learned undead magic were shrouded in mystery. There were rumors in his memory that the Black Will either learned undead magic as a joke by a demon or due to a certain Death God. And if it was the latter, anyone could figure out that it must have been Ayer using even their knee to think about it.

I was intending to say something, but Ayer seemed to see through me as he slightly shook his head and clapped his hands lightly.

And then…

We were now in a familiar forest, with giant trees all around us. Ayer managed to teleport all of us here to safety in just an instant.

There was only the sound of a soft wind rustling the leaves, along with the babbling of a river in the distance. The undead and their commotion outside the forest seemed to

disappear entirely.

"Take this."

I caught what Ayer tossed over to me. It was half a skull, the only item that Aso left behind of his body.

"Since he gave his memories and experiences to you, why don't you take this as well. After some processing, it should be, at the minimum, a SemiGod Equipment. With that fellow's personality—he hates being lonely and is afraid of being forgotten by others more than anything—let him keep his name through the ages in another fashion like this."

By this point, it was quite obvious that Ayer had a connection with Aso and the Tark Republic undead. He didn't intend to hide it at all as he continued speaking slowly.

"Actually, I knew that he would pick you. After all, the two of you have really similar personalities. No need to rush to disagree with me, as I have evidence for my statement. Both of you typically act casual, but the moment that some topic important to you is mentioned, or if you're forced to the brink, the fact is that both of you will instantly go crazy. Let me just try asking you, if you were in his position, would you make the same insane choice as him in the end?"

"Of course I wouldn't… I think?"

Alright then, I actually had to admit that if I was in his situation with his life experiences, perhaps I would act even more insanely than Aso.

"…More importantly is that while both of you appear to be the practical type on the surface, you're actually both idealists that chase after your dreams. Not to mention, you both just happen to possess sufficient power to realize your dreams that others wouldn't even dare to dream of. Did you think that he was ignorant of everything you did in the Northlands? He already gave you his recognition. Since he chose you in the end, you must accept his present."

I nodded silently as I put away Aso's skull that had already transformed into a material similar to mercury. Meanwhile, his more precious gift was already inside my mind, and nobody would be able to steal that from me.

But now, I was getting a little afraid after the matter was done.

After all, from a certain standpoint, if I didn't intentionally antagonize Ayer back in the day, and if I didn't stop myself in the end and truly managed to establish an undead empire, perhaps the end result for me would be similar to what happened to Aso just now.

"But what should we do about the undead outside?"

Little Rosa of the Seven Virtues didn't know who this seemingly powerful young man before her was, nor did she understand why the atmosphere suddenly became so heavy. While everyone else was busy remaining abnormally silent, Rosa only cared about whether her home would still be under threat or not.

"The undead? Do they have some type of relationship with you guys? Do you have any way to stop them? Do these little gals still intend to fight to the end against the undead?"

Ayer was quite interested in the little girl before him. After all, it was incredibly rare for Eich to have a brand-new species. It was an event which only happened once every few centuries or even millennium. The world would become a livelier place now with the wood spirits.

"Of course there's a relationship to us, if they try using another forbidden spell to attack the forest…"

Alright then, little Rosa started blushing right after saying that. Since she and the other Virtues had directly received all of Amelia's knowledge, it took only some basic reasoning for her to realize that she had said something unnecessary.

Due to an insufficiency in the Elemental Tide, the Undead Emperors would still be unable to descend for the time being unless they wanted a repeat of what happened to Aso.

And in the current undead army, even if there were some top level undead archmages capable of casting forbidden spells, unless they were at Aso's power level, they would likely be unable to threaten the Forest of Dreams which was basically at the level of a dimensional will. The most important part of all, however, was that…

"The undead no longer have any reason to attack the Forest of Dreams…"

Indeed, there was no need for either side to continue the battle. Before, the undead

had to conquer the Forest of Dreams at all costs in order to eliminate the rock in the gears of the Dimensional Door, preventing dimensional teleportation from going as smoothly as it should.

But now, not only the Desecration Plane but all six Undead Planes had been successfully connected to the mortal plane due to Aso's sacrifice. The undead had a perfectly smooth dimensional teleportation available to them now, so why would they still need to conquer the Forest of Dreams? That would be a choice that they would need to pay a heavy price for and would bring them zero benefits. Nobody with intelligence would choose to continue attacking this place.

If I was the overall commander for the undead, I would choose to completely ignore this nigh-impregnable turtle-like fortress filled with thorny defenses and simply focus on achieving my next combat objective.

Since I had received part of Aso's memories, I now understood the undead's overall goals.

It was actually quite simple. They just wanted glory and to reestablish the Tark Republic. However, a country with only undead in it was no good. Any country that didn't have sources of receiving new citizens with fresh blood would quickly decay even if it had no outside enemies.

"Kasolan's Tears? Could it be that the Tark Republic still possesses the perfect undead transformation spell that can change any living person into an undead retaining intelligence with a one hundred percent rate? The accumulation of Kasolan's Tears in the Bardi citizens' bodies is the catalyst for that spell? Damn it, any of Aso's memories regarding the undead's future plans are tattered or completely blank. Senior, you put so much thought into what memories to give me and what to leave out!"

But even though I didn't have a full answer to what the undead's plans were, it wasn't difficult to guess their next objective.

Perhaps the Undead Emperors were already treating the Bardi Empire's citizens as the future new citizens of the Tark Republic. The Undead Emperors had only one goal: to create new blood for this old republic so that the ancient kingdom could revive itself in history on the mortal plane. They desired for the undead to have the right to live out openly under the sun, just like all the other species.

And once they realized this dream of theirs, taking revenge on the elves, dragons, or even attacking the Gods themselves were all possible. Unlike Xiluo which kept having internal conflicts and was like a pile of loose sand, the Tark Republic had an incredibly high internal degree of unity. They would definitely have high chances of victory no matter who they faced.

In that case, since the Tark Republic needed to obtain space to exist and resources for itself in the mortal plane, they would definitely have conflicts with the surrounding countries. This was a most basic clash of personal interests and was unavoidable.

Still, I didn't understand how they would be able to make the Bardi Empire's major nobles and local domain lords abandon thoughts of resisting and simply turn into the undead. Battles and conflicts would definitely erupt. Suddenly, I now understood why my Quest had changed its name from "Battle of Two Dragons" to "Infighting Amongst Three Snakes."

When the Bardi Empire and Mage Country were the only participants in the war, they were naturally the "Two Dragons." But now, the undead Tark Republic had fully arrived and joined in—they became the third faction, hence "Three Snakes." Naturally, we would have to pick a side in this three-way war.

I thought about it for the while but still came to the same conclusion as before: I would choose the Mage Country. Although I sympathized with the Tark Republic, they had become the invaders of the mortal plane so it was impossible for me to help them. Not to mention that their final goal was one which would definitely cause the Gods to become anxious. It was a path already proven by history that it would definitely fail. How could I possibly follow down that path with them?

But still, passively waiting for the undead to make their own decisions was something that would make me anxious as well.

"Roland, do you still remember that report you gave me? I discussed it with everyone, and we all agreed that it was worth a try. Don't you think that right now is an excellent opportunity for the first step of your experiment? As long as your plan is successful, at the very least it'll bring some safety to your wood spirits. After all, based just on their geographic location, they're going to be facing long-term warfare in the future. You can't interfere too much directly to protect them, either, as that'll affect the species' overall development potential.

When Ayer mentioned my plan, even I was astonished to hear that the Gods had agreed. My plan was of an enormous scale—it would affect countless individuals and even numerous True Gods' personal benefits. I was only half joking when I proposed it and didn't expect Ayer and the other True Gods to actually dare to implement it.

"Then, what should we do?"

Ayer's incarnation smiled without answering. Instead, he lightly tore the first scroll in his hand. The signature on this scroll belonged to the God of Fate.

"Sign here, and read it out loud together with me. We proclaim that…"

Chapter 289
Martial Arts Harem Story Protagonist Mass Production Plan

"I, Ayer, Death God, Guardian of the Cycle of Reincarnation, and Defender of Order henceforth declare that, in this Holy War, we proclaim battle against the Chaos Faction as well as all invaders from other dimensions!"

It was a simple proclamation that the entire world heard, yet it shocked every living creature. Not only were ordinary people shocked, but even the other True Gods and demons were shocked by this ancient True God's calm yet sudden proclamation.

Perhaps this was only a simple proclamation of war, but the hidden meaning and political ramifications behind it were worth deep consideration.

A proclamation of war? Why make a proclamation of war? Weren't all the Holy Wars in the past begun just like that with no need for such proclamations?

Why was the Death God Ayer making the proclamation of war? Based on the current state of things in the Order Faction, even if they wanted to proclaim war, shouldn't it have been the strongest Order God, the God of Holy Light, declaring the war?

No other True God had made a public statement like this before, so why was it that Ayer, who had stayed out of so many Holy Wars and remained neutral, had suddenly come out with such a proclamation? Just what was Ayer intending? Wasn't he afraid of the God of Holy Light's displeasure?

Oh, and he even used the term "we." That meant that there were others apart from him! Was this an internal power struggle amongst the Order Gods? Were factions beginning to form amongst the True Gods of Order?

Only the first part of this proclamation already caused the perceptive to notice that there was a huge storm brewing. It would make anyone afraid to think too deeply about what was really happening.

Still, I nodded, as I had expected all this.

"Battling without a proclamation of war? Infighting without making it apparent on the surface? So we'll all just pretend to get along, while secretly doing our own things?"

"Yep. We don't need to directly have any conflicts with the God of Holy Light and his Follower Gods. What we need is the right to speak about the Holy War. Only those considered to be on the side of justice will find the most followers! When everything is chaotic, only those who shout the loudest are considered justice. Only those with the right to speak up can possibly be considered the just. Since this is naturally a scenario about justice fighting against evil, we need to figure out a way to become the biggest representations of justice and morality."

This proclamation of battle was the first step in my plan to steal the microphone. It would declare Ayer's faction's ambitions and goals. This seemingly meaningless proclamation was actually using the Holy War as an excuse to raise a gigantic flag representing the Ayer Faction, giving birth to a new Order Faction different from the God of Holy Light's faction.

Yep, although Ayer's faction appeared to be on the Order side on the surface, internally… since it was quite obvious that they were a faction splitting off from the Order faction, how could they truly still be considered an Order faction!? Well, they wouldn't be on the side of Chaos regardless, so it was more like a Neutral faction.

But only raising the flag and letting people know about the existence of an Ayer faction definitely wasn't enough. After all, nobody would want to board a sinking ship.

Since the God of Holy Light and his system of belief was overwhelmingly powerful in the current era, everyone knew who they should be supporting. Even though there wouldn't be an all-out internal conflict on the Order side for the time being due to the Holy War, since we had made it so obvious that we were breaking off from the God of Holy Light's faction, if the God of Holy Light emerged as the overall victor in this Holy War, we would definitely become his next targets immediately right after.

"So, we need to take advantage of the opportunity of this Holy War. Not only do we need to find a way to keep being proactive, we also need to enlarge our faction. At the very least, we need to become a faction similar in power to the Holy Light faction."

This sounded rather self-contradictory. Since our faction wasn't large and powerful

enough, we wouldn't be able to attract followers. Without enough followers, we wouldn't be able to enlarge our faction. However, I knew a method to break this contradiction.

"Have you heard of the Anli Insurance Company? No? Wonderful! Cough—whoops—we're not as bad as Anli, and we're not a pyramid scheme. After all, we're only doing direct selling. Fine then, I'll speak simply. What we need to do is to make customers believe in us and spend money on our various products that will enrich our faction. Basically, they're going to be investing in our faction. Once they've paid and invested in us, that makes their personal benefits tied to us, so naturally they'll be unable to leave us." [1] 1

How to do all this, specifically? Actually, it was quite simple, as I had an example already—my System that loved to make me suffer.

When talking about how to make people fall into pitfalls, who could possibly compare to this bastard System of mine that has made me suffer for several centuries already? What we planned was to give every person a "System", which would naturally give all the "Main Gods" of the neutral faction the authority to speak. Then, people would fight for us on the neutral faction and would be rewarded and slowly grow in power level. This was my self-named "Martial Arts Harem Story Protagonist Mass Production Plan."

Indeed, as the battle continually escalated in scale, in "history," this Holy War was destined to become the final Holy War. The constantly increasing power level of the enemies finally even made most of the game's players, who were like cheaters in how fast they could level compared to Eich's natural residents, unable to keep up with the difficulty spike and never making it to the end of the game.

But as I reminisced on the game's "history," I felt that it was only natural. After all, for quite a long while, these visitors from another dimension didn't feel a sense of belonging in this world. Everything they did was motivated by only their personal benefits. Perhaps today they would fight for honor and glory on the Order Faction, while tomorrow they would betray Order for the sake of some extravagant Myth-ranked sword that a powerful demon promised them as a reward. There were countless players that even transformed themselves into demons or undead.

"A sword that fights without belief behind it is meaningless. Power without direction will only harm oneself."

Meanwhile, the original residents were another matter entirely. They had their own species, families, and homes, and already stood resolutely on one side or the other. However, their births determine what side they were on, and it was too difficult to change their ways of thinking that had been deeply ingrained. They were limited by their own countries and species and kept fighting countless internal conflicts amongst themselves, losing elites and resources. By the time that they learned who the real enemy was, it was already too late.

With all these restrictions against them, the original residents of Eich were limited in growth speed as well. They were unable to keep up with the enemies that only became stronger and stronger and were far too weak to do anything by the end.

However, this world that became real for me didn't possess any dimensional travelers that represented the players who didn't have any beliefs or ties of their own in this world. The original residents were all I could rely on, but just the current them alone were still insufficient.

"So, we need to give them a direction to point their swords at, along with helping them with shortcuts to growth. We need to give them opportunities to jump out of their narrow way of thinking."

This was the main objective that I mentioned in my report. As long as we were able to achieve all this, the world's original residents would become our sharp swords. Not even counting the power of new believers' faith which would power up the neutral faction's True Gods, the power we possessed would naturally keep increasing as well.

Was my plan unimaginable? Impossible to put into place? All we had to do was imitate what my System was doing for me. Although my System was truly unique in this world, I had True Gods on my side. What my System could do for me was quite easy for the True Gods of Eich, who were connected to the basic natural laws of the world, to imitate.

"I, Catio, God of Fate, Weaver of Fate, and Defender of Order henceforth declare that, in this Holy War, we proclaim battle against the Chaos Faction as well as all invaders from other dimensions!"

The second scroll, which was golden, opened, and Catio's proclamation echoed throughout the entirety of Eich. However, the truly important part of the proclamation was destined to come afterward.

"I, Patricia, Moonlight Goddess, Guardian of the Night, and Defender of Order henceforth declare that, in this Holy War, we proclaim battle against the Chaos Faction as well as all invaders from other dimensions!"

This time, a silver scroll was torn and yet another powerful True God made a proclamation. Patricia's gentle-sounding female voice made such a steely proclamation.

"We shall act as guardians and mark all invaders from different dimensions as well as evil members of Chaos! All heroes who are willing to fight for justice and Order shall receive rewards directly from the Order Gods!"

The golden and silver scrolls containing divine power transformed into the purest divine power of all, combining together into a divine powered forbidden spell. It transformed into a pillar of light covering the sky, and the very next instant, even though it was still daylight, an endless amount of moonlight descended upon all of Eich.

"The skies turned dark!!"

"The galaxy… how is this possible!"

With two powerful True Gods combining their powers together to cast a forbidden spell, the entire world was covered by night and the beautiful galaxy was shown in front of everyone. Not a single person dared to ignore this direct proclamation by the Gods.

In his own Temple of the Fate God, Catio unraveled his Web of Fate that he had weaved. The Web of Fate that lost control collapsed into countless knots, and then the knots unraveled into countless lines of Fate. All Fates were tangled together, and all Fates became completely unknown. From this moment onwards, all divination magic stopped working entirely as all individuals' futures became uncertain.

The moment Catio stopped controlling the lines of fate, his divine power instantly started massively decreasing. He instantly went from a powerful God to only a medium-power God and was still decreasing in power!

Meanwhile, the same thing was occurring in the Moonlight Goddess's Divine Kingdom, where starlight and moonlight gathered.

The Moonlight Goddess who had spent much divine power on the forbidden spell was currently at her weakest now as well. In just a short instant, she also went from a powerful Goddess into only a medium-power Goddess.

These two True Gods spent tens of thousands of years of accumulated power and basically broke off all possible relationships with the God of Holy Light through this. Naturally, for these two True Gods to pay such a huge price, they hoped to gain even more in return in the future. The divine power that they spent on the forbidden spell interacted with each other and created a star net that covered the entire world, transforming into a perfect surveillance system that could sense everything.

Meteors flashed across the sky, and stars shone brilliantly in a manic fashion. All the intelligent creatures were able to sense that they felt like something was watching them.

What spread out along with this divine power were countless thin and invisible threads. Gray stardust landed upon the undead that had just invaded the mortal plane who were currently standing outside the Forest of Dreams. Red infortune [2] [2] emblems representing calamity marked these invaders, while the mortal plane's residents were marked instead with a calm blue starlight emblem.

This star net created by the powers of Fate and Moonlight was an eternal forbidden spell. From now until eternity onwards, every existence that entered the mortal plane would be touched by the star net. Those existences that entered the mortal plane without permission would be marked with an infortune emblem. This emblem had zero attack power, and its only use was to mark the enemies of Order so that they could easily be located on the maps of any major church's holy temple.

The two True Gods of Fate and Moonlight paid a tremendous price to create this star net. From now on, these two True Gods' priests and divine job class members would obtain the power to use all sorts of locating and searching divine arts. Not a single person would be able to escape detection from the star net that was literally everywhere.

This was also one of the critical parts of my plan.

"First, what we need to do is point out who is an enemy of the mortal plane, and who is an ally. This is the primary step, as well as the most important step of all. Hmm, it's best if we can use divine power to cast an eternal forbidden spell. Although this might

require a huge price to be paid, only this can help obtain the greatest authority, as well as allow people to trust its neutrality and accuracy. Right, don't forget to leave a backdoor program to manipulate it. By the time that everyone trusts that we're only pointing out their true enemies… heh heh."

At this moment, even Ayer heaved a sigh of relief that the star net was established successfully. Although the star net still needed many more days to finish developing and reach its full potential, the only critical moment in which it could be stopped was just now. Soon, the star net would become a basic foundational law of this world. By the time that the other True Gods realized what this star net could truly do, apart from killing the True Gods of Fate and Moonlight, there would be no other possible way to obstruct the star net.

And if they wanted to find the True Gods of Fate and Moonlight that would require hibernation to recover divine power… they'd have to ask Ayer first! From today onwards, these three True Gods would join their Divine Kingdoms together. As a True God from the immemorial generation, Ayer wouldn't fear any other True God's challenge.

Right now, in the Forest of Dreams, I admired the brilliant starlight as I looked over the words that had Ayer prepared for me. I knew what I needed to do as well, so I spoke up.

"I, Wumianzhe, God of Law and Contracts, Guardian of Law and Defender of Order henceforth declare that, in this Holy War, we proclaim battle against the Chaos Faction as well as all invaders from other dimensions!"

"I, Benny, Guardian God of Smiths and Gnomes, Overseer of the Development and Research of New Technologies and Defender of Order henceforth declare that, in this Holy War, we proclaim battle against the Chaos Faction as well as all invaders from other dimensions!"

"I, Beyana, Goddess of Wealth, Overseer of the Wealthy, and Defender of Order henceforth declare that, in this Holy War, we proclaim battle against the Chaos Faction as well as all invaders from other dimensions!"

One Main God, two powerful True Gods, and three mid-ranked True Gods. Not a single faction would dare to look down on Ayer's faction's strength now. Fine then, I suppose I should say that it was now more like one Main God and five mid-ranked True Gods'

power. However, this definitely wasn't the entirety of Ayer's faction's strength. Perhaps nobody truly knew just what else Ayer had up his sleeve.

At this moment, I took a deep breath, because I knew that when I spoke the next part of the proclamation the entire world would be changed.

"As the creator and guardian of Contracts, any who wish to battle for the cause of justice and Order may sign a contract with me in order to become a guardian warrior who defends their home and Order. No matter what your identity or status was in the past, after signing the guardian warrior of Order contract with me, you shall all become allies and friends on the same side that must support each other. Those who betray the mortal plane and their allies shall be punished by the power of the Contract, while the brave warriors that fight for the mortal plane shall be rewarded by the Gods as according to the contract's stipulations."

The Smithing God Benny spoke up again after I finished my proclamation.

"In order to successfully ensure the guardian warriors of Order contract, all who sign the contract may obtain a free 'Hero's Armlet' from me. This Hero's Armlet will automatically record a warrior's combat achievements and experiences and calculate the number of 'Justice Points' that the warrior should receive for their deeds. The first batch will only be 10,000 Hero's Armlet's, it's first come first served! As for the second batch… wait for me to have some free time creating them!"

Benny was originally a gnome when he was a mortal. His voice retained the sharp guttural sounds of gnomish speech, and his tone was the same as well. Even though he was a True God now, he still had a gnome's jokester personality.

"As the Guardian God of Wealth, you may exchange Justice points which represent glory and wealth for the Gods' treasures with me! We have tens of thousands of years of accumulated treasures, and our treasury is quite full! The Elixir of Youth which can make you undying, Myth-ranked weapons and God Equipment, divine wine, beautiful women and handsome men, noble or royal status, and even the chance to ascend to Godhood, any mystical treasures that you can imagine, we possess! However… we don't accept any debt payments! We only accept cash!"

The Goddess of Wealth Beyana's declaration was quite amusing in its own way as well. However, it was actually the most important motivating factor for everyone. Without any rewards and benefits, why would anyone else work for you? This time, Ayer and

his allied Gods were truly giving it their all. Just looking over the available items for exchange moved me to the point of wanting to go rob them!

Fine then, by this point, perhaps all the readers of my log must have noticed. While most people treated games as different worlds to be enjoyed, I was treating this different world as a game to be played. Since this world didn't have game players that were the equivalent of cheat-like existences when compared to the native residents, all I had to do was create the equivalent.

"Martial Arts Harem Story Protagonist Mass Production Plan! What's the scariest thing in the world? Protagonists with massive plot armor due to their luck in being the main character! That's why all the main characters of any legend are like undying cockroaches! That's because those who can't survive to the end naturally won't have any legends told about them! This time, with the first batch of 10,000 Hero's Armlets, show me how many among you are lucky enough to be the main character type! Big bosses, tremble in fear! A game-player army is coming for you!"

Note:

[1] TL/N: Anli Insurance is an insurance company famous for a notorious pyramid scheme in China.

[2] ED/N: "Infortune," in Astrology, means a malevolent influence; the planet or aspect causing this; especially either Saturn or Mars (more fully "the greater infortune" and "the lesser infortune" respectively). (Source: Oxford Dictionaries)

Chapter 290
Irresistible Temptation

"If life was a game, it would be a terrible game that definitely wouldn't sell."—Roland Mist.

"If the world of Eich was a game, it would be a crappy game that would make every player want to attack all the game designers!"– also by Roland Mist.

The world was unfair, and life was filled with difficulties. Hard work could change one's fate? Such a convenient life only existed in knight stories or Chicken Soup for the Soul.

The reason legendary tales about heroes and their deeds were so popular was that these heroes' experiences were unimaginable and interesting to the readers, what with the countless coincidences and miracles. As for how Chicken Soup for the Soul claimed that "only those who worked hard would win in life…" from a logical standpoint, this was correct as those who didn't work hard wouldn't win in life. It just left out all objective conditions, birth and life conditions, personal backgrounds, how exactly to work hard, the steps needed to achieve one's goal, and how ninety-nine percent failed in the end—things like that.

Alright then. I suppose, in the end, it wasn't anything much apart from talking about the result of one's success. If a proper attitude could take care of everything, the world would be far too convenient, and that would probably be even more unacceptable.

This world was unfair—utterly unfair. Golden Species such as the dragons could sleep all day every day and, when they matured, still be able to easily crush any normal Gold-rank human. No matter how much effort an ordinary human warrior put into training, they would never be able to defeat an equally-ranked Beastman warrior. Not to mention that since beastmen warriors possessed physical advantages over humans along with better combat instincts, they had an easier time progressing in rank.

What about comparing humans to humans? Wouldn't that mostly be the same? After all, there wasn't much of a difference between members of the same species, right? Actually, it was exactly the opposite. There was an even larger difference between

humans.

In order to become a mage, knowledge and wealth was required. No ordinary wealthy merchant would be able to afford it. If you were a genius… actually, there wasn't much of a difference. Geniuses would grow at a quicker rate in power level, which meant they required even more resources in a shorter period of time. No matter how much of a genius one was, one would require magical knowledge, magical ingredients, and textbooks about magic. The archmages themselves never felt like they had enough of such things to begin with, and even if they had extras, they would give them to their family and friends. Why would they give such things to an outsider genius?

Genius? As long as the basic population numbers were high enough, the world would never lack geniuses or eccentric talents. Unless a genius had extraordinary luck and was able to become the disciple of a rich archmage, or the genius happened to be some prince or major noble, any young mage's path to learn magic was quite pitiful. Most would have to turn to adventuring while they were still novices in order to earn tuition money, the result of which many died.

Margaret from back in the day could be considered one of the best examples. She was born as an ordinary commoner and spent an incredibly long time as an adventurer. The money she earned was never enough for her research, which was why she had experiences in stealing, robbing, and scamming as she grew in her travels, while back in the day, I… fine then, I should stop mentioning Amelia and Harloys.

Even a SemiGod mage like Amelia often had headaches about research funds, so there's no need to even mention ordinary mages. One's ability to earn money was almost always directly proportional to one's power level, magical strength, and equipment quality.

Mages were the jobs that needed much money, and they were like this—it should be better for warriors and other job classes, right? Wrong again; it was exactly the opposite. These job classes required excellent physical attributes and had even higher requirements of one's conditions that they were born in. The best growth period for humans was only a few years while they were young, from nine to sixteen years old. If this excellent time period was wasted, and someone still lacked the most basic foundations after this age, then there was no hope of ever increasing in power level as a warrior anymore.

The poor were capable of learning magic, but only the rich could take the martial path.

After all, large amounts of physical exercise required plenty of nutrition to supply one's energy. In order to make quick progress, one needed health supplements, and bottlenecks could be overcome with precious medicines. None of this was anything that an ordinary commoner could afford. Although warriors and other physical job classes were by far the most common, those who truly became high-level warriors were actually at a lower percentage than the other job classes. Most people would never progress far in power level as a warrior.

In this world, might represented status. Commoners wouldn't even be able to obtain the most basic sword techniques. Not to mention that it was quite easy to meet with bottlenecks when practicing sword techniques. It would be a huge amount of trouble if one made a mistake while learning, and a skilled teacher's guidance and well-established techniques were all necessary. Illustrious families and nobles had their own inherited sword techniques, and even in those legendary tales about heroes, there would be all sorts of miracles and coincidences, such as meeting some white-bearded Sword Saint old man in a cave, or suddenly earning the appreciation of some school's principal or so on. This type of thing was common in stories from both my original world and in Eich.

If Adam hadn't met Rolo back in the day, no matter how talented Adam was or how hard he worked, he never would have progressed beyond becoming a town guard and would probably end up taking an arrow to the knee. Although this may sound cruel, it was the harsh reality. It was also why I said this world of Eich would definitely be a crappy game.

It was pretty much the same for the other job classes. Perhaps the easiest among them were the divine job classes as what was most important for these divine job classes was how loyal and devout you were to the True God and that particular True God's teachings.

Priests typically had to start serving a particular church since young and would typically never leave that church's teachings in their life—they would be a specific True God's loyal servant until death. As for Holy Knights, it was true that the requirements to become one weren't all that high, one just had to have a good physical appearance. The training and resources supplied to Holy Knights were quite systematic, but their future… fine then, no need for me to go any more into this, as the number of unnecessary Holy Knights was pitiful enough without needing me to spread salt on the wounds.

Oh right, there was one more job class which had really low requirements, and even helped one to find a job after graduation. This job class was: druids… Yep, those who wore beast skins (the bull faction indicates that they don't even wear beast skins) while wielding wooden staves (druids as a job class were forbidden from using metallic weapons) would welcome you to become a child of the wilderness. This job class required very little money compared to others. It was just that some jobs would be quite dangerous, and it was easy for druids to become wanted fugitives. However, one wouldn't need to worry about rent or tavern fees as one could simply sleep outside in the wild every day, not to mention all the animal companions and transformation magic that could even help save on transportation fees.

In summary, it was now time to introduce the fastest progressing and cheapest job class of all. Fine then, you've all probably guessed it. With the Tark Republic as the evidence, I'm talking about undead mages.

One only needed a most basic textbook on undead magic, plus some ingredients which would easily be obtained for free, and a person could completely learn everything by themselves. There was no limit to what power level one could reach, and there were even additional benefits like being able to transform into an undying lich after death. Apart from the fact that the Holy Church would attack you on sight and that cultivating undead magic would commonly make people less and less humane, there were basically no drawbacks whatsoever!

Cough, I seem to have gotten sidetracked. I should get back to the main topic. Since I told you so much, you should understand that it wasn't easy to be in any job class.

Everyone loves to read stories about legends and probably hopes to be able to experience a main character's life of endless miracles where one's power level would endlessly increase through constant adventuring. However, the problem was that those who had a main character's luck were truly few in number, while most people would remain ordinary for their entire life. But how would such a story possibly attract anyone?

Everyone wanted God Equipment and powerful weapons, outstanding sword techniques, and precious magical knowledge. Yet they were unable to obtain these things. If one could obtain any of these, they were called "miracles," after all. That was the reason why people were so passionate about such things.

Perhaps there were those who finally settled for being ordinary, believing that their

own talent and hard work could only reach such a level. However, there were some people that were trapped at an ordinary level, lacking just a little something more.

Did those people regret that they may have missed a once-in-a-lifetime chance in the past? Were they unwilling to spend their lives in ordinariness? Did they still want to personally improve themselves? Sure thing, as long as you were willing to sign a contract with Wumianzhe the Law and Contract God and became a warrior fighting for the sake of the mortal plane!

I could already imagine what all those who still had ambitions about themselves or those who wanted to continue one step higher would think and do when all the exchangeable items were listed on the bulletin boards of every major city in Eich.

Were your physical attributes too lacking for your martial arts techniques? Did you miss the best growth period of your life when you were young to train yourself? Then go ahead and exchange for the Body Redevelopment Holy Water Potion left behind from the great demons' generation. After drinking this, not even a barbarian tribe leader or beastman royalty would be able to master any martial arts technique as quickly as you. It only costs 1,000 Justice Points, friend!

You don't have any great teacher or strong techniques? Friend, you're in luck. We have the "Eighteen Dragon Subduing Palm Strikes" and "Gandalf's Divine Staff Techniques" available for just 100 Justice Points! Only 100 Justice Points! You want to learn magic, instead? "Dragon Language Mad Curses" costs only 100 Justice Points as well!

What? You've been stuck at the peak of Silver rank for ten years already? Try out this Elven Spring Potion. It costs a mere 10,000 points and comes with a guarantee that you'll pass through your bottleneck to Gold rank in at most three months! Although it's admittedly a bit expensive, just think about it—you'll be a Gold grandmaster, a grandmaster! From now on, even an esteemed noble will have to address you as Master whenever they see you, which will be worth it for the rest of your life!

You're already in Legend rank? You don't have anything you want? Friend, even Legend-ranked Sword Saints need excellent weapons; is there really nothing that you need? We have the Bow of the Sun God, Zeus's Gauntlets and the Twin Swords of Chaos, which are all Epic-tier weapons. What? You've never heard of any of these? Of course you haven't heard of any of them because they're all custom made. The Bow of the Sun God has thirteen different models! The best ones are the most expensive, the most expensive ones are the best! Take a look: this is the Legend-ranked Apollo 13.

It's really capable of shooting down the sun!

What, you don't want any of these, and you prefer some customized or God Equipment? Not a problem! The Smithing God Benny can make any custom order you want, be it a spear or a club or anything you can imagine. 100,000 Justice Points for SemiGod-tier Equipment, 10,000 Justice Points for a Legend-ranked equipment, 1,000 Justice Points for an Epic-ranked equipment, and only 100 Justice Points for an Elite grade equipment! So cheap!

You insist on only wanting God-tier Equipment? Fine then. As long as you give us the God Equipment level materials by killing off a SemiGod ranked Undead Emperor or something similar, we should be able to give you one or even two pieces of God Equipment for free! And there's no service charge!

You don't have the strength to defeat something so powerful? Then, there's no helping it. I suppose you'll just have to pay 2,000,000 Justice Points, and one of us Gods will send you a God-tier Equipment.

All of you simply passing by, stop and take a look! A replica lich king sword SemiGod Equipment will cost only 100,000 Justice Points, and we'll even throw in a free set of ice armor and evil-seeming frost cape. We promise that you'll look more like an evil boss monster than even a lich king.

Would you like a hundred-year contract to have your own companion adult dragon? That'll be 90,000 Justice Points, please—only 90,000! What? You're asking what exactly this means? Do you know what a dragon knight is? You'll become one instantly with this!

Even if you're a SemiGod, we have things for you as well! If you're not interested in any of our God Equipment or techniques, perhaps you as a SemiGod are interested in becoming a True God? That means you need the right to become a God along with a Divine Obligation. The only way to do this normally would be to slay a God, so are you really sure that you're capable of this? However, we just happen to have a Divine Obligation open that was left behind by Lorci, and there are many Follower God positions open under Ayer. Would you like to come join us?

If you're not interested in becoming a God, we also have personal research notebooks left behind by other SemiGods and dimensional masters. These contain the most foundational secrets of all.

Apologies, we don't sell these for any amount of Justice Points. You'll have to prove your loyalty and worth to us first before we'll consider it. Of course, a sufficient amount of Justice Points is also what we'll take into consideration. For example, if you can maintain the position of being first-ranked in total Justice Points for an entire year.

Only the Gods' treasuries would contain more treasure than a dragon's nest. This time, Ayer and his allies were giving it their all. When looking through this dazzling array of superb treasures one could exchange for, it was likely that even SemiGods would be motivated to work for us.

Of course, the True Gods would end up with many benefits for themselves through all this. That would be an overly long and complex verbose explanation, so I'll skip it. However, as long as my plan succeeded, out of us five currently mid-ranked Gods, two—at the minimum—would be able to ascend to become Main Gods. That was the greatest benefit we were all aiming for.

News about what we had available for exchange spread quite quickly. Since the hiring of mercenaries was quite common in Eich, most ordinary warriors saw this as nothing more than a rather long-term mercenary contract. Just that this time, the rewards for being hired were incredibly high, and the employer would be the Gods. These warriors weren't perceptive enough to sense the internal conflict amongst the True Gods, and why would they possibly not want a piece of this irresistible temptation that everyone could share in?

"The 10,000 Hero Armlets we prepared have all been given out within a single day? Should we prepare additional Hero Armlets? Not out in the open, but secretly prepare another 10,000, and put them all on the black market for me! Set the asking price to 10,000 gold coins apiece! Right, we're also going to take preorders for the next batch of Hero Armlets, and the preordering fee will be 1000 gold coins! And we won't give refunds!"

Chapter 291
Gradual Changes

When the skies above returned to normal and the stars in the middle of day returned to regular sunlight, it signaled the end of the terrifying Gods' proclamations. Everyone was able to sigh in relief.

Everyone present with me could easily sense a windstorm brewing on the horizon, and this wasn't even taking into account the possible impact of these proclamations.

This came as a complete surprise for everyone, apart from Harloys who had some prior knowledge of my plan. Even I was surprised as I didn't expect Ayer to be decisive enough to break off from the God of Holy Light's faction.

"Consequences? Relationship with the Holy Light? Who cares about all that? Just do what you want. I'll back you up."

Ayer's incarnation vanished after leaving me with that sentence.

His casualness sometimes made me speechless, but I had to admit that he possessed enough power to not be afraid of the Holy Light Faction. He had also always been incredibly perceptive, and now was indeed the best time to be choosing sides.

The undead armies had arrived, and there was no more stopping their invasion of the mortal plane. It could be said that the Holy War had begun in all its glory. Acting as if we were the ones proclaiming the Holy War in order to grab everyone's attention was doubtlessly the critical point.

Well, since the goal was to grab everyone's attention, it could also be called stealing the headlines.

Right now, outside our forest, the situation hadn't changed. Undead armies from six Undead Planes had successfully arrived, and the area here had eternally transformed. The Undead Calamity was here, and no matter what the undead were motivated by, their next step was inevitable—war.

Indeed, no matter if their reasons were excusable or not, or if they viewed their own actions as justified, this was still a war, a war where the undead were the invaders. It was a major war that was destined to end with the loss of innumerable lives.

The undead wanted to reestablish their country here. However, the Tark Republic had died long ago in the mortal plane, and this land now belonged to the Bardi Empire. While the undead may have the right to return to their homeland after thousands of years, wouldn't the citizens living here for the past thousands of years also have the same right to protect their own land?

Quite often, wars didn't start because of so-called conflicts between good and evil. Wars were merely tools to fight for space to live in.

A ruler could make his own retainers cooperate with dangerous terrorists, but no ruler in the world would be able to make their own citizens give up their homes. In fact, the moment any ruler tried to force their own citizens to do such a thing, he would be then viewed as their mortal enemy. Even his loyalist retainers would rebel.

The citizens were able to accept a minor amount of intelligent undead as high-level nobles, but that didn't mean that they were willing to be ruled and enslaved by the undead. Mega-empires had their own pride, and the Bardi people would naturally find it unacceptable to be ruled by outsiders.

I didn't know what Aso's original plan had been, but now, since both sides' basic needs were in conflict, there was absolutely no way to mediate between them. Battle was inevitable.

"I'm returning to the capital. I need to ask His Majesty Orloss just what he's thinking!"

But even after learning about the undead, Halent was still worried about the situation in the capital and insisted on returning there. All his dragon knights went with him, and in order to help Halent firm his resolve in breaking with Emperor Orloss, I was kind enough to give him a research report on Kasolan's Tears along with the undead's likely future plans, such as the one where they turned the entire population into undead.

Of course, my report contained plenty of questions about why the Bardi Empire's ruling class responded so slowly or pretended to ignore things, along with some advice on how Halent could incite the citizens against Emperor Orloss.

"Halent, Nightrain City needs to prepare for combat as well. When the undead finish their troop organizations, if they directly attack Nightrain city, you can consider contacting the Mage Country for assistance. The Mage Country is far likelier to assist you than the Bardi Empire. Right, since your opponent is the undead, don't forget to ask the Holy Church for assistance as well. They make excellent righteous cannon fodder."

Halent hesitated for a moment upon hearing my words but didn't say anything. It would seem that he had accepted what I said.

Not that the Undead Calamity had commenced, the Tark Republic, Bardi Empire, and Mage Country were exactly like my System's Quest described—"Infighting Among Three Snakes." They were just like three gigantic boa constrictors tightly entwined with each other, fighting for living space as well as authority—the clash for benefits was unavoidable.

The Bardi Empire and the Mage Country were already enemies to begin with, while the battle for living space between the living and undead had already occurred many times in history. It was practically a situation where each of the three countries were enemies with the other two. In fact, a three-way fight like this was common in the past.

Stop it? Use what was there to stop it? Allow me to use a perhaps not entirely suitable proverb here. In front of the gears of history, any that tried to stop such a thing would be as foolish as a person who tried to stop a train with his body. Before, the battles were of a much smaller scale so perhaps they could still be controlled. But when two powerful countries like the Bardi Empire and Mage Country went all out, and when the Tark Republic, which consisted of six Undead Planes and twelve surviving SemiGod Undead Emperors, went all out as well, personal strength and even an entire military squad's strength became meaningless. This was now at the scale of a battle between major countries.

In front of these three tremendous existences, the small amount I had in the Northlands wouldn't even compare to their little fingers. Even the martial arts technique of using an opponent's strength against them required one to have a certain amount of foundational strength to begin with. How could we compare when we were only a pinky finger?

Try to mediate between them? That would only be possible once they had sacrificed enough for them to understand that they wouldn't be able to defeat their opponents without paying a small price. Or there would need to be a force powerful enough to suppress all three sides in order to force them to mediate.

And, among the three sides, the undead Tark Republic would be the unjust invaders as well as the common enemy of the mortal plane. If they successfully grabbed land away from the Bardi Empire, the mortal plane's residents would find it unacceptable when the undead began large-scale slaughters of the living to create undead ingredients or transform the living into the undead.

Of course, in the end, all three sides would want peace, but that would be impossible anytime soon. In that case, I might as well plant a seed for peace in the future, instead.

Perhaps Aso saw through all this already. One of his goals in giving me these memories of his was perhaps to make me the third-party mediator when conditions allowed. Since I was considered Wumianzhe's God Envoy as well as a former Undead Emperor, I was probably a mediator that all sides would be able to accept.

What Aso had wanted as the best result for the undead was to conquer over half of the Bardi Empire and then achieve peace with the other factions through negotiation. However, this goal of his would obviously be unacceptable to the Bardi Empire, nor would it be acceptable to the Bardi Empire's citizens who would lose their homes, family, and friends. The nobles wouldn't accept this, either, so that meant war. The undead would have to achieve their goals through use of force.

The undead were still currently building defensive bases and organizing their troops. Their current behavior spoke volumes about their overall combat strategy—they would refrain from antagonizing additional factions if possible while gathering all their troops in one go for a huge battle. And once they were fully prepared…

"With the rate at which the six Dimensional Doors are increasing their soldiers, they will run out of space sooner or later. If the undead start expanding their territory, the Forest of Dreams to the west and Nightrain City to the east will likely become the frontlines of battle. Both these locations will become real lively soon."

In a way, Halent's preparations weren't wrong. They would even serve a critical purpose in defending the Bardi Empire. If the Bardi Empire was going to defend against and fight the undead rather than accept their rule, then Nightrain City was

destined to become the farthest frontline fortress for stopping them.

"By that time, many of our 'Contract Heroes' will probably come over to Nightrain City to join in on the fun. On our side, the Forest of Dreams' situation will change once again…"

I didn't think that the undead possessed the courage to attack the Forest of Dreams since even the Undead Emperors knew how difficult it would be to deal with a dimensional will. Surrounding it without attacking it was the most appropriate strategy. However, that didn't mean that the Forest of Dreams wouldn't attack the undead! The Forest of Dreams was still a big problem for the Tark Republic's plans.

The undead would obviously transform the area around the six Dimensional Doors into their homeland, and it would become most important defensive base of all. However, there was just a single problem: the Forest of Dreams right next to them that had already become an independent dimension of its own. Not to mention that this forest was located at a formerly famous port so the forest was right by the sea in an area that was easy to dock from. And right across from the sea was the Mage Country, making the Forest of Dreams the best frontline battle location of all.

No matter if it was to help defend the living or to defend against future undead invasions, the Mage Country was certain to send people here eventually. It was even quite possible that a long-term naval route would be set up to the Forest of Dreams so that adventurers not belonging to any faction could conveniently come as well.

"The Mage Country will definitely come, and perhaps they'll even send several military squads over. Since this is a completely safe zone, it will also attract many who desire Justice Points."

No matter if it was because this was the place where the wood spirits originated or because this was going to be one of the frontline locations for the Holy War's battles, it would soon become a flourishing location with a huge uptick in population. Perhaps there would even be those that would greatly profit from the war, making this place into one of the grandest and most flourishing cities in the world. But as the frontline location of battle between the living and the dead, this place was also destined to undergo endless combat. The wood spirits would have to mature through warfare for a long time to come.

As for the Holy War, the original enemies we had planned for weren't even actually the

undead that suddenly descended. After all, even Ayer wouldn't be able to predict the exact timing of the undead's arrival.

The main enemies were all the elemental lifeforms that would awaken together with the Elemental Gods. They wouldn't be strong at all, and they would be excellent for becoming practice enemies for newbies to help them grow. Eliminating these elemental lifeforms would also help suppress the Elemental Tide's increase, a good thing for the Holy War.

The rather weak "monsters for beginners" were the most vital. They would deepen the connection between "newbies" and the Ayer Faction and create the first step in a relationship of trust. The first batch of adventurers, aka the "beta testers," that were successfully rewarded by us would become legends among other adventurers. They would attract more newbies to us and gradually increase the scope of my plan to turn the citizens of this world into gameplayer-like existences. Elemental lifeforms' bodies were also perfect magical ingredients, and they would help reduce our costs. This was why I strongly recommended listing elemental lifeforms to be marked as our primary enemies by the star net.

Since the undead had already begun invading, it was impossible to not add them as enemies in to our system. Hopefully the newbies knew how to run if they faced defeat against the undead—both Nightrain City and the Forest of Dreams had iron defenses. At the very least, newbies shouldn't meet the ultimate bosses and be instantly killed.

As for the other already major field of battle, that was at an old familiar acquaintance's home, the Auland Empire's capital, Kagersi. The Seafolk there were currently in a war of attrition with the humans, with the Seafolk that worshiped the Queen of Storms obviously being the Chaos side and our enemies. They also met our requirements to be listed as enemies to be farmed for Justice Points.

Of course, the Seafolk weren't any easier to deal with than the undead when taking into account their combat strength in water. Those who weren't strong enough would be courting their deaths if they went.

I mentioned my worry for the newbies to Harloys, but she was less worried than I was.

“…Danger? Only with high risks will one obtain high rewards. Otherwise, why would they deserve the Gods' rewards? Besides, we're not babysitters. All the warriors willing to sign contracts with us are adults that can take responsibility for their own

decisions. You think our current opponents might be too dangerous for them? Won't our future opponents be even more dangerous? True top-level warriors can only be obtained from those who survive when everyone around them dies. Since improving power level has always been a competition for survival of the fittest, why are you hesitating?"

"I suppose you're right. Since they're willing to fight on the frontlines for the sake of exchanging Justice Points for the Gods' rewards, they wouldn't be any commoners that have never even seen blood before. Of course they'd be mentally prepared."

From a certain standpoint, I had indeed underestimated the citizens of this world—they lived in a different environment from me in my previous world, after all. Warriors and adventurers were long since far different from commoners, so professional warriors who were used to fighting with their lives on the line in order to make a living wouldn't possibly be unprepared when getting ready to go to the frontlines of battle. The rash that rushed to battle without knowing their own limits had long since died in action.

Rather than considering such things, it was probably a better use of my time to think about how I wanted to deal with this battle between three huge countries that would have major repercussions.

Obviously, doing nothing at all was something I wasn't accustomed to.

"Samantha, it seems your mother is still going to remain asleep for a while to come. But there are still things you all can do."

With bright red hair, "Temperance" Samantha was both the wood spirits' tribe leader and the oldest sister of the Seven Virtues. The strange part, however, was that even though she was transformed from a rose, the symbol of passion, she always had an icy expression and spoke as little as possible.

Although she and Rosa were both transformed from roses, and she greatly resembled Rosa in physical appearance to the point of almost being twins, not to mention the Three Virtues that currently existed had all been living symbiotically with Amelia and knew much about me, Samantha was quite different from the friendly and hesitant

Rosa. She seemed to quite dislike me as a lack of expression was a good expression for her when she saw me, while an expression of distaste was more the norm whenever she talked to me.

"Talk."

"Well, you all will probably have many visitors coming here soon. Their target will mostly be the undead. I hope you'll be able to do three things. First, try to help as many of the visitors survive as possible. Second, provide resources to them that will attract them to stay here; for example, that fruit you have that can improve one's Constitution. You can trade them to the visitors for Justice Points or large amounts of gold coins, but make sure you only give it to them in limited amounts. Third, learn communication skills for communicating with other species so that you can quickly adapt to living in this world."

When talking about who had the most treasures, very few would be able to compare with a dimensional will. This was just like how no small businesses would ever be able to compete with the government. While the former earned money, the latter printed money. A dimensional will was basically like the existence that printed money.

Special fruits that could permanently increase one's basic stats of Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, and so on, nectars that could recover one's HP and mana stats, antidotes that could cure the most vicious poisons, and so on were all available in this forest. While alchemy could create potions and antidotes to replicate the effects of the latter two products, items that could completely—and foundationally—improve a person's stats were exceedingly precious. Just this local specialty alone would attract countless strong individuals to come work for the wood spirits.

Of course, such fruits weren't limitless. Fruits that could permanently increase one's basic stats required many resources for the forest to produce; they were limited. Amelia's Forest of Dreams' power of Creation was limited to only fruits and plants so only the living that were capable of eating these fruits would benefit from them.

As the Holy War continued, I extrapolated that perhaps Justice Points would become more valuable than even gold coins. Just this newly-born currency alone, which represented glory as well as a way of doing business, was highly likely to increase the Goddess of Wealth Beyana's divine power, giving her far more than what she spent to help us create the exchange system. And this was just the beginning. According to my plan, all of the True Gods in the Ayer Faction would greatly benefit from my plan in the

end.

I also knew that with every contract and every fair exchange, there would be an increase in the power of the Concept known as Contracts along with Wumianzhe's power as he was the Guardian God of Contracts. And after the recent Gods' proclamation, the faith of his believers would further increase, along with the believers' devoutness in the other Gods that did the proclamation together.

"This is destined to be a long-term battle. Don't let the warriors die meaninglessly. This is also for your mother's sake."

I wasn't lying about this. After all, all the corpses and souls that died here would become nourishment for the Forest of Dreams. As long as there was a sufficient number of blood sacrifices, not only would Amelia awaken, but she would be far more powerful than she was before. From a certain standpoint, the entire Forest of Dreams was now part of her physical body, and the entire wood spirit species was living in symbiosis with her.

Samantha nodded at this. I supposed that meant she agreed.

As I watched Samantha leave without a sound, I heaved a sigh of relief. Her glares at me were just too vicious, and the complaints and anger in her expression made me feel so uncomfortable, as if I owed her a lot. When I thought about everything I did in the past, which she probably knew about because of Amelia, I felt a mysterious sense of guilt—it made me feel like an irresponsible father that wasn't paying child support.

"Sister Samantha is quite delighted. She looks really happy that father wants her help." However, little Rosa came out to ruin her sister's image.

What? That vicious expression was actually one of delight? Astonished, I hurriedly asked Rosa just how she knew.

"Father, you were unable to tell? Don't look at Sister Samantha's expression. Actually, she was so happy just earlier. Just look at how the vines behind Sister's head are jumping up and down, just like a dog's tail… Ahhh!!"

Alright then. Vines suddenly reached out from a nearby tree, tying up and kidnapping Rosa. When I saw how the oldest sister Samantha had a face that was now turning red

as she continued walking off, I felt like I understood these young wood spirits more than before.

Meanwhile, by a small river, the first artificial construction in the Forest of Dreams was underway. Only four to five hundred square meters, it was a tiny court constructed entirely of stone. It had seven or eight rooms, and was, indeed, the Church of Law's church branch and court in the Forest of Dreams.

Its planned use, apart from being able to provide some Justice Points for the future Contract Warriors that would be coming here, was to spread the teachings of the Church of Law. It would even be able to help people enter Law related job classes, and as the Divine Concept of "Contracts" continuously entered people's dictionaries, not only would ordinary merchants begin using contracts, adventurers and mercenaries would also start coming to the Church of Law as well. "Team contracts" would be a new popular product as well.

As the church branch located on the frontlines, who to make its head priest was naturally an important decision. I chose…

"Krose, are the preparations ready?"

"Yes! The wood spirits are quite easy to communicate with, and they're quickly learning about Law. I think that before long, the Church of Law will have its first group of wood spirit Law job class members."

Krose was smiling brilliantly, a beam of utter bliss. Apart from being able to work in a forest—a place all elves preferred to be—it was more because the wood spirits had promised to cultivate a special plant potion for her that could change her body.

Alright. Everybody probably figured it out already. It was just a plant potion version of the "Spring of a Drowned Man" as it was indeed within the Forest of Dreams' power to produce such a potion.

However, the rules were already set in stone. Even Krose would need to earn Justice Points in order to exchange for such a potion. And since it was a custom order for her, it would probably be far more expensive than usual.

I ended up deciding against hurting her morale by telling her what I was thinking when I saw how brilliant Krose's smile was as she busied herself with her work.

The church's support will be here soon. With your popularity in the church along with all those abnormal fans of yours, I feel like even if you're willing to pay 10,000 Justice Points for that potion, your coworkers are willing to pay 30,000 Justice Points to prevent you from doing so. And even if you succeed in obtaining the potion of 'Spring of a Drowned Man,' they'll develop the potion of 'Spring of a Drowned Girl' just for you.

Chapter 292
Newly-born Silver Species (Part 1 of 2)

A white-winged bird-type magical pet landed in front of me with a letter for which I had been waiting a long time.

"It's finally here?"

The letter's contents were quite simple—there were only two sentences: "I took care of things for you. The official invitation is inside, so hurry and come as soon as you can."

The letter was a reply from my old friend and classmate Kaid. It was only a matter of time before I went to the Cloud Tower in the Mage Country—what was really important was how I went. I would receive treatment that would differ depending on whether or not I had been invited.

That was why I had written to Kaid a while back, asking him to help me out. I divulged a bit about what was going on so that the Cloud Tower would officially send me an invitation.

There were many things I needed to discuss with the Truth Overseers. However, not only did I have old friends amongst the Overseers, but I had many old enemies there—enemies who probably wanted me dead. In order to have an equal (and peaceful) status to communicate with them, I needed to give myself the identity of a diplomatic envoy.

Not to mention that this diplomatic envoy status of mine would be quite real. After all, the wood spirits would definitely need to establish a relationship with the Mage Country. Their representatives would be me and—

"Rosa, why are you the one going? What about your sisters?"

"Big Sister Samantha didn't want to go so she left it to me. Little Sister Jill didn't want to go either—she told me to not bother her with anything that wasn't about battling."

When I thought of the other two Virtues, I recalled Samantha, who was always terse and vicious with her comments, and Jill, who seemed to be a battle maniac. Indeed—neither of them were appropriate for diplomacy, and that Rosa who was always smiling was probably the best choice among them.

When I first arrived here, Rosa had also been the one to greet me. That pure and friendly smile of hers was indeed an excellent diplomatic tool, especially since she would be soon dealing with a group of old virgins—er—old artifacts, and since the elderly were always instinctively fond of—er—willing to protect young girls, this was obviously going to be a huge advantage.

I could already predict the commotion that would happen when Rosa and the wood spirits appeared in the Cloud Tower. After all, the wood spirits would be considered cute by the beauty standards of any species, not to mention how the elderly always doted on young girls.

Besides, the circumstances of their birth made it even easier to establish a friendly relationship with the mages. They were Amelia's daughters.

No matter if it was because they were the creations of the Cloud Tower's rather famous (or infamous, depending on how you looked at it) archmage Amelia, or simply because they were the first intelligent species in history created by a mage, the wood spirits would definitely be loved by the mages. Of course, the fact that they all appeared to be cute young girls would add points in their favor, and for certain groups of people, it would be super extra bonus points… There's nothing wrong with being a gentleman pervert! A forever youthful (young) wife was the dream of all men, wasn't it!?

Cough, setting those subjective factors aside, just from the objective and tangible benefits, the Mage Country would not only want to establish a friendly relationship with the wood spirits, but they would even look forward to a formal alliance.

Although the wood spirits weren't all that numerous as a species yet, they were an entirely new Silver Species. Their current power levels and future potentials were astonishing. With the Holy War right at everyone's doorsteps, why would they refuse such a strong ally?

Of course, there might be those with ambitions of stealing from or conquering the wood spirits. Not every Truth Overseer was the type who only cared about the secrets of magic. The wood spirits would have to make a display of sufficient power.

That was why I was in no rush at all. The first impression was the most important; the first time that the wood spirits were shown to the world would be critical. Rather than rush to show everyone but then be looked down upon, it would be better to arrogantly arrive late. People would remember them much more clearly.

Wood spirits also had astonishing potential as they were a Silver Species, something incredibly rare in today's age.

This wasn't the ancient era where Silver Species were incredibly common. This was an era of Iron Bloodlines, where the humans of the Iron Tribe [1] dominated the world.

There were incredibly few Silver Species in today's world. The most obvious examples were probably the Four Elven Aristocracies, but the superior elf species mostly consisted of the elven kingdoms' royalty and nobles and were incredibly few in number. The only Silver Species with a high population, the dark elves, had weaknesses such as their fear of light. Moreover, after they fell into depravity and transformed into dark elves from night elves, their racial talents tilted far too much towards the mage job classes and lacked the ability to perform in other job classes. Some people already considered them to be a relatively strong Bronze Species.

Every single wood spirit was, at the minimum, in the Silver rank. In the Forest of Dreams, wood spirits would be improved to the upper tiers of Silver rank and could even reach the lower tiers of the Gold rank with the assistance of the forest's magical plants and strengthened outer shells. That was my assessment of the wood spirits' potential as a species, and Ayer, too, had agreed with me.

When taking the average potential of a species in the world of Eich, the wood spirits were considered top-class. In case my words weren't enough to make people understand, I could show them a comparison between the wood spirits' base stats and other species' base stats in order to make them easily understand just how scary wood spirits really were.

"Average beastman berserker stats: 15 Strength, 8 Dexterity, 12 Constitution, 8 Intelligence. Main stat: Strength. Racial talent: Frenzy."

The stronger warrior tribes among the beastmen species only reached the level of a Bronze Species. And their racial talents were far too much tilted in favor of Strength, so over ninety percent of beastmen could only choose melee combat job classes.

"Average human warrior stats: 12 Strength, 8 Dexterity, 10 Constitution, 10 Intelligence. Main stat: Strength. Racial talent: None."

This was the stat spread of an average human, which was even more pitiful than a beastman's. However, the only advantage was that without any particular racial talents or overwhelming unbalanced stat spread, humans could enter any and all job classes as they weren't limited by a species' natural talents. However, any future development down their chosen paths would depend entirely on themselves; human bloodlines contained nothing to help them out.

However, Silver Species were rather ridiculous.

Most people treated the Bronze Species of beastmen, Northlands barbarians, dwarves, and wild elves as the upper limits of what a powerful warrior species was supposed to be. However, there was one species commonly ignored by people that was actually an incredibly common Silver Species—the giants.

The most common mountain and forest giants would be five to ten meters tall after reaching maturity, giving them the power level of average Silver ranks. Meanwhile, the relatively stronger semifrost giants and flame giants were in the upper tiers of the silver rank, while some of the strongest giant species such as the cloud giants and magma giants typically had various racial talents that controlled the elements after reaching maturity. They were naturally born as talented in both physical and magical aspects, and these strongest giant species were Gold Species equal to dragons in power.

Of course, there was also a huge difference in power level amongst all the dragon species. The weakest white dragons wouldn't know how to fight in any way other than melee combat until they reached the level of Ancient. White dragons had incredibly low intelligence, equal to that of a normal wild beast. Although they technically counted as a Gold Species as they were dragons, they were infamous for their weakness to live up to the name. Meanwhile, the strongest among the commonly seen dragons species, gold dragons and red dragons, would easily be capable of defeating and killing three similar-aged white dragons in a one on three fight. And there were Legendary Dragon Species above them such as the rainbow dragons, force dragons, and time dragons, against which even Gods would need to be careful.

As for the strongest giant species, the titan giants, it was rumored that they were the creators of all other giants. There was a huge difference between them and the other

giant species… nobody would object if they were labeled as a double Diamond Bloodline Species. That was because the strongest titan giants were powerful enough to slay Gods. Fortunately, this world was no longer a world where titan giants reigned supreme, and the Legendary Dragon Species had almost gone entirely extinct as well.

According to records in history, in the ancient war of stone giants, the giants had rebelled against the Gods and lost. So, Kasodia, the God of Intelligence in that era, cursed the giants to lose their Intelligence which naturally meant the giants lost their hope to reach the pinnacle of power levels. The few remaining giant species that retained their Intelligence typically hid out in snowy mountains and magma-filled volcanos… but I knew that as the Holy War continued, they wouldn't remain inactive for much longer.

"Average hill giant warrior stats: 19 Strength, 10 Dexterity, 20 Constitution, 3 Intelligence (cursed down from 10). Main stat: Strength. Racial talents: Earth Affinity, High-Speed Regeneration, Stoneskin Armor, Earthquake Spell (rare), Curse of Low Intelligence (Negative racial talent)."

From this, it could be seen that if it weren't for the fact that giants had far too low Intelligence, hill giants, a typical giant species, had racial talents far surpassing most common species in Eich today. As for why they had always been considered easy opponents that even a team of two or three Silver-ranked adventurers could deal with, it was mainly due to their overly low intelligence. Not only did they fall too easily for all sorts of traps, they were unable to cultivate in any job classes and could only pitifully rely on their own racial talents to grow.

If only giants could easily learn all sorts of martial arts, mature giant warriors would be able to easily defeat human Gold-ranked warriors, and Sword Saint giants would easily be able to slay dragons. Dragons would no longer be the top species of Eich due to their racial talents.

By the way, in a certain "historical moment," the fallen titans returned and regained the giants' lost intelligence, so these muscleheads became incredibly scary. That game expansion was known as "Attack of the Titans…" fine then, the game company was probably trying to profit off of the popularity of the anime "Attack on Titan." [2]

Cough, getting back on topic, the wood spirits were also a Silver Species but didn't have any natural weaknesses like the giants did. Their base stats were ridiculous.

"Average wood spirit stats: 16 Strength, 14 Dexterity, 12 Constitution, 14 Intelligence. Racial talents: Soul connection to all wood spirits, Evolution by devouring (forbidden to use except when lives are endangered), Unyielding Spirit, Incarnation of Wrath, Plant Communication, Forest Traveling (the ability to enter trees), Eternal Rebirth (limited to only being effective within the Forest of Dreams)."

As Amelia's created species, those seemingly frail bodies possessed combat strength matching that of giants. Their much higher Intelligence, as well as the racial talent of Unyielding Spirit, allowed them to easily enter mage job classes in addition to warrior job classes. Their basic stats were well-balanced, which allowed them to choose their own personal paths of development just like humans could.

So, even though I now had the invitation to the Cloud Tower that I wanted, I wasn't in any hurry. We had the right to be as late as we wanted, and making them wait would even benefit our negotiations.

"No rush. Let's help the wood spirits improve their foundation."

The first present that Amelia gave them was the Virtue of Humility, which was the power for them to continuously improve themselves through high-speed learning. They would all be capable of entering any job class they wished to improve their potential and themselves. Although this wasn't listed as one of their racial talents, it was actually the most important present of all.

Although the wood spirits' Strength and Dexterity values were quite high, and they were talented at quickly mastering martial arts, I soon discovered that they were still unsuitable for melee combat job classes.

Why? Actually, it was quite easy to understand the reason. Everything was Eren's fault—er—the fault of them being only 1.2 meters tall! [3]

"Um, although it's a bit awkward to say this, if you're so short it'll be disadvantageous for you to wield weapons like other species. If melee combat is absolutely necessary, you can consider relying on the strengthened outer plant shells of yours, instead."

Indeed, the most important talent necessary for martial arts was a powerful and large body. The small bodies of wood spirits that were like young girls' bodies would be a critical weakness for melee combat job classes. When they fought with others, the wood spirit's sword would be more than one meter away from the enemy's body when

the enemy's weapon reached the wood spirit's neck. There was simply too large of a disadvantage in reach. A beastman Sword Saint's Whirlwind Slash attack would be able to slay one hundred of his enemies in one attack, while a giant's Whirlwind Slash attack could create a true windstorm and slay one thousand humans in one attack. A tiny wood spirit Sword Saint using the same Whirlwind Slash attack would have an effective radius of only 1.5 meters, and it was likely for all her enemies to run away without getting injured and her being unable to catch up due to her short legs.

However, Amelia seemed to have taken this into consideration. The symbiotic magical plants and strengthened outer shells of theirs were doubtlessly items to help them make up for their weaknesses in melee combat. With the assistance of these items, the wood spirits would still be able to enter melee combat job classes just fine.

Meanwhile, they were also quite talented at learning magic. The wood spirits entered the mage job class at an astonishing ratio of one percent. Back in the day, the Mage Country even established bases in all the Elemental Planes in order to find more potential mages from the lifeforms in those planes. If they knew that this new wood spirit species that lived so close to them had such astonishing talent in magic, they would probably go crazy.

However, the most suitable job classes of all for the wood spirits were naturally the job classes related to nature and the forest. The wood spirits were especially talented at using druids' nature Divine Arts and elves' nature magic. It was as if they were born to become druids and nature priests.

Eaglestorm was absolutely delighted to meet so many with excellent druid potential. He busied himself every day, teaching them about that druid sect of his.

Soon, however, I was no longer able to take it. I found a chance and caught him, giving him a vicious beating."

"I already tolerated it when you taught them terrorist philosophies such as 'The safety of the forest is more important than humanity because humanity is a pestilence upon this world' since they're quite open to hearing this and it's not entirely wrong. But you even dared to teach them your Wild Bull Druid Alliance's outrageous philosophy about not wearing clothes? Do you really want to see the wood spirits running about naked that much? You're not afraid that I'll really kill you?"

"But those are our teachings! Didn't you say before that as long as we didn't break any laws, we had the freedom to believe whatever we wanted? No! Definitely no! You can kill me or beat me, but I refuse to change my beliefs!"

Eaglestorm was crying with his bruised face as he adamantly insisted on his own beliefs.

"Fine. Freedom? That means it doesn't matter who goes to teach them. I'll have Krose teach them, instead. After all, she's also a windstorm archdruid, equal to you."

I pretended to leave, but, in reality, my goal was to force Eaglestorm to make some concessions. After all, based on my understanding of Krose, her windstorm archdruid mastery came from the elves' teachings, and her main knowledge of druidic magic was only at the level of summoning windstorms. She didn't know anything about the druids' most powerful nature and transformation Divine Arts at all. Eaglestorm, on the other hand, was a master of both nature and transformation Divine Arts.

"Don't, don't, I'll change it! How about changing it to 'Wood spirits are the children of nature, so plants are part of their physical body. Covering yourselves with leaves and vines are fine and don't count as wearing clothing?'"

This time, it was my turn to be astonished. This fellow who was so devout on his own beliefs changed them so easily?

"You're not afraid of others in the Wild Bull Alliance giving you trouble?"

"No! I'm one of the creators of the Wild Bull Alliance, not to mention I'm now an archdruid as well."

“…Then why don't you also change the absolute rule against human druids wearing clothes in your alliance? That will make it much easier for you to recruit new human druids."

"Never! That's exactly why I created the 'Wild Druid Sulfur Mountain Branch Alliance'! To be openly naked was the only reason I had so many conflicts with all the other archdruids! You can kill me, you can beat me up, but I'll never wear clothes!"

I didn't even know what to say anymore. So all the druidic sects' internal conflicts and

arguments between belief systems stemmed from this guy's personal desires!

“…It's fine to do whatever you want when there are only you guys, but if you dare to go around naked in front of the young wood spirits, or if you dare to teach them to go around naked, I'll—I'll…”

Gentlemen (perverts) were never-fearing-death type. I thought for quite a while but couldn't think of anything that Eaglestorm and his alliance's gentlemen would be afraid of. So, I decided to test something—an experimental punishment of sorts.

"I'll force you to transform into an animal and lock you up with Beifeng. Are you afraid yet?"

"Hah, Beifeng has been busy playing with magical plants as of late. The past two days, I've seen him chasing after a three-headed piranha plant. As long as he has a target to focus on, he'll be quite difficult to distract within this period of time. What are we afraid of?"

I found it even more difficult to come up with anything now. I was even getting a bit curious that even though those wood spirits were so cute, I actually hadn't received any complaints about Beifeng yet. So it turned out that he had developed new interests and ways to play around yet again. I suppose it was impossible for ordinary people like me to understand Beifeng's world, after all. Wait—Eaglestorm actually understood Beifeng so well? I suppose gentlemen (perverts) always understood each other the best; as expected of jail buddies from Sulfur Mountain City who picked up soap together.

"I feel like you're somehow looking down on me…”

“…I remember that druids like you are able to transform into trees as well. As long as you imitate and have a good enough relationship with something living, druids are capable of transforming into it. I recall that recently, you've been interacting plenty with the piranha plants yourself…”

"Please, no! I'll obey your commands!"

Fine then, the archdruid finally surrendered. I was still hesitating about whether or not I should just toss Beifeng out to feed the undead in order to prevent his negative influence upon the young wood spirits when Beifeng gave me a nice, expected surprise.

Notes:

[1] ED/N: This was mentioned in Chapter 12.

[2] ED/N: A Japanese manga series. Fun fact: The manga has 71 million copies in print, making it one of the best-selling manga series. (Source: Anime News Network)

[3] ED/N: Eren Yeager is the protagonist of the Attack on Titan manga series. There could possibly be some sort of joke over here, but since neither Imperfectluck nor I have watched Attack on Titan, we aren't sure.

Chapter 293
Newly-born Silver Species (Part 2 of 2)

"The Great Stone Sculptor Ainslo and the others want to live here?"

This was rather surprising to hear, but it seemed that the environment and living conditions here fulfilled their requirements. Out of the blue, the Earth Elemental Lords that had come with Beifeng had made a request to live here in the Forest of Dreams.

They were six existences at the Saint rank and above—especially Ainslo, who possessed the power to fight for the mantle of the next Earth Elemental God. She was one of the strongest Earth Elemental Lords in existence, so of course I wanted to know why these six Earth Elemental Lords wanted to live here. But first… I needed to stop myself from laughing.

"Are you intending to live here as well? That'll be wonderful… I mean I'll miss you so much."

Yes, that was what I was so happy about. After all, the six Earth Elemental Lords were currently in the dracon's Soul World. If they all stayed behind here in the Forest of Dreams, wouldn't that mean that this bastard would need to remain behind as well? Although I felt apologetic towards the inhabitants here, I didn't really care so much since Beifeng wasn't interested in the wood spirits.

"No, Milord. Only my sister and five brothers are going to stay here. I can't be without you (because I'll always meet wondrously strange species when I'm with you), so I'll continue following and serve you (in order to seek new food), Milord. Ah! Please don't stomp on me!"

He even tried to intentionally hug me as he said so, and then…

"Did you really think I didn't understand what you meant? That's what you get for making me so disgusted with you!"

After beating him up in order to vent, I finally moved on to the main topic.

It turned out that the Earth Elemental Lords felt this environment to be quite suitable for them to live in even without Beifeng's Soul World's support, and it was far more comfortable compared to his tiny Soul World as well. They hoped to be able to sign and become Contract Warriors and fight for Justice Points in order to obtain the right to live here.

Based on the magical system of this world, earth, water, fire, and wind—the four major elements—were the foundation of everything. Just as how ice magic was a branch of water magic, nature magic, which controlled plants, was, of course, a branch of earth magic.

This small dimension filled with nature magic would naturally be beneficial to the Earth Elemental Lords.

From a certain standpoint, being able to strengthen the Forest of Dreams' defenses was a good thing. Not to mention that only by making it possible for the earth to move together with the trees would the Forest of Dreams truly be able to truly become a moving, living forest. If the Earth Elemental Lords helped out, I would get help in realizing some of my plans for the Forest of Dreams. The forest's defenses would be improved several fold as well.

However, the problem was…

"Are they reliable? Beifeng, tell me the blunt truth. Do you trust them?"

"Captain Roland, although they're my sworn brothers and sister, and that Ainslo indeed treats me quite well, I truly don't trust them at all. Since they were willing to rebel against Emordilorcan, it's only normal for them to rebel against us later on as well. Not to mention, Ainslo is quite ambitious; she really desires to become the new Earth Elemental God."

From a certain standpoint, Beifeng Herault who had been with me since Sulfur Mountain City was actually one of my closest and most trusted retainers. When I heard him say this, I actually relaxed somewhat. At least Beifeng knew the situation as well and was even willing to tell me directly, which meant Beifeng could still be considered trustworthy.

I long since knew that those Earth Elemental Lords weren't worthy of my trust. After

all, I had been the main culprit behind the Earth Elemental Lords' suffering in the first place, having destroyed the Earth Elemental Throne so that no new Earth Elemental God could be born for the next several hundred years—at least. From a certain standpoint, it could even be said that Ainslo was forced to leave her home because of me. Even I wouldn't believe it if they said they had no grudges against me, but she and the others hadn't mentioned anything and even became super obedient, which made me all the more vigilant against them.

Although they weren't reliable or trustworthy, their powers would be far too useful for this forest. If the Earth Elemental Lords truly helped out, they would massively speed up my plans for fortifying the defenses here.

According to my expectations, the wood spirits didn't even need to live on the surface. The surface could be left to the magical plants and the soon-to-arrive visitors. They would become the first line of defense against an undead invasion, and the wood spirits that had the talent of Plant Communication would basically be able to live on top of the divine trees (that was what the wood spirits called these towering trees that almost reached the clouds) and enjoy the fun of "I can hit you but you can't hit me."

Actually, the development for this had already begun. There were various rope bridges tied across the divine trees, and in order to increase the speed at which they could ascend and descend such great heights, rope elevators had been installed in the hollow centers of the divine trees. Every day, countless wood spirits were choosing their new homes and thinking of ideas on how to decorate them in a camouflaged fashion so that nobody could see their homes from the ground.

By the time they were finished, the wood spirits would no longer need to appear on the surface. It could be said that if the wood spirits didn't wish to see someone, that person could walk through this entire forest without seeing a single wood spirit.

But just this alone wasn't enough. The wood spirits still needed a safe hideout and home, and it would be best if they also had a fixed marketplace for trading with other species as well. However, it wouldn't be safe to place these core structures on the wide-open treetops. After all, if there were any aerial attacks, the wood spirits may be able to escape into the trees, but the structures would be unable to move.

"Since the skies are no good, let's go underground."

Emordilorcan's underground labyrinths in Antuen and the Earth Elemental Plane had

given me a deep impression. I wanted an underground labyrinth that spread throughout under the entire forest, creating an entire underground world that only the wood spirits knew how to traverse. If this really succeeded, it would mean that anyone who managed to conquer this forest still wouldn't be able to touch the wood spirits.

Although I had my plans set for this already, and magical plants were quite skilled at digging, it would obviously take many years to complete. It would also cost an astronomical amount of resources and labor. And even if it was completed, it probably wouldn't compare to the Earth Elemental Lords' underground palaces as they were all digging specialists. After all, Emordilorcan took only one or two short months at Antuen to create such a large-scale underground labyrinth that was so solid and defensible. We wouldn't be able to achieve this level of digging skill even if we had ten years.

However, Beifeng's six Earth Elemental Lord brothers (and one sister) were all at the Saint rank, and if they started digging together, they would probably far surpass Emordilorcan who wasn't even in his best condition at the time. I even impulsively wanted to reconsider my overly conservative plan and make a 999-floor gigantic underground labyrinth to make any possible invaders suffer to death. I would make it obnoxious to the point where the exit was right in front of someone with just a wall in between, but it would require two weeks to reach. Despite the fact that it was only 999 floors, I would write on the entrance, "Enter the 1000 floor labyrinth if you dare."

That wasn't all. I planned on making other obnoxious labyrinth obstacles such as uphill paths that made one notice that they had accidentally returned to the first floor, with a sign saying "Hero, please try again." Or, the invader would finally make it all the way through the final floor after following all the clues but then would find out that an item near the first floor's entrance was required in order to truly reach the end. (Excerpt from Archmage Victor's lecture, more than one thousand years in the future: By the way, Roland Mist really accomplished his dream. This endless labyrinth filled with disgusting traps and terrible psychological tricks became the most hated adventuring grounds of all. It was nicknamed: "The Labyrinth That Only a Moron Would Enter." As the creator of such a labyrinth, Roland Mist's name was cursed by countless people.)

Since I was currently so passionate about creating a terrifying labyrinth, Ainslo and the other Earth Elemental Lords' offer to stay here was a huge boon. However, such a secret undertaking wasn't suitable for untrustworthy outsiders to handle for us, nor

was there a rush to complete this.

"Sure, we accept. There's no reason not to accept."

I agreed immediately, but I was actually thinking about how to test the Earth Elemental Lords' sincerity. If they were truly sincere about helping us, that would be the best-case scenario. If they had other things in mind, then this was also a perfect opportunity to see what they were plotting and deal with that.

"How's the progress on the airships?"

"The Ivy League's completion is slightly over fifty percent. The Mizar's modifications haven't been going smoothly and will probably take longer than expected."

As I walked in the forest and looked at the humongous trees around me, it gave me the mistaken impression that I had become tiny. Meanwhile, in the area of the forest by the sea, docks were already beginning to be constructed.

All the land routes to the Forest of Dreams were currently blocked by the undead. If the wood spirits wanted to contact the outside world, it was only natural for them to turn to water and air routes—ships would be absolutely necessary.

Amelia quite obviously didn't know how to manufacture airships, which naturally meant that the wood spirits didn't know, either. It was up to me to give them the technology and knowledge to create airships. Of course, they didn't have the necessary materials or smiths for airships, but, just as how I had used undead materials to substitute for certain materials, they were capable of using plant materials to do the same. It was just that the wood spirits' construction methods would remain incomprehensible to outsiders.

I named their first airship the "Ivy League," and it was equal in strength to any one of my seven airships of the Big Dipper Squadron (e.g. Mizar). The Ivy League was three hundred meters long, and if you stood the airship up vertically, you would discover that it was actually just a gigantic hollowed-out tree. The outer bark's hardness, however, far surpassed that of ordinary steel.

Right now, the Ivy League was undergoing detailed modifications. The large tree leaves were being transformed into a wind sail and mast, while roots tied everything together as the support. With its outer appearance making it appear just like an ancient tree, it was a rather wood spirit-like airship. The large majority of its attacking

mechanisms were hidden under the tree bark.

After all, this was, indeed, a tree—a living tree, a divine tree that had just been uprooted. It was a "Skyscraper Pine Tree." (named by me).

Yes, this was their unimaginable technology—all their airships only needed to be planted. This tremendous pine tree I called the "Skyscraper Pine Tree" was the wood spirits' favorite type of tree to live in. This particular tree had been hollowed out; through special methods, it had been created by the Forest of Dreams itself.

Of course, apart from the Ivy League, which would become the first ship in the wood spirits' airship fleet, there were also divine tree candidates such as the "Original Bamboo" and "Grand Peach Tree" and so on… yep, those strange names were all created by me, weren't they great?

This was a far too convenient method to create airships. If it weren't for the fact that these unimaginably large trees would begin withering after leaving the Forest of Dreams for too long and would eventually die, making it impossible to take them on long distance trips, I would have immediately created several hundreds of these divine tree airships.

"The Ivy League will die if it doesn't return to the Forest of Dreams in six months, and it will start weakening if it doesn't return in three. One can't get quality goods for a cheap price after all. In that case, the wood spirits' air fleet will only be able to be used in this nearby area. Still, it'll make an excellent airship fleet for defensive battles at least."

Meanwhile, the Mizar was also undergoing modifications at the under-construction docks. We obtained plenty of hydra hide from the seven-headed water dragon (hydra) from the earlier fight with the Queen of Storms, and its heart had already become the Mizar's backup engine. Since the Mizar was designed in the exact same way as the Borealis, it was compatible with the same technologies for powering up. Now that the Mizar had put on a layer of hydra skin and hydra body parts, it had become a lot more similar to the Borealis.

At the moment, I had just finished my future blueprint for the Forest of Dreams. I temporarily divided the forest into six districts.

The wood spirits' residential area would be amongst the tallest trees of the forest,

their divine trees. This district would be intricately connected by endless rope and wooden bridges and would be where the wood spirits primarily resided. It would likely become a forbidden zone for other species.

The docks district would be where endless amounts of airships and naval ships parked. There would also be the business district, located not far away from the docks, which would be where outside species' merchants gathered. There was also the divine district, where all the Gods' churches would be welcome, even if there was only a lonely Church of Law's stone court and church right now. Of course, this would also become the service district for all Holy War-related issues.

The central district would be for the future adventurers and Forest of Dreams' residents. Although this was currently nothing but empty land, in the future it would likely become the most populated and largest district of all; various basic necessities stores, entertainment options, and public facilities would be set up here.

The sixth and final district was the underground labyrinth that was still a mere blueprint in my mind, but it would be exclusively for the wood spirits.

"When the Ivy League is ready, we're going to head out!"

While I was patiently waiting, I received an unexpected visitor: an envoy from the Tark Republic undead. Their intent? To hold talks with me!

Chapter 294
Missed Target

I received the Tark Republic's undead envoy group in an empty clearing outside the Forest of Dreams. In many cases, diplomatic envoy groups were no different from spies scouting out information. Even if many things weren't considered top secret, I still didn't want to show them to the Tark Republic.

“…Halu the Twelfth? What a strange name."

"Your Majesty, we possess our very own naming system. Perhaps other species consider our names strange, but to us, they represent our entire lives."

The main envoy was a vampire marquis. Tall, white, and handsome, he was clad in ancient black ceremonial attire and held a black staff in his hands. He slowly yet clearly articulated each sentence in a logical manner, although his speech was somewhat archaic with an ancient accent. Despite his young appearance, he resembled an old-fashioned aristocrat.

As for him calling me "Your Majesty," that was without any formality at all. It was just the typical way the undead respected SemiGod undead… it would seem that they had long since known the fact that I was Yongye. Actually, I had already resolved myself to this as some things were impossible to conceal from everyone. If I was an Undead Emperor exiled from the mortal plane, I would have been really interested in the only new Undead Emperor to arise in this recent generation, thinking of every method I could to obtain all possible information on him.

Although he was quite deep in enemy territory and surrounded on all sides, the envoy, Halu the Twelfth, was quite gracious and seemed to be an experienced diplomat. With warm passion in his seriousness, his behavior revealed an elegance that only time and accumulated experience could have given him. In fact, there was nothing wrong with his manners, and perhaps we were the ones being a little rude, as we didn't even invite him inside the forest and had casually found him a small wooden stool for him to sit on.

"Let's get to the point. What are you here for? I don't have the time to be playing word

games with you."

In spite of my bluntness, this vampire marquis undead—who was, at the minimum, at the Saint rank—maintained his smile as he shook his head slightly.

"Of course, we would not waste Your Majesty's time with trifling matters. My main purpose on this very day, apart from presenting you the greetings from the other Undead Emperors, was, in sooth, a small matter that I would like to ask Lady Gria…"

Not me, but Gria? I had pretty much guessed at what they wanted. And the next moment when Halu stated his goal, my prediction was proven correct.

"You want to ally with the Xiluo Empire?"

Since the Xiluo Empire was an undead country like the Tark Republic, in a way they were the only possible ally for the Tark Republic in the entire world.

Also, don't judge Gria by how unreliable she seemed when she was with me. As the former Fourth Senator, in a situation where the First and Second Senators had been deposed and the Third Senator Harloys was "missing," Gria was indeed the number-one ranked individual under Omar. Even Lionheart, the current Xiluo Empire's prime minister, would have to respect her opinions on every matter.

When I turned around to look at Gria who was standing beside me, she cast a casual glance in my direction before faintly lowering her head. She remained behind me, and this was an obvious indication of her giving me the right to answer for her.

"It's even better to be able to discuss this personally with you." Halu's elegant smile remained unflustered upon seeing this. Not even a hint of surprise showed upon his face, as if he had long since guessed at this outcome.

Well, his tricks didn't need to be stated out loud. In a way, the Xiluo Empire had already become one of the most important parts of the future Mist Alliance, and any perceptive individual would be able to figure out who really was behind the Mist Alliance.

But, from a certain standpoint, this was also a standard diplomatic tactic, to test whether the Xiluo Empire was still under Emperor Yongye's control. In front of such a sly veteran diplomat, Gria had instantly revealed the truth that I was still in charge as she was used to only thinking about combat matters.

"Alliance? Do you really think it's possible?"

It had been quite difficult for me to get the other Northlands countries to begin accepting the Xiluo Empire. However, the Tark Republic, which was invading the mortal plane, was basically the enemy of every single country in Eich. The moment the Xiluo Empire allied with the Tark Republic, Xiluo would likely be viewed as the same as the Tark Republic, which would waste all of my previous efforts.

"As ancient undead who haven't been back to their homeland for a long while, we find it quite fortunate that we have been able to see another undead country in our original home of the mortal plane. We're even more delighted to see that the Xiluo Empire's citizens have achieved a peaceful relationship with the living. We understand that your country hasn't had it easy in a world filled with enemies, but, at the very least, allow us to express our friendliness to plant a seed of opportunity for the future."

His words were rather roundabout and slightly difficult to understand, but to express it in an easier manner, he was basically saying "Even if we can't become official allies now due to the circumstances, we're simply here to express our friendship, and we just want to improve our relationship."

It would seem that Halu was indeed an expert diplomat. From the very start, he didn't say anything useless like, "We promise to not attack the wood spirits," or something as foolish like, "We'll pretend that Emperor Aso's death didn't happen." Instead, he had jumped directly to the main topic.

His directness and sincerity had actually given me a good first impression. After all, due to the unique and unavoidable geography of this region, the conflict between wood spirits and the undead was practically unavoidable. Not to mention, Emperor Aso's death would definitely be no small ignorable matter for the Tark Republic, and it would only be natural to blame us for it.

Since the conflict between both sides was unavoidable, with battle the only result in the future, saying something so obviously fake like, "We won't have any conflicts anymore," would be nothing more than an insult to both sides' intelligence. Unfortunately, many of this generation's diplomats liked to pretend to be fancy with their words, saying only pretty words they felt their targets wanted to hear. Not only would they be unable to fool their targets, they would be all the more despised.

But, if it was only to express their friendliness, there would have been no need for this

vampire marquis to personally come here. I didn't pry and merely sat there quietly, sipping my tea and waiting for him to speak up.

Finally, Halu was unable to wait any longer, and his tone contained disgust and absolute loathing as he spoke again.

"…Gricasio—as long as we obtain his head, the Tark Republic is willing to pay a large price. We're even willing to give up on this forest and the entire surrounding area."

Alright then, I should have already guessed it. This was the critical point that Halu was here for.

I could understand the Tark Republic's anger. Emperor Aso's choice to sacrifice himself for the sake of the Tark Republic when facing a powerful enemy would be considered a warrior's honor. Insulting the powerful enemy would be the same as insulting Aso himself so Halu and the Tark Republic were still able to respect me even if we were enemies. However, there was one type of individual that would never be forgiven—traitors!

Gricasio had already received generous gifts of knowledge from all the Undead Emperors which helped him get much closer to reaching SemiGod rank, but this meant that Gricasio had to help the Undead Emperors in turn. Not only that, the Undead Emperors hadn't placed many restrictions on him, mostly due to their trust in his power.

Undead were undead because of their stubbornness, and top-level undead all had their own pride. Their power levels acted as the best name cards and self-introductions; the stubborn top-level undead all had their own pride and self-respect. SemiGod undead might be insane, foolish, and deceitful, but it was impossible for a top-level undead to not have their pride and basic morals. From a certain standpoint, this was considered as common sense by all undead.

However, they just happened to meet an exception… Perhaps Gricasio's stubbornness that was keeping him alive was his desire to never die. As long as he could continue living, he was willing to do anything, no matter how shameless.

Even though Halu's request sounded quite reasonable, I didn't even consider it, shaking my head directly in refusal. I didn't even need to consider this matter.

Halu nodded. He seemed to have expected this answer.

"We can understand your desire to protect him. Please inform Gricasio that we consider him our mortal enemy, and the day he leaves this forest is the day of his death."

Halu's meaning was quite obvious. While it wasn't at the extent of declaring all-out war against us, the moment Gricasio appeared, there would be a major attack targeting him. And, in order to deal with a Myth-ranked Immemorial Bone Dragon like Gricasio, the Tark Republic undead had likely prepared themselves for paying a huge price.

"You won't be able to achieve your desire here."

"Hmph, Your Majesty should not underestimate our determination to take revenge for Emperor Aso—"

However, I rudely interrupted him halfway through his little speech. After all, no matter what he said or how movingly they swore revenge, it was all meaningless.

"Your declaration to kill him for certain has already failed. It's not that I want to protect him, it's because he's not even in the Forest of Dreams!"

Alright then, Halu's handsome face instantly distorted upon hearing this. I felt that it was something quite new, seeing an undead astonished to the point where his chin bone fell off.

"How is that possible? He's not under your protection? Where could he even go!?"

"No, no, you see, on that day he directly returned to Xiluo and even left a note for me. His note said, 'Your Majesty, I'm suddenly having some stomach problems so please allow me to first return to the Xiluo Empire to await your good news.' Hah! As if an undead would actually have a stomachache? Halu the Twelfth, I, too, want to kill off that sly old fox even more than you guys do. As long as you can catch him, feel free to do whatever you like with him without caring about me."

How would a sly old fox like Gricasio possibly not know that the Tark Republic wouldn't forgive him? And how could he possibly leave the matter of his own safety up to me? On the same day Aso had sacrificed himself, Gricasio had unhesitatingly left that note for me and left. In order to avoid being caught, a Myth-ranked Undead Lord

Bone Dragon like him actually secretly swam underwater in the middle of the night in order to escape. It was incredibly shameless to the point of having no limits whatsoever.

As for whether or not he really returned to the Xiluo Empire? I figured that it was highly likely he had returned. After all, it was probably the safest place for him. A powerful faction would be the most beneficial for him, and he indeed counted as being part of my faction now. Of course, just like how things were in the past, he was one of my most untrustworthy subordinates—a complete summer soldier and sunshine patriot, [1] a perfect example of "when the going gets tough, the tough get going." [2] 1

"So, he escaped long ago, and everything you just said was meaningless."

Alright then. At least it was fun to see Halu's ugly expression as he left. Although I didn't really know what to think of this entire diplomatic mission, in a way, now that the Tark Republic diplomatic envoy had left, that set the tone for the relationship between us.

At the very least, we would definitely remain enemies with the Tark Republic for quite some time to come.

After I watched Halu the Twelfth vanish from my sight, I received an unexpected group of visitors.

"They want to make use of our strength to protect them?"

The Veji Merchant Association's group was still in Nightrain City. Due to our influence as well as the change in the overall situation, the Nightrain City dragon knights didn't give them a hard time. Still, staying in an enemy country like this was an uncomfortable situation, which was why they asked to see if they could leave together with us through the dragon knights.

I hesitated for only a moment before I agreed. After all, this was nothing to us, and, perhaps, the Veji Merchant Association and those two mercenary groups would come in useful in the future. Besides, the work here at the Forest of Dreams was falling into place; it was almost at the point where I wasn't needed here anymore. It was about

time for me to leave.

Notes:

[1] ED/N: The terms "summer soldier and sunshine patriot" were used in "The American Crisis," a series of articles/pamphlets written by Thomas Paine during the uncertain times of the American revolution (winter 1776). They refer to individuals who claim to fight against tyranny on the side of freedom, yet are unable to stick it out when the going gets tough or unfavorable. (Source: Urban Dictionary)

[2] ED/N: The original meaning of this saying is inspirational: "When the situation becomes difficult the strong will work harder to meet the challenge. They become determined and are willing to fight." Often times it is used sarcastically, as it is used here, meaning "when the going gets tough" (when the situation becomes difficult), "the tough get going" (the 'tough' people 'get going,' i.e. they flee).

Chapter 295
Unfamiliar Old Acquaintance

The Bardi Empire wouldn't deserve to be called a mega-empire if they knew nothing about the fact that a major conflict had erupted within their own borders.

Everything that had happened at Port Victoria had already been learned by the Bardi Empire's capital city, Stalar, through various information channels. After being incited by certain parties, even the commoners were discussing this sudden battle out on the streets—it wasn't limited to the nobles.

The current hottest topic was about how the Undead Planes had been connected to Port Victoria and that the undead armies had arrived. The topic became even hotter when one of the elders of the House of Nobles, in utter disbelief, demanded evidence from the Dragon Knight Archduke Halent. This had enraged Halent to the point where he bloodied that noble's mouth with a powerful before stuffing a memory crystal with the battle's recordings into that very noble's mouth.

Alright then. Although Halent would have to pay a price—most likely the emperor's rage and house arrest for half a year—that unfortunate noble marquis who had been pitifully beaten up was even arrogant enough to openly swear revenge upon Halent. And so, that noble's luxurious mansion was set on fire by a passing dragon… Yep, we all knew what that was really about.

"Look, it's those undead!"

Halent's memory crystal, which contained vivid scene of endless amounts of undead pouring in, was viewed time and again by all the highest-level members of the Bardi Empire. Descriptions of what was in it spread everywhere. The prevailing attitude in the Bardi Empire began changing as well, and the high-level undead in the royal capital started having a difficult time.

The biggest trouble for the undead in the capital was due to the series of events set in motion by Emperor Aso's death.

In order to better control the situation, most of the high-level undead in the capital

were Aso's direct subordinates who had signed soul contracts where they would die together with their master. When Emperor Aso died, the undead that suddenly died with him astonished the fortunate survivors and made them tremble in fear. After all, in their minds, Undead Emperors were just like True Gods; they were considered undying, immortal existences. To them, it was as if the very sky had fallen.

Since the Desecration Plane was the first Undead Plane to have connected to the mortal plane, most of the undead that had arrived were from it. It was as if a huge company's CEO had died out of the blue along with many of the higher-ups. The panicking of the mid-level and lower-level employees as a result was only natural.

At this critical moment, the living's sudden increase in hostility towards the undead made the undead feel all the more lost for what to do. They became extra cautious in every little action they took as they were afraid of further increasing the enmity towards them.

Meanwhile, the most incomprehensible of all was what the master of this country, Orloss the 13th, was thinking.

While he angrily condemned Halent's ridiculous actions and didn't accept Halent's request to meet him on the surface, he didn't even give Halent any punishment apart from verbal denunciation. Orloss kept coaxing the undead with platitudes but didn't take any actual actions to control the rumors spreading around. His attitude was forceful as always yet his actions were self-contradictory.

While the capital was busy with the chaos of the storm of rumors, Orloss would either shut himself in like a hermit or suddenly desire to go out for some fun and go hunting. His retainers didn't understand just what their venerated emperor was thinking at all.

Currently, a sudden rainstorm ambushed Orloss's procession where a battle suddenly began and ended in just an instant.

"Speak! Who sent you here to assassinate His Majesty Emperor Orloss? The 26th Prince? The 8th Prince?"

The assassin's limbs had been sliced off, and the amount of blood on the ground had far surpassed the lethal amount. He was likely to die at any moment. However, the emperor's personal guard continued his interrogation without skipping a beat.

“…It was the 8th Prince!! Don't kill me, don't kill me! I've already told you who it was,

please help me stop the bleeding!"

Since the guard received an answer, he ignored the assassin's pleas for help and directly reported it to Emperor Orloss, while also inquiring if they should keep this only assassin that survived out of the group that had ambushed them alive. However, Orloss slowly shook his head, telling his guard to simply execute the assassin.

"You're not going to ask more? Maybe the assassin wasn't telling the truth."

In Orloss's carriage was Halent who should have been at his home, having been "refused" a meeting with the emperor.

There was one other person riding in Orloss's carriage. The third and final person was a black-robed mage who always followed Emperor Orloss wherever he went. Yet, at the moment, this mage seemed to be napping.

Halent wasn't at all surprised by the surprise invitation and the ambush attempt on Orloss. After all, if Orloss the 13th didn't have some actual power backing him up, this "Fox Scorpion Emperor" would have long been assassinated.

"It's meaningless. I meet with assassination attempts once or twice every week. Those who dare to try assassinating me—no—I should say that those who come to their deaths here are those who don't care about their lives. Since the assassin said that Little 8th was behind this, that means that apart from Little 8th, anyone else could be responsible. No, actually, from the recent reports I've been receiving, they've all made plenty of progress and have learned how to hide the truth within falsehood and make the truth seem like a lie, so maybe Little 8th isn't so innocent after all. Yep, judging from how Little 8th's personality has become more and more extreme as of late, there's over a seventy percent chance that his assassin was just acting there in order to pin the blame on one of his brothers. Ha! Little 8th's become a lot smarter recently."

Even though he was clearly talking about something as unfortunate as the fact that his adopted princes wanted to kill him, the old emperor was smiling in such a genial fashion. He even sounded proud of the princes. It was as if he was an elder praising his children for being capable and filial.

From a certain standpoint, he was indeed quite proud. The fact that his twentyish adopted princes kept plotting and scheming against each other was actually something that this seemingly kind old man personally put them up to. It appeared

that he was intending on using such a method to choose his successor.

Halent didn't reply to this as he didn't intend to care about anything in the royal palace, and nor did he have any interest. He was simply interested in why the emperor suddenly invited him over in secret, but whenever he mentioned what was currently happening with the undead in the west part of the Bardi Empire, the old emperor would only mysteriously smile and say, "You'll find out soon in a bit."

Actually, due to certain reasons, Emperor Orloss was in quite an excellent mood these days. He sunk into nostalgia as he looked at the rain outside his carriage window.

About thirty years ago, on a rainy night just like today's, there was also yet another internal struggle within the royal palace that had left him seriously injured, on the verge of death. At that time, he managed to meet Aso and told Aso about his unwillingness to die, which managed to change his fate.

From that day onwards, the Orloss who wasn't so respected and feared in the past possessed the secret power he received from the shadows as he gradually reached the peak of imperial authority. By today, his achievements and authority had far surpassed any Bardi Emperor in history. However, only he himself knew that he had to pay a price for that assistance he received in the past. And this debtor wouldn't be easy to deal with.

Of course, how would an ambitious and scheming individual like Orloss, who was capable of making his own adopted sons plot against and kill each other to determine the strongest, possibly stand for being controlled by someone else? Orloss always had his own plans and powerful weapons available to him, unbeknownst to all.

Even with his numerous and careful preparations, he hadn't put any of them to use yet when the situation majorly changed. The undead's greatest miscalculation was that they didn't expect the stubborn Aso to sacrifice himself. The hold that Aso had over Orloss when Aso intentionally saved Orloss's life naturally disappeared together with Aso's death.

The undead's original strategy was to control the old emperor and gradually insert the high-level undead into the various social classes of the Bardi Empire to slowly take over the country from the inside. But now that Aso was dead, and all six Undead Planes' Dimensional Doors had been opened wide—

"Ah, the situation has become completely chaotic."

Nobody responded to Orloss's sentiment. Indeed, with the changes in the situation, some people went from chess pieces to becoming chess players, while some believed themselves to be chess players when they were nothing but sacrificial chess pieces. With all the chain reactions from Aso's death, it was very likely that nobody knew what would happen from now on.

"Your Majesty, about Port Victoria…"

"My dear Halent, there's no need to be hasty. When we arrive at a certain place, I'll introduce you to a certain someone. After you talk with her, you'll probably have a fresh outlook on many things."

The emperor retained his smile as he spoke to Halent. Meanwhile, the horse-drawn carriage entered a forest, and everything in the carriage fell silent as the carriage then proceeded into a deep canyon.

Suddenly, a strange sensation of dizziness came over Halent. He paused in surprise for a moment, but then came to the realization that he had just experienced a dimensional teleportation.

"Little Orloss, there seems to be a guest today?"

Orloss heaved a sigh of relief when he heard this voice. He even muttered to himself, "Ah, I'm quite lucky today. It's the easiest one to talk to this time," before he responded.

"Yes, he's Aboyue's grandson and Mina's great-grandson. You've probably seen him before as well. There's a bit of a change in the situation now, so I believe that it's time for him to meet you."

"A change in the situation? Are you referring to Aso's death or the successful opening of all six Dimensional Doors for the Undead Planes? Even in this location, I'm quite clear about what happened."

"Both, but not only that."

The darkness around the carriage subsided, and Halent inhaled deeply when he finally saw just who was speaking. There were stone walls all around, and this seemed to be an underground location. Meanwhile, the soft-sounding female voice belonged to a

silver dragon, whose head was as large as a small mountain.

"Such pure draconic might? Is this an Ancient Dragon? An Immemorial Dragon? Or something even more ridiculous, a survivor from the times of fairy tales and legends?"

Dragons especially viewed both rank and power level as important. Halent was pressured to the point of being unable to even move in front of this dragon that was evidently far, far stronger than he was.

"Lady Evelyn, even if you're able to sense the incidents that happened in the mortal plane outside, you'll never guess who the person behind all of it was."

However, that gigantic dragon seemed to half smile, as if she was an adult who was dealing with a naughty child playing a joke on her.

"Who else could it be apart from Roland? That special letter I had sent him had been activated, so how could I possibly not know?"

The silver dragon head seemed to have abnormally human-like behaviors as it revealed a nostalgic expression, seeming to reminisce about something in the past. Then, it revealed a playful expression.

"Your timing was perfect. The other two heads had a huge uproar over hearing about Roland, but they are now asleep."

"Haha, that's wonderful. Right, Halent met him recently as well. Lady Evelyn can ask Halent about him."

The silver dragon sent Halent a friendly look, and he noticed that the draconic might around him had dissipated. However, before he could even speak up, an astonishingly loud angry roar came from behind him.

"Roland!! Where is Roland? Don't you dare move! Roland, let me kill you!"

Roland's name seemed to have awakened a certain existence which let out a deafening roar. An extremely corrosive green dragon breath melted the entire stone wall.

Boom!

A colossal dark shadow crashed into the stone wall, and the entire cave shook with

the strength of an earthquake that sent endless amounts of small stone shards falling down from the ceiling.

While the humans covered their heads and ran, that gigantic black dragon head suddenly reached out searched around with its huge eyes but didn't find that man who she hated so much, so she retreated and went back to sleep with loud snores.

Only now was Halent able to completely see the true form of the huge dragon before him.

It was an exquisitely beautiful beast, an existence with power that far surpassed any regular Immemorial Dragon.

"A three-headed dragon! And they're actually three different species, silver dragon, black dragon, and sapphire dragon? A dragon of good, evil, and neutral are all combined in one body? Dear Dragon Gods! How is this possible!? This is desecration! This is the evilest curse!"

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Arlodant, the Mage Country, wasn't particularly large in size for a mega-empire. Most of its population was concentrated in the capital of magic, Arlo. But, as a mega-empire level country, the Mage Country's size still exceeded East Mist's by several tens of times.

Alright then, I'll admit it. It was mostly because East Mist was simply too small. After all, the way most humans saw it was that the entire Northlands were an unimportant remote location, and few paid attention to it. Some were only hearing about the Northlands' war with the beastmen just recently.

"I never thought that I'd be returning here. It seems like things haven't changed much."

Arlo's streets were incredibly clean. Stone gargoyles swept up trash on the streets, and even though it wasn't even nighttime yet, the streets were lit up by magical lights. The street-side shops even had magical signs that flashed and sparkled to attract customers with their advertisements.

The citizens walking around seemed to be unaffected by the war with the Bardi Empire as they casually went about their daily lives. Thanks to the archmages' excellent mastery of teleportation magic, the business district here was quite

renowned. Not only could one see various countries' local specialties here, but it was even possible to find rare treasures and mystical beasts from other dimensions for sale.

After all, mages had spread out so far and wide that they even lived in other dimensions.

The people here were used to seeing all sorts of strange and exotic things. When our Ivy League airship descended in this city, very few people actually exclaimed over it. The residents only glanced at the gigantic shadow in the air and muttered, "What exotic object have the mages created today?" before busying themselves with their work.

But, today, they were destined to be astonished because… I, Roland Mist, had returned!

Chapter 296
Seekers of Truth

Although it had been two days since I and the wood spirits' envoy group had arrived in the city of Arlo, the highest-level authority in the Mage Country, the "Truth Symposium," still hadn't contacted us for an official discussion. This wasn't because they were acting high or mighty or because they were avoiding us on purpose. We simply had bad timing, as the Truth Symposium was currently but an empty shell.

"Where are all the Truth Overseers? Um, normally speaking, it's already considered quite an accomplishment if more than half of the Truth Overseers can be located. Currently, there are only six Truth Overseers on-duty at Cloud Tower. It's impossible to begin a conference with only that many. At the very least, there needs to be ten of them. How about just waiting for the Truth Symposium's regular scheduled meeting for next month?"

Aloso, a member of the Mystical Blade School, was one of the most famous ice mages of the current generation. Halfway through the SemiGod Rank, he was a former member of the Truth Symposium. When we arrived, he was the one who came to greet us and had answered my question.

Judging by his unrestrained passion and how hard he hugged me as a greeting, the Ice Aeon spell I had given to him as a gift must have been something he really liked. It likely brought him great benefits.

"Roland, I never expected that we would meet each other again. You, the king of all truants, would actually mature to such a degree? As the dean, I'm quite proud of you."

This old archmage had a rather plump physique which was quite rare for mages. Aloso also had an excellent reputation for being one of the nicest mages in Cloud Tower. He was currently smiling like a Maitreya [1] [1] and even slapped his own plump stomach as he laughed, causing his fat to tremble.

We sort-of counted as teacher and student as well. Back when Kaid and I were studying beginner-level magic, we were all technically under Aloso in the Mystical Blade as he was the head teacher at the time. Now, he had become the dean of the

Mystical Blade School, which was why the graduation certificate he did for me even had his personal seal and signature.

Although we were technically teacher and student, it wasn't like what I had with Harloys or Amelia.

In order to explain things clearly, I first need to explain the Mage Country's special and unique political structure.

This country, rather than calling it an independent country (which would typically be considered to have a group of people ruling over others) would be much more accurately described as a mega-large research association.

The capital Arlo's name meant "seekers of truth" in the ancient language, and it represented the intention of this city when it was founded. Similarly, Arlodant meant "The place where seekers of truth gather" in the ancient language, which was quite self-explanatory.

The ruling class in this country wasn't composed of a noble system. So-called nobles were simply local administrators to begin with. And, even though this was the Mage Country, true authority didn't lay in the hands of any single mage.

The entire Mage Country consisted of countless small, medium, and large mage organizations. Every mage would typically choose to join the most appropriate mage organization for them as the most effective way to get one's voice heard in the Mage Country was through an organization.

The larger organizations would tend to have various smaller factions or internal organizations and branch organizations. This was due to the fact that mages would have different understandings and paths on how to seek the truth.

"I want to prove star cluster magic's revelations on Fate."

An example of one organization came about because of Archmage Rodriguez's ideas about star magic. Thus, the famous "Star Revelation" mage organization came into existence. This organization's divination, prophecy, and horoscope magic was at the world's peak; however, the Star Revelation's members were typically utter hermits who lacked practical combat experience. It would be considered quite something if their members could perform at even half their actual power ranks.

"I want to reach the pinnacle of combat magic."

Another example of how an organization came about was because of Archmage Levist's passion in combat magic. Thus, the famous Mystical Blade came into existence. Their members were typically far more experienced in actual combat, which was rare for mages. They were far more skilled at combat magic and combat strategies, and half of the classes they taught were about practical combat. They typically grew through actual battles. However, it would be difficult to ask any of them for some top-level theories.

Alright then. Although both of these organizations were among the most powerful organizations in the Mage Country, they were almost exact opposites and had a terrible relationship with each other. One could view them as a practical faction and a theoretical faction. Or one could even think of it as the hard sciences versus the literary arts.

But there were no absolutes as there were always exceptions to everything. The Great Saint Margaret was a member of a smaller faction within Star Revelation. However, she was definitely highly skilled in real combat, having traveled all over the world.

And, from a certain standpoint, I counted as a member of the Mystical Blade. But let's not mention elemental magic which frustrated me so much. At the very least, I was quite well versed in undead magic.

From another standpoint, the organization's goal would typically change over time, different from what the creator intended. An example would be the "Sword of Order" organization. This organization's creator was a fervent believer in the Holy Light, and the organization's original focus was on Order Divine Arts, the power of faith and belief, Holy Light magic, and other similar topics. But, in the current generation, the changes in the Sword of Order organization were so massive that the original founder would likely be angered to death if he was still alive.

Perhaps they had gone off the wrong track somewhere, somehow, or maybe it was that things would always eventually balance in the opposite direction… This organization had long since stopped studying Holy Light magic and instead specialized in the rarest and strangest forms of magic. For example, their member mages liked to study undead magic, demon summoning magic, eastern talismans, and so on. It was definitely a gathering of researchers who loved to study the unpopular, and the Sword of Order organization ranked at the top of the world in studying the various sorts of taboo

magic.

The relationships between the various organizations were quite messy. Some of the smaller organizations counted themselves as part of several larger organizations since their core leaders were members of those large organizations. However, the large organizations all had bad relationships with one another, so during every academic conference, the mages wouldn't know who to support… Don't look down on academic conferences, as they were the most serious conferences in the Mage Country. The moment various organizations started disagreeing about something, the conference room would immediately turn into a dueling arena.

Yep, the most important meetings in the Mage Country were academic conferences, rather than supposedly serious political meetings.

Since all the mage organizations sought the truth as their goal, their internal conflicts stemmed from various types of academic disagreements. And, in the Mage Country, the highest-level academic conference was the "Truth Symposium." Yep, the same Truth Symposium was also the highest-level authority of this country.

The members of this Truth Symposium weren't fixed. Archmages with great research accomplishments or excellent reputations would be invited to become members, thus receiving the non-governmental status of "Truth Overseer." However, many undying archmages were uninterested in the Truth Symposium which was hardly ever able to come to a unified agreement on any topic. After forcing themselves to participate in a few meetings, they would feel like it wasn't worth the trouble of having the title of Truth Overseer. They would often resign from their posts, and new archmages would take their place.

The reason? The Truth Symposium had two types of meetings: scheduled meetings and emergency meetings. Any mage that reached a sufficient level could apply to listen in to a Truth Symposium meeting and support their own faction. When I was still an acolyte, I had listened in to two Truth Symposium meetings. I discovered that at these meetings, the mages would use thirty percent of the time to brag about their own academic results, fifty percent of the time to attack others' newest research accomplishments or to plagiarize them, and the remaining twenty percent of meeting time would be used to fight over funding and resources. For instance, they would always fight over the new mages with the greatest potential…

As for political tasks that needed to be done? When all the mages' mouths were dry

and they finally became tired of arguing, the final five minutes of the meeting would be used to pass new political policies at a high speed. The efficiency was incredible. Before a policy was even fully read out loud, all the mages would raise their hands in approval, and before the documents were finished being signed, all the mages would teleport away. With such "politicians" in charge, it must have been hard on the actual governmental administrators.

"It's all just a joke. They're all so old and stubborn. They're all top-level experts in their own fields so who'd be able to convince anyone by simply debating? There's also an ironclad rule that disallows actual fighting at the Truth Symposium. By the end of the debates, it's not even about who's being logical and reasonable—it's about who can be the loudest and maintain their concentration for the longest! It's about who can tolerate such a farcical debate the longest!"

This was also why the Mage Country had never invaded another country in the past thousands of years. In the past, there were obviously mages with plenty of ambitions. But to convince enough archmages in the Truth Symposium to pass a majority decision to declare war would be as difficult as reaching the stars. That mage might as well rely on their personal strength to try and conquering that country to realize their ambitions.

The Mage Country could technically even be considered to not be a country. For the true, purest of mages, the only places in the world they cared about were their research laboratories and libraries. They lacked territorial ambition and they did not pursue glory and honor, the exact opposite of the nobles and royalty in this world.

With such a political system, it was impossible for the Truth Symposium to ever "find the truth" about anything. Instead, it was quite easy for one to make enemies. It was quite common for those who became truly angry after arguing with those that disagreed with them to call for a duel with the other side in Midmountain Park after the conference. After all, fighting was strictly prohibited during the conference itself.

Every time one passed by that flowery park, one could always witness various duels of all sorts, sometimes even those involving forbidden spells. It was quite common to see an elderly white-haired professor dueling against some slightly cultured hooligan mage. There were even plenty of mages that knew martial arts and would use such techniques in the duels.

It was difficult for any sane person to tolerate such long and meaningless meetings for

more than one or two times. And, for the smaller organizations and independent non-affiliated mages, their research results would be questioned endlessly, which made things all the more unpleasant. That was why, due to a lack of enough Truth Overseers to hold the meetings, the conferences were postponed endlessly… However, since the meetings were considered pointless by everyone in the first place as nothing ever came of them, everyone was actually quite happy to postpone them.

Yet there was an ironclad rule that the leaders of the eighteen largest and strongest mage organizations were absolutely required to attend all the scheduled Truth Symposium meetings. Their organizations were too influential, so they were forced to attend. And, in a way, this actually caused the leadership of these large and powerful organizations to change quite rapidly as if it was an unpleasant job that nobody wanted.

Of course, there were exceptions to everything. For example, a certain witch intentionally became a Truth Overseer of her own volition. Although her main goals were to scam research funds and cover her own crimes, her excellent physical appearance and ability to conceal what she was really like, along with that natural talent of hers to detect others' emotions, helped her greatly in taking lead on discussing several major topics. She even won most of her debates, accumulating very high popularity and authority within both the Cloud Tower and the Mystical Blade.

Yep, the witch Amelia had once been a member of the Mystical Blade as well. She even gave classes to me and Kaid back in the day.

Right now, my biggest headache was that I was going to have to attend this headache-inducing Truth Symposium meeting.

Not long ago, I met with the Truth Overseer named Oslowen, and my System directly gave me the next step in my Epic Quest.

[Congratulations for activating the next part of your Epic Quest: "Will you have a glorious homecoming, or will you become a fallen phoenix?" You are required to participate in the next Truth Symposium meeting. The next portion of your Quest will depend on how you do at the Truth Symposium meeting and the status and identity with which you decide to attend. System Reminder: You know how things are done between mages. If you want mages to listen to you, you have to bring out something worthy of their attention.]

From this long Quest, which was, in actuality, a series of Quests in succession, it was quite obvious what the final goal of this Epic Quest was now. Of course, I would need to directly or indirectly get involved in this three-way war. That was how all these Quests in this Epic Quest chain were connected. First, I had to choose a side in this war and improve my Reputation level in the chosen side. After making my choice, what came next would naturally be to increase my influence. Only if people listened to me would I have the power to influence the entire war's situation.

For me and my newly-born Mist Alliance, allies were absolutely required. I needed to try and get a mega-empire level country on my side, as they were the most influential voices in human society.

The Mage Country was an anomaly to begin with amongst all the mega-empire countries. Since there were problems with all the other mega-empire countries, the Mage Country was probably the most trustworthy ally I could choose from the rest. Their support would be immensely important.

Based on my System's typical habit of making me suffer, I knew that unless I had a sufficient enough status to speak at the Truth Symposium and made myself influential enough at the meeting, the future developments would only make me suffer more and more. Perhaps I would even become nothing more than a cannon fodder-level vanguard without realizing it.

If the next scheduled conference was postponed, that would be both good and bad for me. The bad would be that I wouldn't be able to continue the Quest for quite a while, while the good would be that I would have more time to prepare.

However, that conference would be about the critically important issue of the war against the Bardi Empire. The invitations had already been sent out to the Truth Overseers, and absenteeism was strictly forbidden. It was highly unlikely that it would be postponed as usual, so my current goal was to make myself as influential and reputed as possible within the time limit of one month. I wanted to influence things at the conference as much as possible.

"With so many things having happened recently, the Truth Symposium meeting will definitely be held. At the very most, it'll only be postponed by one or two months. Roland, wait around for a while and familiarize yourself with the environment here. The situation seems to be easing up on the frontlines, and two Truth Overseers should be returning soon. At that time, they can begin the procedures for the meeting. Right,

how about coming to my school to teach a few classes as a way of passing time? With a veteran student returning to the school to teach, the students should be quite pleased."

Only now did I recall that Aloso had helped me obtain a special teaching certificate. At the time, I was just thinking that he was helping me to have an identity as a member of the Mage Country. I didn't realize that he was actually serious about having me teach.

After all, from a certain standpoint, we were all students from his school. Of course, students from a magic school were completely different from a mage's disciples.

Most large and medium-sized mage organizations had their own magic schools. That was where novices would be trained and talent and hard work could show their mettle.

Of course, the mage organizations wouldn't do such things like run magic schools for novices out of kindness and charity. Due to the magic schools always being affiliated with some mage organization, the newbies at the magic school would typically become the fresh blood for joining these organizations. Of course, if the newbies wanted to become official members, they would either need to perform incredibly well or become a candidate for an archmage's disciple.

The general knowledge taught at magic school may be shallow and limited, but it was also the most efficient required knowledge. So many years of teaching magic pared the classes down to the essentials, and it would build a solid foundation that would help a novice reach the next step. Seeds with true potential would be able to sprout with just this little amount of nutrition. Most archmages would find students appropriate for them while teaching classes, such as Harloys and Amelia back in the day.

By the way, since Harloys and Amelia were both teachers at the Mystical Blade magic school, they were naturally both members of the Mystical Blade mage organization as well. And, to my knowledge, Harloys was also one of the top-level members of the Sword of Order. While she was still a teacher, she discovered quite a few vicious individuals that she recruited into the Sword of Order, and several of her disciples even ended up on the Calamity Rankings. There were even more that became antisocial maniacs. Harloys' nickname of being the "Demon Professor" was definitely well-deserved.

In all honesty, it was just far too difficult to become a mage, so mage society didn't have the typical human society's system of children taking over their parents' work. Not only that, a mage's typical inheritance that they left behind would mostly be research about a particular topic and records about seeking the truth. The most important part of mage society naturally became the relationship between teacher and student.

"I definitely can't have my teacher's knowledge be lost to the world with my generation." This way of thinking was common to every mage. When a mage reached a certain level, they would desire to find a student who could inherit all their knowledge and research. Of course, the most important inheritance of all would always be the mage's desire to learn more about a particular topic.

And unlike other jobs where sometimes the relationship between teacher and student would be icy, the relationship between mage teachers and mage students would typically go on for several tens of years or even several centuries—it would typically become one akin to that between a parent and child. In fact, the Mage Country's laws even stated that a mage teacher had the right to make arrangements for a disciple's life, while the disciples would be responsible for taking care of an elderly teacher in old age. There were also inheritance laws for teachers and students that mirrored other countries' inheritance laws between parents and children.

What? Me and Harloys? A mage teacher-student relationship like ours, as if we were mortal enemies cursed forever to be stuck with each other… there would never be anyone else like us in existence!

Although I was currently worried about how to increase my fame, I soon started worrying about if I was becoming far too famous.

"It was a huge mistake to take those bastards with me!"

Note:

[1] ED/N: Maitreya is regarded as the future Buddha of this world in Buddhist eschatology. The Budai, or Laughing Buddha, is often identified with or seen as an incarnation of Maitreya, so much so that the Budai image is one of the main forms in which Maitreya is depicted in China. In this case, the author was relating Aloso to the chubby, smiling image of Budai. (Source: PDG Chapter 345 TL Note… yes, I know, I know. I was recently reading PDG, and it seriously was a coincidence. I'm definitely

not stalking other novels' notes. Definitely not.)

Chapter 297
The Great Industrial Party

"I should just toss these bastards into Goblin Cannons and have them shot to the ends of the world! No, that's still not enough! Their ability to survive surpasses even cockroaches! Even if I toss them into the Trench of Amu, they'll surely still survive and return—"

"Um, sir?"

"—I knew I should have tied them all up and tossed them into the sea. No, that still wouldn't be safe enough! Hehehe! I should just send them into my Frigidwinter Earth and have them hibernate there forever—"

"Sir!!"

An angry roar right next to me finally snapped me back to my senses. The next moment, a female face appeared in front of me and almost scared me witless.

"Sir, although you're an archmage from Mystical Blade, as well as our teacher, the most basic laws of our society need to be followed. Please take the law seriously!"

Alright then, looking at the young and angry woman before me, even though we were both wearing the light-blue robes of Mystical Blade, her emblem on her sleeve, which represented she was responsible for maintaining social order, stood out incredibly so. As I was the person bailing out the criminals, I could only obediently apologize and make promises on those bastards' behalf.

"I'm so sorry. I shall properly lecture them. I definitely won't give them an opportunity to commit such crimes again."

In the Mage Country, those who broke the law would naturally be punished by the mages. Since the Mystical Blade consisted of mages skilled in practical combat, many of their members chose to join law enforcement and social order jobs in society.

Although this woman before me seemed young, she had already been working at her

job for more than ten years judging by the emblem on her chest. And, as was common of a member of the powerful Mystical Blade, she was the type who really liked to lecture others.

"Sir! Please make absolutely certain to rein them in. I can barely even believe that someone would do such a thing…"

Her lecture was getting longer and longer and was giving me a headache. However, I felt just like an unlucky parent summoned to a parent-teacher meeting because my child hadn't received a passing grade, as I could only smile and apologize continuously as I accepted the endless lecturing.

"Yep, yep, I'll definitely put a tighter leash on them."

I finally managed to finish the process of bailing them out. Right when we left the Mage Country's version of a police station together, all the bastards behind me started jumping up and down in excitement at having regained their freedom.

"Eaglestorm—"

"Milord, relax. In the future, when I'm spreading the teachings of my Wild Bull Alliance, I'll definitely remember to wear some pants."

"Does that mean you won't be wearing a shirt?"

Alright then, let's stop caring about that sly old fox. The very first day he arrived, Eaglestorm started spreading his Wild Bull Alliance's teachings. It was only to be expected that he would be captured and arrested by a mage in charge of maintaining social order, and it was only a matter of time before he was jailed again. If it had been only him, I wouldn't have even bothered coming here to bail him out. However…

"Yawen, you've greatly disappointed me. A Town Security Officer like you, an enforcer of the law, was jailed as well? This isn't Sulfur Mountain City or Diffindor. Don't make trouble for me."

"Milord, I'm so sorry. I really didn't think that those hooligans would be so weak against my beating. Still, they were such cowards. Although they were breaking the law themselves, they actually requested assistance from a law enforcer!"

"…So would they be brave if they let you beat them up as you pleased? Stop reading

strange books and start thinking with your brain instead of your muscles. After all, a successful Town Security Officer needs to have some intelligence."

Next, I glanced over at the youngest criminal amongst the bunch.

"Little Timlad."

"I apologize, Big Brother Roland. I'll be more careful in the future. Next time, I won't let them find any evidence and I won't personally go to pick up the goods. I'll find an adult to do the work on my behalf when I need black market merchants."

Alright then, what he was actually saying was that he still intended to continue and that the only mistake he made was letting others find evidence of his crime. Little Timlad was the most excited person out of all of us to arrive at the Cloud Tower. He was quite curious about all the magical secrets available here. In just a few days, he already spent every last cent of the money he had saved up over the past few years on all sorts of various strange things. He had been arrested for going to the black market to purchase stolen goods.

"Yingou?"

"It really wasn't my fault. How would I know that the mage was idiotic enough to test the barbeque rack right after I sold it to him? Heh heh, he was unlucky to be caught in such an explosion."

This old and young engineer pair… sigh. One sold fake products and injured someone else, while the other went to the black market to purchase stolen products and ended up getting reported because he looked too young. While there was, indeed, a saying that birds of a feather flocked together, the two of them stuck together due to their bad habits and kept negatively influencing each other. As time passed, they were becoming worse and worse and more and more dangerous.

What? I'm still missing one person? It would seem incredibly improbable that a certain individual whose name had become forbidden would actually manage to escape being jailed here, right? Hah! Are you talking about a certain individual currently under suspicion of magical pet kidnapping and desecrating a summoned creature? At the moment, a certain dracon was still in a jail cell and was trying his utmost to attract my attention by rapidly blinking. Hmm? I don't know who that is! I didn't see anything, and none of you saw anything either, right?

As I expected, everyone shook their heads. Nobody knew who this individual could possibly be.

Yep, I didn't know him one bit so of course I didn't intend to bail him out. I definitely didn't want to become known as a pervert through association, so that bastard may as well obediently stay in jail until he rots.

And it wasn't only me. All the other criminals I bailed out were in mutual accord and managed to forget about that person. After all, not a single one of them wanted to be treated as that person's companion. He had managed to become headline news on his very first day here, making it beyond difficult for any of them to dare to claim to know who he was.

"I'm not going to care about all of your private affairs. But what about the tasks I gave you all to do? How are they going?"

The reason I took them along with me wasn't to give myself more trouble. In fact, it was the opposite. I would need many helpers for what I was planning, and most of the things could only be accomplished by them.

"With you personally signing the forms and archmage Kaid's letter of recommendation, the registration process has been completed. The newly-born mage organization 'Great Industrial Party' has been successfully established. It shall be registered as an organization under the Mystical Blade, and you are listed as the Great Industrial Party's leader. Since you and Kaid, two top-level archmages, are backing this organization up, nobody should be stupid enough to come looking for trouble."

As a great alchemist, Jinya Beyar was quite popular in the Mage Country. That was why I sent him to run some errands and do some paperwork for me. And it was probably the only reason why he wasn't also locked up for selling fake products.

"What about the store? Have the renovations started?"

“…There's been a tiny little problem with that. But have trust in old Jinya; it'll soon be taken care of."

Jinya's goblin eyes were darting left and right at a quick pace. Based on my understanding of him, he was obviously lying to me.

"Yep, we'll probably need only one week to clear away all the rubble. Then, we can

begin on the renovation work for the new shop."

Timlad smiled and immediately sold Jinya out.

"Rubble!? You damned goblin, you caused an explosion again? Ah, I knew I shouldn't have left things up to you all! Amelia will kill me!"

Jinya's rushed escape was the best evidence that I had been on my mark. It was now my turn to be in a terrible mood.

Originally, due to certain reasons, as Amelia's only disciple as well as "lover?", I successfully managed to take over several properties under Amelia's name on Stonecrystal Street. I intended to use these properties as a base of sorts to do some things here.

However, I regretted it immediately on the second day after taking over those properties. Countless debtors swarmed upon me upon seeing that someone had moved into Amelia's properties. All sorts of IOUs and debt agreements piled up with enough money owed to purchase the entire Stonecrystal Street. Not to mention, I had legally taken over her properties using faked documents and my real status as her student, so it was only natural that the debts were taken over by me as well.

"…I think it's far more than just one street? There's probably enough debt to purchase three whole streets. Amelia, were you actually out traveling to escape your debts? Fine then, I suppose I owe it to you to pay your debts off. Besides, I'll also benefit from this in the end."

From a certain standpoint, it would be quite difficult for a foreign visitor to speedily integrate himself into a relatively closed-off society. However, even if Amelia's reputation was somewhat seedy, people still knew about her, as evidenced by all the debtors waiting for her to resurface. No matter what, her storefront had over a hundred years of reputation to back it up. As long as I paid off her debts, I would be able to utilize her connections, which would be far faster than if I tried to establish connections of my own. And, right now, what I lacked the most was time.

Amelia's store? The Great Industrial Party? You see, even though I was once again intending on improving my Reputation, the devious tricks I pulled off in Karo would be useless for a repeat performance here. In the Mage Country's society, nothing would compare to research achievements and academic accomplishments. This was

similar to my previous world's academic society in its theoretical purest form.

"I'm an elemental magic specialist who won the Martin Scholar Award twice before."

“…I'm the unknown mage who invented the 'Ice Aeon' spell."

"I'm the vice dean of the Kaso magic school. My disciples are all over the world."

"Ice Aeon, thank you very much."

"I… I'm a core member of the Sword of Order! Could you stop talking about that 'Ice Aeon' of yours?"

“…I'm the creator of undead construction. Since you're a member of the Sword of Order, you should have read my thesis collection before on the might of undead construction. Or perhaps you're not even at the level where you're allowed to look at such top-secret theses?"

"Let us talk a bit more about Ice Aeon!"

When research results could turn into actual power and wealth, the phrase "knowledge is power" would no longer be simply an empty platitude. The status of mages was basically determined by their academic accomplishments.

As for why this ice mage former teacher of mine treated me so well? That would be because of the magic information I had given him. Not only would it assist his own personal research as a reference, it would also massively increase the status of ice magic within the Mystical Blade.

"Us ice mages in the Mystical Blade finally have a forbidden spell."

This sounded rather cool, and it would even help as an advertisement to attract young ice mages into Mystical Blade. Of course, the truth that "ninety-nine percent of people would be unable to reach the level required to cast this spell" would be left unsaid.

This wasn't even an attempt to fool people. It was simply common sense that didn't need to be said. After all, forbidden spells were far too difficult. And besides, even if it was left unused, it would still benefit many ice mages as they researched and analyzed the components of the forbidden spell.

Of course, I didn't do it for nothing. There was a rule of equivalent exchange in mage society, and since I provided such a rare and precious magical spell to the Mystical Blade, they rewarded me with an astronomical number of their "Contribution Points" that I could exchange for other magical knowledge and secrets. This was the most basic function of any mage organization: to gather a group of mages with similar interests to exchange information and magical ingredients so that everyone involved may benefit and grow stronger together.

But if I joined the conference using the status of Roland from the Mystical Blade, I would immediately face endless challenges from the Eye of Truth and other such mage organizations. It would be much better for me to join the conference as simply myself.

The "Great Industrial Party" would be a theoretical-type organization. Amelia's stores and workshops would be how I would turn theories into actual products and money. With that completed, a persistent virtuous cycle would be created, and this new mage organization would truly be established.

The goal I had given myself was to be able to appear at the conference with the status of "inventor of a new technology." And I, indeed, had plenty of technologies and toys on hand that I could use.

No matter if it was magical engineering, the Four Elemental Swordcasters, undead magic, ice magic, or wood spirits, there were plenty of things I could bring to the table. Obtaining the Mage Country's support was something on my to-do list for quite a long time already. It would be quite convenient to show and give them all these things in order to improve my standing here.

I already had the technology, and as for stores and workshops, I could make use of Amelia's "Thorn Garden" as well. Stonecrystal Street was a rather flourishing and bustling street. But due to the fact that the store had been completely destroyed by Jinya's explosion, I now needed to consider how to reconstruct it… and also how to explain to Amelia just why her garden and experimental laboratory needed to undergo such extensive reconstruction.

But, in order to overturn Amelia's past reputation, make the Cloud Tower's various mage organizations take note of my "Great Industrial Party" and even give me the right to attend the Truth Symposium meeting as the leader of the Great Industrial Party, I would need to show them a sufficient amount of strength and achievements. From a certain standpoint, the little gift of Ice Aeon that I gave to the Mystical Blade helped

me out greatly: I could avoid the most troublesome part of accumulating everything from scratch.

"Teacher, good morning."

"The weather's quite nice today, isn't it, sir?"

"Hello! Would you happen to have time to eat lunch together with me?"

"Senior, please go ahead of me."

As I walked around, there were quite a few that came up to me and politely greeted me. These people included white-bearded elderly mages as well as passionate and beautiful young female mages. The friendly attitudes they had towards me filled the bastards following behind me with nothing but disbelief.

"Brother Roland, could it be that you were unpopular for so long that you finally couldn't stand it anymore and finally purchased a Potion of Alluring as seen in the advertisements? But that's obviously just a fake and useless product."

Reyne was a bit hesitant but finally said what she was thinking out loud. Although the implied meaning behind her words made me quite displeased, making me want to retort, I decided against it when I thought about how she was one of the few people that came with me who I didn't have to bail out of jail.

"Hmph. This is the charisma of a scholar. Little girls like you wouldn't understand!"

Alright then, if you ignored all those ridiculous abilities attached to me that I couldn't get rid of, in a way, I actually had quite a high Charisma stat. However, it was obviously impossible for me to suddenly become so popular through my Charisma stat alone. The true reason was because of the Mystical Blade robe I was wearing.

This was a deep blue mage robe. Although it wasn't really eye-catching, the robe was made of starsand and tigermoth silk, the highest quality materials. Of course, most normal mages wouldn't be able to notice such a tiny detail. What they saw were the emblems on my chest as well as the special color of my robe.

The Mystical Blade's mage robes were all light blue. However, deep blue was a color reserved only for mage teachers. Well, that wasn't much on its own. After all, there were countless professors and lecturers within the Cloud Tower to begin with. The

most critical part was still the three emblems on my mage robe.

The first was an emblem of a blue book that said "443". This represented that I was part of the 443rd batch of students to graduate from the Cloud Tower after the Cloud Tower overhauled and unified the education system several centuries ago, with one batch of students graduating every year. The current new graduates already had emblems numbering over six hundred, and that young female policewoman mage also had an emblem numbering over six hundred. That meant that despite how young I appeared, I was a "Senior" to them who had graduated about two hundred years before they did or would.

The other two emblems I possessed were two very similar crown emblems with wings on the crowns. One was a black crown with bone wings, while the other was a white crown with ice wings. This was the greatest honor in the Mage Country: the Emblem of Endless Truth.

This emblem by itself wasn't that meaningful; it was simply the symbol of one's academic achievements. However, the fact that mine were crowns represented that I had reached the peak of my fields. The black crown with bone wings represented undead magic, while the white one with ice wings represented ice magic.

And the only basic requirement for one to be able to join the Truth Symposium was to have one of these tiny crown emblems. However, since knowledge was power to mages, pretty much only Myth- and SemiGod-ranked mages would be able to obtain this emblem.

This seemingly ordinary mage robe was, in reality, broadcasting my status to everyone. What the mages passing by saw was an old artifact at least two hundred years old still pretending to be young, not to mention I was at the peak in two different magic types. It seemed quite likely that I was a Truth Overseer as well, so of course all the mages would be polite to me.

These emblems were also the reason why I was able to so easily bail out those damned bastards from jail. Apart from the emblems I had, there were many more emblems that represented all sorts of achievements and personal status. However, I had no more emblems other than these three. I saw a random mage passing me by who had more than twenty emblems attached to his mage robe, including even two dragonslaying emblems, which indicated that he had slain two dragons. However, he didn't particularly seem to have a proud expression on his face. Well, it might have

been because that it was forbidden to remove or not wear these emblems, so he might have felt that his emblems were attracting too much attention.

As for why the Mage Country made such a law, forcing mages to wear these emblems? That was in order to save everyone's time and prevent fights. After all, there were too many old artifacts here. Perhaps that little girl right in front of you, hopping up and down while waiting in line at the cafeteria, was actually a thousand-plus-year-old elder, and if you cut in line right in front of her, she might casually flick her hand and kill you without breaking a sweat.

In the distant past, there were all sorts of mages that loved to "pretend to act weak before revealing their true strength" or "pretentious mages that loved to act strong but ended up getting slapped in the face" which gave the law enforcing and public order mages far too many headaches. But ever since this law about the emblems was passed in the Mage Country, a mage only had to take a look at the emblems on another mage's robe to roughly know whether they could take that person on in a fight. This helped drastically reduce the number of conflicts in the Mage Country.

As I walked, I gave the orders for my plans for the upcoming period of time to the bastards following behind me. Soon, we returned to Stonecrystal Street, but what greeted my eyes was a little store that was utterly different to how it was the day before.

Chapter 298
New Thorn Garden

Thorn Garden, Amelia's hundred-plus-year-old store on Stonecrystal Street, was now unrecognizable to its former self.

Now, it was a cute store that was decorated like a small forest. The products were housed in small treehouses, numerous vines and trees were the store's pillars, and green grass constituted the most natural of floorboards. The cute wood spirits worked busily as the hardworking employees, while the tall strengthened outer-shell treants became the store's security guards. Incredibly, this unconventional decorative style had already attracted many customers on its own.

"Thank you for your purchase! Please come again."

As the cashier, Rosa was very busy, but she made it a point to smile at every customer, who were all, quite evidently, satisfied.

The wood spirits were busy as well, dashing around and smiling warmly as they served the customers. From some female mages and acolytes, high-pitched exclamations—"So cute!""Let this big sister hug you!"—reached my ears.

"Yesterday, this place was clearly nothing but rubble!"

Jinya's muttering made me turn around and glare at the bastards I had to bail out of Mage Country's jail. I compared them to the hard-working wood spirits and, once again, seriously considered whether or not I should toss all these bastards into an ocean trench or tie them to a goblin rocket and shoot them into the sky.

Why was there such a huge difference between the wood spirits and these bastards? I nodded in satisfaction as I continued observing the wood spirits, but when I entered the store…

"Ah, Father, you've returned."

The moment Rosa greeted me, everyone glanced in my direction. The looks of disbelief

and shock from the customers were too awkward for me to handle.

"Daddy!!"

"Dad, Little Red 232 has worked very hard today. Did you see me?"

"Father, we made a lot of profit today."

Full of joy, the wood spirits scampered up to me and hopped up and down as they showed off their accomplishments. Meanwhile, all the customers were looking at me in more and more of an unfriendly fashion…

Apart from their somewhat strange plant parts, wood spirits greatly resembled young elves. Since I hadn't yet started spreading news of the existence of this miraculous new species—I was intending to save it for the Truth Symposium conference—most people would believe that the wood spirits were young female elves who simply preferred to dress up in nature's style. Some sharply perceptive individuals, however, noticed that they weren't entirely the same as elves. However, that was a bad thing because…

"He's actually making such young daughters of his work? What a scumbag."

"Take a closer look. Some of these elves don't have sharp ears. They're probably all half-bloods. With so many daughters, the word scumbag isn't even sufficient to describe him anymore. Just how many elves has this bastard fooled?"

"He's such a playboy father? I'm so jealous!"

"They actually have numbers in their names? That means he has at least several hundred daughters? Wow. What a super mega scumbag."

"Two Emblems of Endless Truth indicating that he's a master of two different types of magic? Even if he's a super powerful archmage, that doesn't change the fact that he's a scumbag."

Strange comments such as these could be heard everywhere; my reputation now began developing in this strange direction. And, at such a moment, how would my System possibly forget to add fuel to the fire?

I had, once again, activated a Reputation Quest.

[Mage Country, Karo City: Venerated 20000/20000, Playboy Who's Finally Reformed. Your Reputation has now been transferred to Mage Country, Arlo: Respected, 168/50000. The playboy shall never reform. Congratulations! You have obtained the new title, "Professional Oni Chichi." [1] [1] Equipping this title will greatly increase your attractiveness to young girls. The classical line "Would you like to come with me for some candy?" will have its success rate massively increased. But, at the same time, adult women will be massively repulsed by you. System Notification: Stop always blaming others for making you suffer. You're the source of all gentlemanly evils!]

The scandal I had made up in Karo City—with great difficulty, mind you—in order to increase my Reputation was no more. My reputation was now distorted even further and was destined to become stranger and stranger. While I was almost wanting to cry at this development, a certain bright and cheery obedient girl spoke up and sprinkled some extra salt on my wounds.

"Father, when Mother sees that you've done such a good job running her shop, she'll surely be delighted."

"Mother? The original owner of this store?… Amelia!" The moment the customers heard Rosa's innocent comment, I knew everything was over for me.

"Wahhh, my angel!"

"The heavens shall smite such a scumbag!"

"Let me go! Don't stop me! I'm going to do everything to kill that scumbag! Nothing will get in the way of my revenge! Who cares if he has two Emblems of Endless Truth? Even if he's a two-hundred-plus-year-old ancient zombie, even if he can casually kill us with his little finger, even if he can make us fail our classes forever at his whim—hey! Why are you letting me go? Be a little more pragmatic; come back and restrain me."

Should I say that it was to be expected of someone who had her own support group even within the Truth Symposium? As a mega-popular mage teacher, the angelic Amelia's faked wonderful reputation was far more known to everyone than her true personality. And due to Amelia's overt favoritism for female students, she had both male and female fans. There were now people everywhere spitting blood upon hearing my name, and countless more really wanted to beat me up. How nice that my Reputation was increasing once again… and how speechless I was.

Even though everyone was cursing me, I could only helplessly look at little Rosa who was still smiling happily, apparently not realizing what she had just done.

"You must be black-bellied underneath that pink appearance of yours."

"Rosa isn't black at all. It's our duty as your daughters to watch you well and make sure you don't get up to no good with other women while Mother isn't here."

Alright then, that perfectly innocent brilliant smile of hers made me be at a loss at how to punish her for the trouble she had just put me in. After all, she wasn't like the group of bastards behind me, with ridiculously thick skin that could endure anything—including being shot out of a Goblin Cannon. If I did such a thing to Rosa, my infamous reputation would gain the title of "loli abuser," adding to my list of crimes.

So, I could only helplessly shake my head as I picked up this pink little troublemaker who was definitely secretly black-bellied and entered a private room in the store. As for all the cries of "demon father!" and "lolicon!" behind me, I could only pretend to ignore them.

As for the way my reputation was turning out? Forget it, I didn't have any hopes for my reputation helping me anyways. Even when I was studying here, I didn't manage to get a single girlfriend, so this time was probably the same. And since the result was going to be the same, who cared if my reputation kept getting worse and worse? At least I didn't think I had any regrets. I definitely wasn't disappointed because I couldn't disguise myself as planned in becoming a teacher to flirt with the female students that didn't know anything about me—nope. Definitely not.

As for those tears forming in my eyes? That must just be a mistaken impression.

"Forget it, forget it. That's just my life."

[It's 99% your fault.]

"It's 100% your fault."

Alright then, the System and the silly cat's comments came simultaneously. Should I be thankful that, at least, the System had a better impression of me?

[Relax. There's no such thing as an absolute, and based on my logical calculations, there's still at least a miniscule chance for you to obtain a girlfriend, although it's a

decimal with many zeros. Would you like for me to help calculate it for you? 0.000…]

"No! Stop spreading salt on my wounds!"

I decided to ignore my System and the silly cat, as I was rather interested in a different topic.

"Rosa, what are you all selling? The products I'm preparing haven't arrived yet. Are you all doing some type of wood spirit coffee house here or something?"

Yes, that was what mystified me. I had just finished purchasing a new workshop as Amelia's experimental laboratory was now nothing more than rubble. The magical engineering technological products weren't ready yet, so how did these young wood spirits make the store so popular?

"Although Mother wasn't skilled at business, the products of her research are excellent, and her Emblem of Endless Truth in plant magic helps her reputation. For those who have needs for her plant products, she's actually considerably popular. It's just that Mother's pricing system and product availability were too unreasonable. Her magical plants have great combat strength and are actually one of her most popular products we've been selling, but Mother actually priced the magical plant seeds at 15,000 gold coins apiece, when they cost her less than 10 gold coins to make. That made the plant seeds into a mega-luxury item that few could afford. Of course she would be unable to sell any of them. The reverse is true as well. She priced many items too cheaply, and they always sold out instantly. However, she priced them so low that she barely profited, and Mother was too lazy to restock those products."

After hearing all this, I understood. Actually, Amelia did not have a dearth of successful research products that she could profit from. As a top-level plant magic expert, how could she possibly lack research results? However, Amelia lacked people she could trust, so there was no one around her who could advise her on how to manage her finances. She priced all her products at whatever she wanted, and it were the random byproducts from her research that were placed on the shelves of her Thorn Garden store. Whenever she started a new research project, she would never consider how she could make back her money. It was only natural for her to be in such a huge amount of debt.

"So you and the other wood spirits repriced all the items Amelia left behind in the warehouse."

"Yep. We used our new techniques to enchant or improve them and also added our wood spirit products as well. Today's the first day we tried this, and it's so popular already. There's also the fact that Mother's store has been closed for so long, so there's a large demand on the market for high quality plant magic goods. The new customers probably heard about us from the returning customers."

Seeing the little financial expert Rosa speak so confidently on this subject made me truly feel that Amelia needed to start learning from Rosa. With Rosa's assistance and my special products that should be ready for sale soon, this hundred-plus years old store—famous for never turning a profit—might soon become one of the top ten most profitable stores in the Cloud Tower. It could maybe even challenge some of the biggest mage organizations' stores which had been open for more than a millennium.

Was it supposed to be unusual for mages to open up their own stores? It did seem wrong that academics needed to be concerned about money, but that was the difference between ideals and reality. Since tuition fees and researching new magic all required large amounts of money and resources, even the richest person would eventually go bankrupt if they only spent money without having any income in return. Mages had to learn how to make money first in order to spend money.

Low-ranked mages had their ways to earn money. They could copy and sell magical scrolls or simply work for mid and high-ranked mages. After all, low-ranked mages had less expenditures, so that was plenty for them. Meanwhile, top-ranked mages would typically require several hundred thousand gold coins for a research project, where failure meant they would lose their entire investment. Any mage who didn't know how to manage their money would eventually become deeply entrenched in debt, just like Amelia.

Actually, just like the researchers in my previous world, it was quite easy for mages to turn their research results into mountains of gold coins. Rechargeable enchantments for weapons and equipment, cannon fodder-level magical familiars, potions, newly invented weapons and equipment, various applications of magic in daily life and so on were all fields that were highly profitable.

For example, I knew of a mage organization named "Dance of Darkness" which mostly consisted of mages interested in summoning magic. They were particularly skilled at taming magical beasts. Apart from selling various summoned creatures and contracted magical pets, their horses were so popular that they dominated over seventy percent of the horse market. That was a long-term, consistent source of

income for them.

Enchantment specialist mages would open up enchantment stores, while alchemists would never lack money as they were experts in creating magical products and equipment. If you were an archmage with a monopoly on some special technology or product, then you could simply lay in bed and count your money.

The archmages who didn't have any research results to sell could hire themselves out as mercenaries or adventurers, and copying high-level magical scrolls was also a well-paid job. As long as a person paid even the slightest attention and, when they were out of money, stopped their research and went to find work for a while, no mage would starve to death.

Alright then, I might as well make fun of Amelia a little here. Although she was someone who possessed the Emblem of Endless Truth in plant magic, not to mention that she had a monopoly over the highest-level plant magic products, it was quite abnormal how she managed to be so pathetically poor and riddled with debt.

And now, with a little helper like Rosa, I wouldn't need to worry about the store anymore. Originally, I had been concerned about whether that group of bastards would be able to run the store…

Since I didn't have to worry about the store's daily operations, I could now focus on preparing the products for sale and what new products to develop. But, of course, my goal had never been something as simple as opening a store to make some money.

Notes:

[1] TL/N: Oni Chichi is a rather famous Japanese hentai about a father and his daughters.

Chapter 299
Bribing

Was the Mage Country strong? The answer was an obvious yes. However, even though the Mage Country technically counted as a mega-empire, everyone knew that it wasn't even a country. It was simply a place where countless mages gathered. Ignoring the countless mid- and low-ranked mages, when one only counted those archmages that had obtained the Emblem of Endless Truth and considered if all these top-level mages acted together in unison…

Alright then, everyone knew that was basically impossible. After all, every mage had their own desires, their own goals in life, and their own research topics they were interested in. Wanting them to act together in unison for a country's goal was unimaginable. This was also the main reason why the Mage Country had never expanded their territory ever since Arlodant had been founded. They lacked the necessity of expanding their borders.

Expand their territory and population? What a joke. There were only so many mages to begin with, and the city of Arlo could contain ninety percent of the Mage Country's population itself. Why would they need to expand their territory with nobody to live in it? It would be all the more bothersome for them as they would need to plant more crops and maintain public order in more places.

Increase their population in order to increase the number of mages in the Mage Country? That was unnecessary as the Mage Country never cared about what nationality a person was from, nor did they care about a large base population in order to obtain more mages. Anyone willing to abandon an ordinary person's boring life and choose the path of seeking knowledge would easily be able to become a member of the Mage Country.

The forever-neutral country, Arlodant. It wasn't particularly because the Mage Country maintained neutrality, it was that most of the mages in this country, as individuals, consciously chose to remain neutral. This neutrality didn't only extend to wars between countries, it even included the eternal Holy War.

They didn't favor the Order Gods, but they also despised the Chaos Gods. It could be

said that they only believed in themselves, that they only cared about magic and the truth. They were the most truly neutral third party in the Holy War.

Of course, since most mages were humans, it wasn't technically wrong to say that they were in the Order Faction, but as for having them fight for the Order Faction… fine, the Mage Country didn't even have a standing army. At any rate, the mages that cared about Order versus Chaos and were willing to go fight for their beliefs were free to do so. However, there would be no such collective action taken by the mages as a whole.

"They're basically allies that were made for us."

But just as I mentioned earlier, everyone in the Truth Symposium was an academic who hated politics. In such a situation, something like an alliance was meaningless. An alliance that wouldn't do anything for you was basically no different from scrap paper.

There were plenty of ambitious individuals that wanted to borrow the powerful Mage Country's strength in the past. However, those individuals all failed. No matter how loudly they shouted for assistance, very few mages would come to their aid.

But if I had to critique those individuals, I would say that they were too outdated in their methods of thinking. Alliances, inciting the population, bribing higher-ups, and other such typical plots were utterly useless when dealing with the Mage Country which had its own unique political system in the world of Eich.

As for me, I had my own opinions. We definitely couldn't make a formal alliance of any sort with the Mage Country that completely lacked any unity as a country. After all, even if we obtained a certain percentage of the Truth Overseers to support us, all the mage organizations and individual mages wouldn't listen to them… But looking at it from a different standpoint, we could simply bribe every individual mage. As long as we bribed enough mages, the entire Mage Country was basically on our side.

This sounded inconceivable? There were too many individual mages to possibly bribe? But, it was actually doable.

How does one make an originally neutral person suddenly become your ardent supporter? The answer was quite simple. Just fill that person's wallet with your money or owe him a significant amount of money. Make it so that his and your personal benefits are intimately connected.

In that case, how does one make two different factions, or on a much larger scale, two

different countries become as one? The answer was still the same. Just make their benefits connected. For example, if they used the same currency, the same language, and had zero trade tariffs for each other, they would stand on the same side for most benefits. They would naturally become one.

Back in my original world of Earth, many countries in history used this method to unify two countries. Emperor Qin of China, was such an example; he unified Chinese currency and all the Chinese dialects into one, which set the foundation for China to become a nation.

Alright then, by now, the idea was obvious. I only had to fulfill two conditions to bribe all the mages to be on my side. First, I needed to make sure their personal benefits were tied to mine. Second, I had to make them into my customers, friends, and even debtors. If I could accomplish this, then they would naturally feel that if they didn't support me, they would be losing out. They would support me of their own volition without me even needing to do anything.

Originally, I had only thought about this plan before helplessly giving up on it. The resources and wealth needed would be astronomical. However, a sudden recent event helped make my fantastical dream of "bribing the entire Mage Country's mages" to become a possibility.

"Justice Points! Our top-level products can only be purchased with Justice Points. And this is only a beginning. Our final goal is to make the entire Mage Country use Justice Points as its most important currency."

I was completely confident that with the Gods backing me up with their countless years of accumulated treasures, my products and treasury would make any mage go crazy with desire. Yet this was only a beginning.

According to my plan, in the future, more and more stores would be using Justice Points as their currency. My most important goal was to make the majority of people in the Mage Country admit and think that Justice Points were the most valuable currency of all. They would then automatically join as "Contract Mages" and fight for our cause in order to obtain Justice Points.

That would help us obtain countless powerful Contract Mages. If a sufficient number of mages sought Justice Points and joined in battle, the entire Mage Country would gradually transform into my ally even without a formal alliance agreement.

Of course, realizing this goal still required countless steps and little tricks, such as how to make the Mage Country recognize Justice Points as their official currency, how to make other stores and mages want to use Justice Points as their currency, and how to ensure that the major mage organizations wouldn't interfere with Justice Points as my system expanded. However, I had both confidence and patience. I could take things slowly here.

"Neutral? Soon, you'll discover that, in this war, there's no such thing as being neutral. This time, I definitely won't repeat the mistakes of the past."

In the game's "history," the Mage Country was just as strong as the current Mage Country right now. However, the story's version of the Mage Country chose as always to ignore the Holy War, despite all the changes occurring in the world and all the death being wrought. They chose to simply remain as observers that would record what happened.

They remained neutral as always—no—neutral was no longer sufficient to describe them. They were arrogant, dense, and coldhearted. Well, since the Mage Country was able to ignore even the Yongye Calamity and other similar large-scale battles in the past, it was only natural that they would simply ignore everything that happened in the Holy War.

Even though everyone was at war around them, they chose to remain in the Cloud Tower and go about their daily lives, discussing their newest technological inventions or how bad the weather was. But, when the Holy War truly ended up involving the entire world, they finally discovered that they were caught up in the war as well. Yet Armageddon had already descended upon them, and it was too late to take action.

To be fair, even in the game's storyline, there were perceptive mages that sounded warnings, and the mages stationed in other dimensions had reported on how the creatures from other planes were gathering their forces in an abnormally large-scale fashion. However, all the large mage organizations had already come to a conclusion because of the past—they had etched into their minds that this would simply be another two- or three-hundred-year war between different species. They would just need to ignore this war like always.

But the arrogant mages tasted bitter defeat and death in the end. When Arlodant finally realized that something was wrong with the situation and truly commanded all the mages to begin participating in the war, the entire land of Eich had experienced

endless battle, and countless powerful existences had already descended upon Eich from other planes. The River Styx was filled with the souls of the dead, with SemiGod existences enjoying their wine glasses filled with human blood wrought from catastrophe. The demons and devils had organized themselves into colossal armies under the leadership of the Evil Gods, and those "powerful" mages were unable to do anything at all.

“…Sometimes, remaining neutral seems like it can't possibly be a wrong decision. However, it's also the most passive choice, which makes it the farthest possible answer from the correct decision."

Although I didn't want to admit it, from a certain standpoint, it was a good thing for me that the Bardi Empire began a war against the Mage Country. At the very least, the Bardi Empire informed the mages that remained in their ivory towers that there was no such thing as absolute peace in the world. Even if you remained as a hermit in your own home, it was possible that one day, a robber would break into your home and slap you in the face.

I truly looked forward to the next Truth Symposium conference scheduled to take place in slightly over one month from now. I wanted to see what the archmages that returned from the frontlines of battle would have to say. Also, I wanted to know more about the sudden forbidden spell ambush on the Bardi Empire's frontlines. This didn't seem like the Mage Country's typical style of doing things at all, so I couldn't comprehend what had happened. There was definitely something interesting behind that, a plot I hadn't yet uncovered.

What I currently needed to do was forcefully wake them up to the situation. "Justice Points" and the magical secrets that they could exchange for would be the bait to get them involved. As long as enough mages were involved, there would be a sufficient number of reports sent to the Truth Symposium about the scale of destruction and chaos in the Holy War. With the mages' Intelligence, it would be impossible for them to not notice and ignore the danger with so much information stuffed in their faces. By that time, the entire Mage Country would naturally become my ally.

Was it going to be difficult to bait the mages? Haha! Would a mage have no desires? Impossible! I had always believed that the seemingly calm mages were actually the easiest job class to tempt of all.

"Greed" Harloys was a classic example of a mage. Her endless greed and desire for

magical knowledge was an accurate stereotype of the mages. I had already purchased a large advertisement in next week's "Cloud Tower Weekly" magazine which would give a detailed introduction of Thorn Garden and our new products, even including a full list of every item one could exchange for with Justice Points. The items that came from ancient times or were Gods' secrets were precious goods that nobody would be able to obtain otherwise.

There was nothing that could compete with the "unknown" in attracting mages due to their desire and thirst for knowledge. Justice Points would definitely cause many mages to act.

With Justice Points as the bait, my final goal was to wake the Mage Country up to the danger they were in and act much sooner than they would have otherwise.

However, things had to be taken slowly. This "plot" of mine, which was completely out in the open and had nothing nefarious about it compared to my usual plots, was one that could be taken slowly. As for how to drag the Mage Country into the Holy War with me? I first needed to make the Thorn Garden as popular as possible.

Plant magic products would have a limited market appeal. If I wanted to attract the entire Cloud Tower's attention, it would be insufficient to utilize Amelia's products alone. My new products were now prepared, and I could even make a huge profit while obtaining my goal.

"Mechanized mage squadrons? That seems like it would make for such an unusual art style."

Archmage Andrei was currently in a bad mood. The vice leader of the Sword of Order, he was a mage who had the goal of raising the strongest magical pets possible. He felt like he had been away from his favorite lovely experimental laboratory for far too long. His clumsy acolytes wouldn't even dare approach his precious pets' cages, so he was afraid that maybe a few of his treasured pets might have already starved to death.

"However, I sense that my little preciouses are under threat from something far more dangerous than starvation. How strange. Is there some dangerous existence currently at the Cloud Tower?"

However, Andrei knew that it wasn't time to consider such things as he looked at the thick sandstorm and smoke in front of him. The endless sounds of dragons roaring

could be heard in the distance.

Ever since that forbidden spell transformed this area on the Bardi Empire's frontlines into a living hell, two small squadrons of Bardi Empire dragon knights had already arrived (the western dragon knights loyal to Orloss—not Halent's squadron). The twelve dragon knights' constant ambushes were quite difficult to defend against.

Still, this wasn't a big problem; there were a total of four Truth Overseers in this area. If they combined their powers and forced the Bardi Empire's dragon knights into a direct confrontation, the Truth Overseers would likely win quite quickly.

However, both sides were in a stalemate for various reasons.

The archmages here didn't want to escalate the level of the war, nor did they want to slay the dragons and dragon knights, which would antagonize all the dragons behind the dragon knights. Meanwhile, Bardi's dragon knights seemed to be acting strangely as well.

While they still kept on with their ambushes, their ambushes lacked actual attack power. The largest-scale attack they used would be a single dragon breath which would set a few structures on fire. As they were the ones supposed to be taking revenge here, this was obviously far too peaceful.

"It feels like they're under some sort of restraint as well, and they don't intend to escalate the level of this conflict, either. I don't understand what's happening."

Yet soon, Archmage Andrei didn't have to worry about things on the frontline anymore—he received a letter from the Cloud Tower.

Chapter 300
Iron Horses

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

It had become quite common to hear sounds of explosions in the streets of Arlo as of late. Young mages would ride mechanical Iron Horses on the streets, chasing and racing each other and leaving nothing but dust and smoke in their wake.

These Iron Horses were equipped with steel wheels, which left behind marks in Arlo's ancient streets. Sounds of excited laughter could be heard as young mages reveled in the thrill of moving at high speeds. Winds, whipped up by these Iron Horses, would flip ladies' skirts as they passed by, resulting in storms of curses everywhere. Public order officials who came investigating would only meet black smoke, leaving them coughing in anger. Unfortunately for them, license plates weren't yet a concept in this world. It was impossible to easily identify the owners of the Iron Horses.

The riders broke the speed records over and over again as they improved their techniques. Iron Horses could be seen chasing after others on the street causing loud disturbances, and soon it became considered both popular and fashionable among the youth.

"They've taken to racing? They caused enough traffic accidents in one week that you typically deal with in one year? Does that have anything to do with me? I'm just a merchant doing perfectly legal business. If someone killed another person with a vegetable knife, are you going to arrest all the merchants that sell vegetable knives?"

Cher, the female mage in charge of public order, was furious. Her veins were bulging as she glared at the young-appearing mage, who had such an uncaring expression. Still, she was helpless. She couldn't do anything about it.

This wasn't her first time dealing with this "archmage" before her, after all. In just one week, this archmage had come to the police station nine times to bail out his companions ever since their first meeting. Although none of his subordinates would do anything too nefarious, they would constantly break records for how shameless they could get and how creative they could be with their shamelessness.

There was especially a certain dracon who was now basically treating the jail as his home. He arrived at their jail every single day. On top of that, although Cher wasn't sure what he did, all the other imprisoned criminals had furiously begged the police mages to save them and not put them in the same jail cell as him…

"Um, I think it's probably safer for my well-being to stay here in jail."

When she asked the dracon, that seemingly honest individual actually trembled in fear—he had apparently antagonized an inestimable number of people. But when she checked his records, she discovered to her surprise that he was a Saint-ranked beast tamer/hunter. Did that mean that in just one short week he successfully antagonized Myth-ranked and perhaps even SemiGod-ranked mages?

As for the others, they continued to sell their fake products, go around naked, cause explosions or simply fights—in short, all sorts of other troubles. If it wasn't for this archmage bailing them out every time, Cher would have long since made them rot in jail.

Today, however, was different. Cher could no longer tolerate this anymore. Perhaps it was true that the morals of one's subordinates didn't mean that the boss was the same, and it seemed to her that his feelings of awkwardness and depression at their mayhem were real. However, when he had to come the very next day, or even on the afternoon of the same day to bail out his subordinates yet again, not only did that make people suspect his sincerity in saying "I'll make sure to manage them properly," it also made people suspect if his group of subordinates were actually some professional criminal organization or if they were intentionally giving the police mages and public order mages trouble on purpose.

Yet this was all merely a small aside for the waves that Thorn Garden had caused in mage society.

Thanks to the cute wood spirit employees at the newly renovated Thorn Garden, the store had become rapidly popular with female mages. Even those who weren't interested in plant magic would spend an entire day in the forest coffee café attached to the store and watch the cute little wood spirits scurry around for several hours without getting tired… Of course, there were also male mages and even some elderly mages with white hair who tried this as well. However, most of them would soon escape; they would be unable to withstand the numerous glares from the female mages.

While the female mages and acolytes treated the forest coffee café as a holy grounds for relaxation, the male mages had a new toy to play around with as well.

"Iron Horse #7" was the name of my new product and was behind the black smoke, noise pollution, and traffic accidents throughout in the streets of Arlo. Iron Horses were similar to rocket cars built by goblin engineering, but it possessed only two wheels. After all, Yingou demanded additional money for training wheels! And while everyone was still suspecting whether these Iron Horses would even function properly, the goblins that acted as the demonstrators began a fast-paced race in front of everyone.

At first, the mages all thought that this would be another new miraculous but dangerous goblin invention. They all brought snacks and prepared themselves to see some fireworks. However, they were astonished to see that apart from a few goblins that lost control and caused traffic accidents, none of the Iron Horses self-destructed at all… this was utterly unlike what they knew about goblin technology!

Soon, a young, relatively rich mage was unable to resist the temptation of his curiosity. He purchased an Iron Horse despite its expensive price with the intent to take it apart for research, not to ride it. And when he took it apart in public in front of everyone, the entire Cloud Tower was shaken by the news.

"A mega-small energy battery! And it's actually so stable! How is it possible!?"

"No—no—it's probably just a rechargeable cycle!"

"Who cares about how it works? It's fine as long as it does what it's supposed to do."

"It would seem that archmage Hesta and archmage Dia researched in the wrong direction on how to develop smaller batteries. They didn't need to create new energy sources for small batteries. Only storage capacity and rechargeability were necessary."

"Olivia's Magic Box" was indeed an invention that would change the times. From the very start, the biggest drawback of goblin engineering wasn't even the inconsistent explosions—it was the lack of consistent and long-term energy. If one used a special, powerful magic creature's magic core as the energy source, not only would that incur incredibly high costs, but the magic core would eventually run out of energy. Whatever it powered would become nothing more than scrap metal until the owner obtained

another magic core with similar properties.

Once the issue of a reliable source of long-term energy was taken care of and mass-produced under my design and direction, I naturally decided to create metallic motorcycles for people to ride.

It was also within my expectations that the mages would soon notice the critical new technology within the Iron Horses. After all, the research project of inventing a smaller portable battery already had two Emblem of Truth-level archmages, Hesta and Dia, competing against each other. However, neither of them had made much progress—from the very start, both of them were researching in the wrong direction.

Mages were quite familiar with the concept of batteries; every mage tower had its own large-scale batteries to back up the mana reserves. There were many different types of batteries that all worked differently, and some were even capable of magically receiving energy from different dimensions. With the support of these batteries, a high-level mage could practically have limitless mana within his or her own mage tower. It would be a conservative estimate to say that the mage would have their power multiplied threefold.

"Never attack a mage when they're in their mage tower." This was one of the most common sayings among adventurers. Any who dared to break this common sense had already died off.

Mages had always researched how to make their batteries much smaller and portable as this would obviously help increase a mage's strength when they traveled outside. However, they had kept researching about batteries through the soul, or from natural phenomenon, or from alchemy. It was evident that no mage had ever thought about researching batteries through the field of engineering that had absolutely nothing to do with magic.

With mages' current techniques, even their smallest battery was the size of an average room in a house. For quite a long time now, making batteries any smaller than that was basically viewed as impossible. After all, "opening up a stable portal to another dimension" or "absorbing energy from a powerful energy-producing creature" would all require a significant amount of space.

From a certain standpoint, although they were all academic seekers of the truth, magicians, alchemists, and "scientists" would look at the same issue from different

angles. Well, in truth, nobody was right or wrong about it. Even the most basic magic spells used by mages would violate what engineers knew about the most basic laws of energy and conservation and so on. They were direct opposites from the very start. It would be like trying to make a chicken communicate with a duck.

Based on the logic that batteries needed to be medium-sized or huge, mages only considered how to obtain more energy from the same size, trying to create a "perpetual motion machine." However, they didn't consider that it would be enough to store sufficient energy to create a self-sustaining cycle that would only need occasional recharging. Since the mages were never researching the right topic to improve batteries in the first place, and they lacked the theoretical scientific knowledge about batteries, for them to actually produce results would be no different from winning the lottery.

Now, however, this famous research topic that everyone had thought was impossible actually produced results. Top-level mages who had made this their lifetime goal lost to goblin engineering technology as evidenced by the indisputable fact before everyone's eyes. Even the calmest mage would be unable to handle this.

"Take it apart!"

"Yes, take it apart!"

With the passionate observers egging him on, the Iron Horse owner who showed everyone what was inside excitedly prepared to take the battery apart so that everyone could research it together. However, he discovered that there was a complex magical seal on it that was even labeled with the goblins' "Safety Brand." Of course, this was merely a small issue that wouldn't be difficult for the mages to deal with at all. And so, with the help of some onlooking archmages, this small magical seal was forcefully broken through.

And then… well, there was no more "then."

Boom!

Well, it wasn't really a big deal. Mages were quite well-versed in all sorts of magical traps. This magical seal was designed so that if it was forcefully broken through using magic, a magical keyboard with numbers 0-9 would appear, and the correct 20-digit

password needed to be inputted within ten seconds. Even if you knew the password, you would need to have a high typing speed. Since mages were typically non-athletic, this would be quite difficult for them.

Alright, should I say that the mages were quite used to dealing with explosions in the process of their research? Or should I say that Jinya and the goblins had some moral boundaries after all? At the very least, the explosions caused by the breaking of the batteries' defenses weren't very powerful. Not a single mage died from these explosions.

But, from a certain standpoint, mages were truly rich. News soon started spreading that the "Iron Horse #7" possessed small, portable batteries, and the rather expensive Iron Horses were sold out in just a single afternoon. And then…

During the entire night, explosions could be heard from all over the city. Before the skies even lightened, there was a long customer line of "blackened individuals" standing in front of Thorn Garden, waiting for it to open so that they could purchase more Iron Horses.

Of course, once top-level archmages started taking an interest in this, the goblins' mechanisms wouldn't be able to obstruct them for long. It would only be a matter of time before they figured out this technology. However, this was a technology I was intending to sell to them anyways. By the time they figured the battery technology out, I would have made massive profits off the Iron Horses.

Meanwhile, for the mages that weren't researching how to take the Iron Horses apart, they naturally tried riding the motorcycles, using the Iron Horses as they were intended to be used. And soon, they discovered additional benefits.

"It's so steady! It's a lot steadier than a horse! And it's so quick!"

Long-distance traveling was considered an unpleasant task as most mages had below average Constitutions. In their eyes, this strange new invention was far more comfortable than a real horse, and it was a lot steadier as well. But if its only use was comfort, that wouldn't be all that important to them.

"I can actually cast magic while sitting on this!"

Total concentration was required for a mage to cast magic. It typically required a few seconds of blocking out the outside world. If a mage was riding a horse that jostled

their body back and forth, it would be quite difficult for them to concentrate. The fact that these Iron Horses could be ridden so smoothly attracted many mages' attention.

Mages' biggest weakness was doubtlessly the fact that they themselves were typically quite slow. If a warrior was able to close the distance, increasing that distance between them would be incredibly troublesome. It would be no exaggeration to say that a mage's combat strength would be doubled if they were able to cast spells while moving at high speed.

However, even for combat mages that were specialists in practical combat, it would still be difficult for them to master casting spells while moving. They would only be able to cast spells at slow speeds. If they tried casting spells while riding in a horse-drawn carriage… with those wooden wheels and a lack of shock absorbers, anyone would be constantly jostled up and down. A single bump in the road could be the cause of a fatal magical backlash.

There was indeed one type of steed that was steady enough for mages to sit upon and easily cast spells from: dragons. However, those would be incredibly difficult to obtain…

And so, being able to cast spells while moving at a high speed was considered impractical. Yet the mages soon found out that it was quite easy to cast spells while sitting on the Iron Horse motorcycle or riding in its sidecar. Meanwhile, Thorn Garden's first advertisement for the Iron Horse was published, with the catchphrase being "Make those muscleheads forever eat our dust."

In order to prove the veracity of the advertisement's claim, the Four Elemental Swordcasters that came from the Northlands rode some of the Iron Horse motorcycles on the streets. They perfectly displayed the motorcycles' excellent shock-absorbing functions and the possibility of casting spells while moving at such high speeds.

After all, only mages knew what mages really wanted. This seemingly insignificant toy was actually a tool that could greatly increase mages' power and survivability when traveling outside.

That was how Iron Horse #7 became the first successful part of my plan in conquering the market in the Mage Country. Young people rapidly learned how to drive motorcycles and got rid of the training wheels that they considered useless. They even began racing each other on the streets, giving public order mages like Cher endless

headaches. Meanwhile, the older mages spent money on hiring drivers so that they could enjoy the feeling in the wind from the motorcycles' sidecars.

In fact, "Have you bought one yet?" and "How many did you buy?" became a common greeting for the mages during this time. Meanwhile, Thorn Garden had an exceedingly long line forever waiting at the door.

And this was just the beginning. Two days later, the mages were almost at the level of fighting each other to buy Iron Horses. Since I made it a limited product where we would sell only one hundred Iron Horses per day, they would always be sold out on the same day despite the high price I set.

The most important part was that I made yet another new advertisement for Thorn Garden. It stated that in one month's time, Thorn Garden would only be accepting "Justice Points" as payment for the Iron Horses in the future.

"Justice Points? I've heard about those—during the Gods' proclamations, right? They seem easy to obtain. But how am I supposed to get them so quickly? Doesn't this basically mean that the Iron Horses will only be sold for one month?"

This helped sell the Iron Horses even quicker than before. Those who successfully purchased Iron Horses showed them off on the streets, which only increased everyone's desire to purchase one. In fact, the archmages were willing to exchange their precious treasures to get on the reservation list. While I wasn't black-hearted enough to further increase the Iron Horses' price, I made a huge profit by simply selling reservation list positions for the right to purchase an Iron Horse.

This was quite the excellent sales tactic. The only type of products capable of competing in profitability with "excellent quality and cheap" or "fresh and interesting" would be "limited edition, first come first served" and "impossible to find in the future."

Meanwhile, on the other hand of things, the huge increase in the number of motorcycle races on the streets made Cher, who represented both the police and public order mages, become greatly angered at both me and my products.

As I looked at the blue-haired girl before me puffing her cheeks in anger, I felt a headache as well. After all, if at all possible, I didn't want to antagonize this Mage Country governmental public security department.

I should mention that public security in the Cloud Tower was taken care of by two different departments. One was a more typical police station-like department for public security, while the other consisted of internal mage organizations' public order squadrons. While the police mages would take care of incidents both small and large, it was evident that normal executors of the law would be unable to reign in all the mages.

That was why the mage organizations' public order squadrons were in charge of internally policing the organization's member mages that crossed the line with criminal actions. Of course, since police mages and public order mages had similar tasks to begin with, many mages worked part-time in both departments. This was especially so since many public order mages had lots of free time when they didn't have any particular troublemaking mage that they needed to investigate.

Cher Allen, this female mage before me, was not only a member of the police mages but also one of the high-ranking public order officers in the Mystical Blade's internal public order division. She had nicknames given to her by others such as "Iron Girl" and "Iron Throat." Alright then, when the word "Iron" was used to describe a girl like her, it was evident that it wouldn't mean anything complimentary. She was evidently the icy and stubborn type, and, in a way, also showed how she was overly serious.

Every time I bailed my underlings out from her jail, I experienced her more and more severe lectures. Her original respect towards my status as an archmage had vanished, and whenever she looked at me, I felt like she was treating me as human scum. And whenever I successfully bailed my subordinates out, she would shout at me—just like how a passionate detective would shout in an old police story at the sly criminal—"I'll definitely find the evidence to put you in jail!"

Why did I mysteriously become the sly antagonist criminal!? Was I really someone who had a legendary face that attracted aggro [1] [1] naturally and created crimes by simply existing?

Just as I was hesitating over what method I should use to fool the "passionate detective" before me, the clamorous sounds of fighting rang out behind me, followed by a large explosion from the warehouse.

A new trouble had come looking for me.

Notes:

[1] ED/N: In an MMORPG, when you "piss off" an NPC(non-player character) and it enters a combat state with your character. It is also an informal British word that means "aggressive, violent behavior."



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