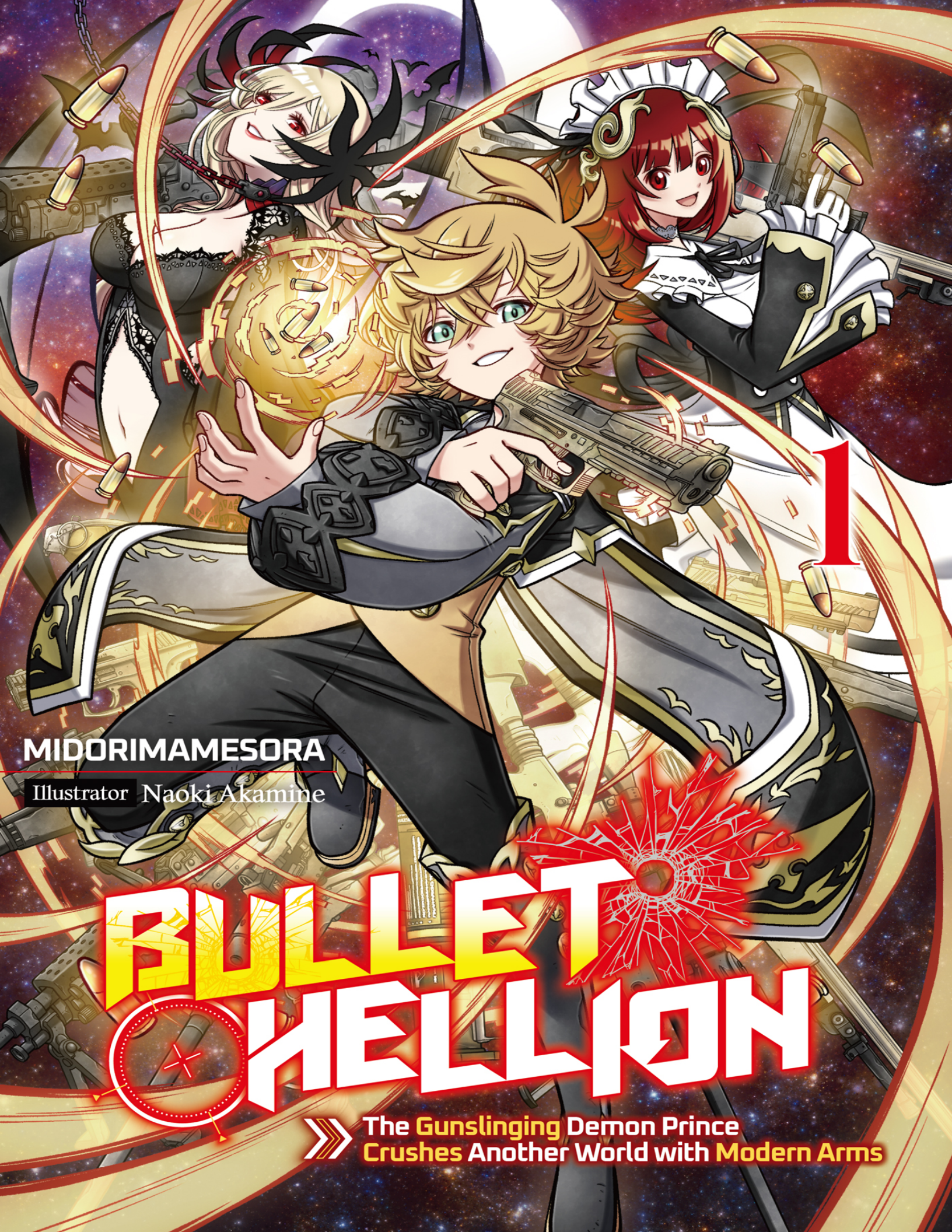
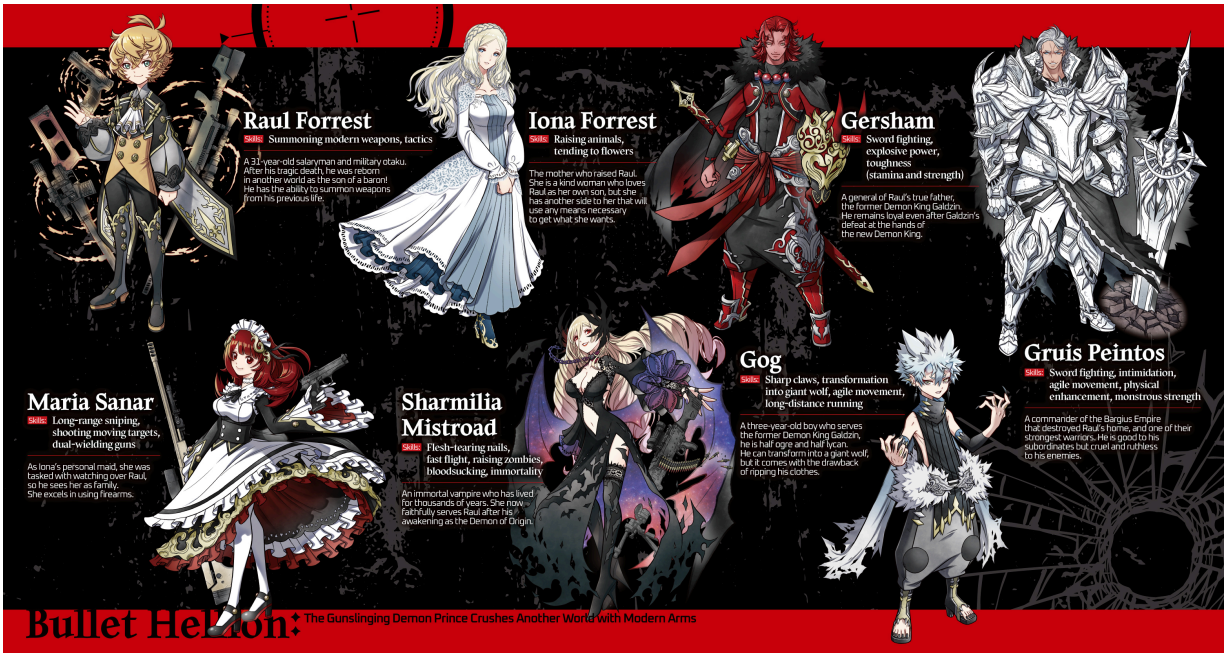

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MIDORIMAMESORA
Illustrator Naoki Akamine
BULLET HELLION
The Gunslinging Demon Prince Crushes Another World with Modern Arms


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BULLET HELLION
The Gunslinging Demon Prince


Crushes Another World with Modern Arms



Raul Forrest

Skills: Summoning modern weapons, tactics

A 31-year-old salaryman and military otaku. After his tragic death, he was reborn in another world as the son of a baron! He has the ability to summon weapons from his previous life.

Iona Forrest

Skills: Raising animals, tending to flowers

The mother who raised Raul. She is a kind woman who loves Raul as her own son, but she has another side to her that will use any means necessary to get what she wants.

Gersham

Skills: Sword fighting, explosive power, toughness (stamina and strength)

A general of Raul's true father, the former Demon King Galdzin. He remains loyal even after Galdzin's defeat at the hands of the new Demon King.

Gruis Peintos

Skills: Sword fighting, intimidation, agile movement, physical enhancement, monstrous strength

A commander of the Bargius Empire that destroyed Raul's home, and one of their strongest warriors. He is good to his subordinates but cruel and ruthless to his enemies.

Maria Sanar

Skills: Long-range sniping, shooting moving targets, dual-wielding guns

As Iona's personal maid, she was tasked with watching over Raul, so he sees her as family. She excels in using firearms.

Sharmilia Mistroad

Skills: Flesh-tearing nails, fast flight, raising zombies, bloodsucking, immortality

An immortal vampire who has lived for thousands of years. She now faithfully serves Raul after his awakening as the Demon of Origin.

Gog

Skills: Sharp claws, transformation into giant wolf, agile movement, long-distance running

A three-year-old boy who serves the former Demon King Galdzin, he is half ogre and half lycan. He can transform into a giant wolf, but it comes with the drawback of ripping his clothes.

Bullet Heaven

The Gunslinging Demon Prince Crushes Another World with Modern Arms


Eventually,
I felt my eyes open up just a little.
I'm waking up!
I need to find everyone and run!
But what awaited me was an ocean
of fire. My face was burning from
the heat of the flames,
and I was floating in the sky.
What...is this?
The earth was scorched as if
it had been bombed.
Here and there, craters had been
gouged from the earth,
and the corpses
of the vampire's thralls
littered the ground.
Hm? The vampire seems
to be surprised by something,
but who else could be here?
Who could it be?
Suddenly, the world erupted into
a cacophony of gunfire and explosions!
What's happening? Are those guns?
Explosions? How many weapons
did I summon before?
Wait, my body feels like it's on fire!
What's going on?
Who is it? Who is attacking?
And within that chaos came
an inhuman scream.
Eh? What is that weird screaming?
Is it someone new?
Am I going to die?!
Then...everything
became silent at once.
A life-or-death situation.
He awakens with the resolve of someone driven to the edge...
...and evolves into a new form
with the authority and power
to reduce everything to ash.

Prologue

Chapter One
Reincarnated as a Noble

Chapter Two
A Deadly Escape

Chapter Three
Meeting with a Demon

Chapter Four
The Conquest of Gladrom

Chapter Five
The Making of a Demon

Epilogue

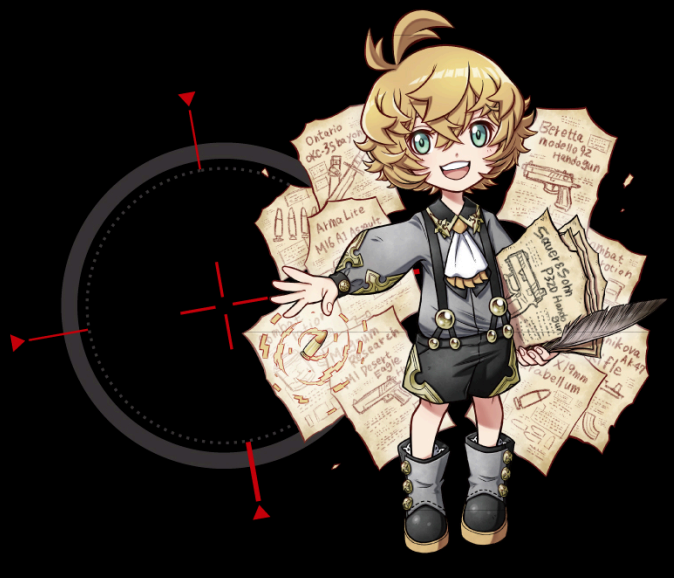




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Prologue

Two shadows danced in the night sky.

The pair floated in midair, defying gravity with their gently flapping wings—wings so black, they seemed to have absorbed the darkness of the night. One was a woman with beauty beyond compare, adorned in a dress with her blonde hair in delicate waves. The other was a woman wearing a maid outfit, whose long black hair framed her cool features.

They fixed their gleaming eyes on a group of sword-wielding knights in full body armor who were frantically running for their lives. The wizards who had been the knights' only hope had already been killed; the best they could do now was fend off the zombies that had been born from their former allies. Their long-honed swordsmanship and the swords that had protected them were now only good for decapitating the walking corpses of their fallen friends.

In that instant, one soldier caught a glimpse of a Reaper with otherworldly beauty, bathed in moonlight, floating in the sky. However, this was the last thing he would ever see.

"Fire!"

With her beloved master's command reverberating in her mind, she opened fire upon the soldiers. Not with either arrows nor magic, but an M240 MMG.

The beautiful Reaper shot 7.62x51mm caliber steel bullets at a rate of 900 rounds per minute. The bullets, loaded from her backpack, poured down upon the armored knights like a hailstorm.

Chapter One: Reincarnated as a Noble

I was visiting the United States to compete in a paintball tournament. I had received the invitation to enter from the organizers after gaining recognition by winning a national airsoft competition in Japan.

My name is Takayama Junya, and I am 31 years old. The military has been my one true love since I was a child... In other words, I'm a military otaku and a virgin. When I was young, I was given a book called *The Firearm Encyclopedia*. I would draw each of the weapons in my notebook and let my imagination run wild. I fantasized about guns, rifles, hand grenades, bazookas, tanks, missiles, fighter planes, battleships, and everything in between. I put up so many model guns in my first apartment, it looked like a secret room in a spy film.

Somewhere along the way, I developed the desire to experience combat myself, and so I got into military simulation games such as airsoft and paintball. In other words, I became a respectable military otaku and a superhero among virgins. I was enjoying a lifestyle that was the complete opposite of a normie, but I still made friends with fellow military otaku while frequenting a military simulation store. They were my comrades in arms.

I had come to America with three of these comrades. At this point, we were competing against an American team in the semifinals. The special venue was strewn with bunker obstacles of different shapes and sizes, with cameras installed around the field so that the many spectators could watch the match. As expected of America—the nation the sport originated in—a lot of money had been put into it. Five minutes into the match, and the teams were in a deadlock. This was when we would bring the fight to them.

"I expected nothing less from an American semifinalist team."

America's paintball competitions were high-level, and it seemed like this would be no easy victory. This was to be expected as there were many veterans and ex-special forces here. From behind a bunker on my right, my teammate Minagawa used a military hand signal to tell me to circle around from the left. I dashed and slid into the bunker in front of me. Minagawa wasn't a former ranger in the Self-Defense Forces for nothing: he was able to accurately read the enemy's movement.

I looked farther to my left to see Hayashida. He was an IT-type with a good head on his shoulders and had been able to understand the situation while moving to position. The other team should have already been right ahead of him. Hayashida darted out to the bunker farther in front of him. *Pop, pop* came the dry sound of a model gun. Hayashida had been marked with pink paint. He put his hands over his head to signal he had been shot.

The Americans are strong. But this is what we expected.

Now it was four-on-three. Hayashida had been taken out, but he had been a decoy. Now it was time for my team to show its true ability! Looking to my right, I saw Minagawa and Tanaka moving quickly. Tanaka was an air ambulance pilot who was able to quickly assess any situation. He flanked the American team who had momentarily lost focus after downing one of their opponents, and precisely marked two of them in the back with blue paint. *Use your enemy's momentary distraction to your advantage.* It was a tactic unique to military simulation games, one that could not be used in a real battle where lives were at stake.

Now it was two-on-three. If I could get off a shot into the backs of the two remaining disoriented opponents, we'd win, even if I got taken out in the process. This was the strategy we had come up with: unlike with real guns, sacrificing yourself in paintball doesn't leave you dead. The fight would come down to this single moment! I painted the first enemy blue and then aimed at the second, who was crouched behind cover. He turned and pointed his gun at me. This last enemy seemed much calmer than the others, but he was still doing exactly what we had expected. This would be our win!

Hmm? Why is he smiling?

Pop, pop! Bang, bang!

Wait... What was that other sound?

After confirming my hit on the last enemy, I heard a deafening gunshot ring out. A powerful impact knocked my body to the ground. A tremendous pain burned through my chest as if I was being branded with hot metal.

Ack!

I fell on my back as I coughed out blood. The room grew dark and I fell unconscious.

The next time I opened my eyes, I saw Minagawa, Tanaka, and Hayashida peering down at me with tears in their eyes and shouting something. And who were the other two people? Ah, probably paramedics. I couldn't breathe or catch everything they were saying, but I could understand the gist: someone had sneaked in a real gun.

...A real gun? No way, this can't be happening. Why?

"Takayama! Stay with us!" Minagawa cried, desperately trying to pull me back to consciousness. "Let's go back to Japan together!"

"Sorry," I gasped, "for leaving you with such a crappy memory..." It was difficult to speak through the pain, but I felt terrible, so I forced out the words to Minagawa.

"Idiot! That doesn't matter!" he shouted, sounding seriously angry.

He really is a good guy. I'm getting weaker. I wish I could have at least had a girlfriend— Ack!

I smiled through the blood. The EKG let out a long beep.

"Takayamaaa!"

And so I died.

. . . . . .

I woke up, but I felt dazed. Everything was blurry, and I couldn't see much to begin with. I slept. I was hungry. I could see a faint light. Something warm was put into my mouth and it filled my stomach. I slept again. I woke up to a gross, damp feeling around my crotch, but the unpleasantness soon went away. I slept again. I

woke up against my will and was upset. Suddenly my body softly floated up. I was gently rocked. I slept again. I just felt happy.

For a long time, this repeated between short spells of sleep, and I felt like I was living in a world of fuzzy white. I can't remember it very well, but time passed in a haze.

One day during this repetition, I suddenly woke up with a clear mind. The ceiling was unfamiliar, as was the room illuminated by moonlight coming through the window.

Huh? Where is Minagawa? What on earth is going on?

I hurried to sit up and moved my legs to stand up from the bed. That's when I noticed something strange.

My feet can't touch the floor! What? My legs are shorter than usual. If I look down, I see the legs of a child, and my hands... My hands are tiny too! They're small and stubby like maple leaves. Are these my *hands? What is going on?*

"Raul, what's wrong?"

Eep! The voice of a young woman called to me from behind and my heart almost stopped. I turned to see a beautiful woman about twenty years old with graceful features and blonde hair that reached down to her chest.

She's beautiful and she's wearing thin, loose-fitting clothes... I can almost see her breasts. I mean, her nipples are showing through. But I know this person very well. This beautiful woman is without a doubt my mother. She's not Japanese and is a lot younger than I should be, but somehow I'm sure of this.

"Do you need to pee?"

I nodded my head to answer her.

"Here, here."

My beautiful mother took me in her arms and gently lifted me off the bed. I was almost able to see her breasts. She lit a candle on her bedside table, took me by the hand, and led me from the room.

This is definitely not a hospital. If my memory is right, this is my home.

I finished using the bathroom, returned to my room, and climbed into bed.

"Good night, Raul," my beautiful mother whispered softly to me,

and then kissed me on the forehead.

"G'night."

My heart was racing as I closed my eyes and pretended to be asleep. I now had the memories of the months leading up to when I'd lain down to sleep last night. They were memories of being raised by my beautiful mother, who was sleeping beside me. I was sure that I had fallen asleep last night while she had read me a bedtime story. Raul was my name now. It was clearly not a Japanese name.

I had a father too. He was a rugged man who was passably handsome, I believe. He was a father who was very kind to his family. I had that memory. But then I remembered that I had died on the way to the hospital after being shot with a real gun at a paintball tournament in America. My mind came into focus.

Who the hell would use live ammunition at a paintball tournament?! Was it an accident? And did my memories from before my reincarnation really come back to me? I think I saw something like that on a variety show... But wait! I'm a kid! I remember that I was a thirty-one-year-old salaryman named Takayama Junya, and even that I had gone to an American paintball competition with my friends. But all the details are a bit hazy. What year and month is it? Can I get back to Japan?

Wait, was I born bilingual? I'm speaking a foreign language. This language...it doesn't seem to be English, French, or German. Maybe it's Middle Eastern? I'm not sure. Either way, I hope I was born into a rich family. Looking at my mother and the size of the bed, it seems to at least be respectable. The toilet had the sound of running water coming from it. I came out without flushing anything. I've never seen anything like it. Anyway, tomorrow... But she's beautiful isn't she, my mom. She's my mom, so it's okay if I touch her, right? Yeah...

And then it was morning. My beautiful mother was still sleeping next to me, slowly breathing.

Even in the light, she's still beautiful. Honestly, she's more beautiful than anyone I've ever seen on television or in movies. Is she a European actress or model? If I really have been reincarnated

into a family like this, I'm so lucky.

I grabbed onto the bedding, slid to the floor, and quietly left the room so as not to wake her up.

The sun still isn't up. Seems like it's around five in the morning. Is there no clock here?

The house was dimly lit, but my eyes soon grew accustomed. Everything was beautifully decorated, including the railings and window frames, and a large vase was placed in the corner of the hallway.

Wow! This looks like the kind of house an actor or someone rich might live in. It's definitely not some poor person's house! Actually...are these people absurdly wealthy? This is ostentatious. What if she really is some kind of actress?!

Impressed by how luxurious the house was, I decided to check out some of the other rooms. In the living room, the table and chair each had four legs, and there were pretty flowers that looked like lilies of the valley arranged in a vase atop the table. A shelf on the wall displayed expensive-looking plates and other decorative items. They were of an antique style and so extravagant that their high value was obvious at a glance. But I then noticed something strange; it looked as if a section of the shelf was sparkling. I felt drawn to it and tried to get closer, but I couldn't reach it with my body as small as it was now. Even so, I desperately wanted to see it. I tried to slide over a chair from the table.

It won't even budge. Young children are surprisingly weak. It won't move unless I put all of my strength into it.

"Hnn!"

The chair wobbled and then fell towards me. I quickly tried to hold it up, but it was surprisingly heavy and I couldn't support it.

Thump!

That was close! I'm lucky I wasn't crushed under it.

As I stared blankly at the overturned chair, unable to lift it because it was so heavy, the door opened and my beautiful mother came in.

"Raul! What happened?!"

She ran to me with a worried look on her face and picked me up.

I tried to hide my embarrassment.

"Ah, um..."

"Were you getting into some mischief?"

It seemed like she wasn't angry at me. And as I had thought before, she was breathtakingly beautiful.

"I was trying to get something from that shelf."

When I said that, she approached the shelf with me in her arms, picked up the shining item, and showed it to me.

A 9mm bullet for a pistol.

Being a military otaku, I knew that much. But why was a single bullet just lying there? I was worried that my mother might be concerned if a three-year-old knew about bullets, though, so I played dumb.

"What is it?"

"This came from inside your chest. I think it may have been given to you by a god as a charm to protect you, so I've kept it as a keepsake."

So that means the bullet stayed inside my body when I got reincarnated? But what kind of person calls a bullet a gift from a god?

"But neither I nor your father know what it is."

Eh? They don't know what it is? Have they never seen a bullet before? This must not be a gun society like America.

"Ohh."

I decided it would be best not to talk about it too much. I pretended to lose interest, when—

Knock! Knock!

There was a knock on the door. A woman stood at the entrance.

"Good morning, Lady Iona. Master Raul, it seems you have also woken up early today."

"Good morning, Maria," my mother said in greeting.

Umm... She's wearing a maid outfit. Is this the home of some European big shot? I've only seen maid outfits as cosplay in Japan! This family is definitely rich!

"Good morning, Maria," I repeated.

I knew this maid's name. And my mother's name was Iona. Maria

was a girl in her late teens with a cute face, and the dark brown hair that went down to her shoulders suited her.

And my eye can't help but notice that she has a well-developed chest. It's bouncing!

"I was outside gathering some firewood when I heard a noise."

"It's okay," Iona replied.

With practiced movement, Maria held her hand over a candle. A faint light enveloped her palm, and the candle suddenly was alight. The candlelight illuminated the still slightly dim room.

What was that just now? It sure looked like the candle lit up when she put her hand over it. A magic trick? Is this candle some type of electrical device? Her movements were so natural.

It had happened so suddenly that I wasn't able to understand it. In any case, the candle lit up by itself.

"Then please allow me to prepare breakfast." Maria curtsied and then left the room again.

There doesn't seem to be anything special about the candle. Iona saw it too, right? Does this house have no electricity? She also brought a candle when I got up to go to the bathroom last night.

I looked up at the ceiling. Instead of fluorescent lights, there was a chandelier with lamps. As I pondered this, I heard a rustling noise coming from outside.

It sounds like someone is visiting. Isn't it too early for that?

Iona let me down from her arms and looked out the window. Her expression instantly brightened.

"Oh! Your father's back from work! Let's go greet him together, Raul."

Eh? Coming home in the morning? Iona said he was at work; did he just finish a night shift?

When we came to the entrance, I was shocked at how opulent it was. A red carpet and a huge chandelier caught my eye. A staircase led up to the second floor from the middle of the entrance.

It's so fancy! Incredible!

Iona and I passed the entrance and hurried to the front door, when the massive doors swung open.

"I'm back!"

"Welcome home."

Eh! Is this my father?

The sight that greeted me was so shocking that I froze. No, this was definitely the father I remembered, but...here he was, clad in silver plate armor, with a sword strapped to his back.

"Raul! Have you been good?"

My father, still wearing that armor, patted me on the head.

*Oh, I see. He's wearing cosplay...or not. There's no way someone would wear full-body armor for cosplay! He wears that getup at work and owns a gorgeous mansion? No doubt about it: I was born into a family of movie stars! What a dream situation! My father must be an action star. I've never seen him before, but I'm sure he's been in a bunch of war movies! Maybe he's friends with Arn*ld! Or maybe Ke*nu? Perhaps Stath*m? No, it's gotta be Stall*ne! Ah! So* that's *why that bullet is a good-luck charm! And I'll bet my beautiful mother pretended not to know what it was because I'm only three years old. It finally makes sense!*

"Papa!"

Iona seems to think the outfit is normal. Maybe she's an actress after all.

"But why did you come back looking like that?" my mother asked.

Right? She thinks it's embarrassing too! You can't just come home dressed in a costume like that!

Then another man's voice came from behind my father.

"As you say, my lady! Lord Gram set out without listening to a word that I, his servant, said."

"Servant"? Not his manager, but his servant? Also, "my lady"?

Behind Gram was a young, pleasant, and good-looking man.

This guy is wearing armor too!

"Don't be that way, Leonard. I just wanted to get home quickly. Now, you can do the same."

"Ha! In that case, I pray that my lady and Raul have a restful day. I shall take my leave."

With that, the man called Leonard disappeared pleasantly into the morning mist.

Is Leonard a fellow actor? Maybe he's playing the role of a

servant. He was also wearing a sword... He's definitely an actor, right?

"The nightwatch must be hard work. Come in so I can help you remove your armor," Iona said appreciatively to father, heading into a room inside.

"Nightwatch"? Is that the title of a movie? It sounds so lame. Wait...it's not an erotic film, is it? Is he that *kind of actor? I see, I see. Hmm...or maybe not. Is he a castle guard?*

The questions kept going back and forth in my head, so I decided to try and organize what information I did have.

First, there's the way this house is decorated, then there's the professional maid and the mysterious way the candle was lit...and my father's job is a castle guard with full plate armor and a sword? And also, a servant? He seems less like an actor and more like a real knight. There's no way...but...was the candle lit by magic? I mean, there doesn't seem to be any electricity in the house.

Little by little, I began to see the answer.

I get it! Don't underestimate me just because you think I'm a kid! I've already seen through everything! I will have them stop this grand prank. Where's the camera? They must be actors trying to make a video of tricking their child. But I'm not just some kid! Is this a video stream? I'll just ask Iona directly. She'll be kind and come clean, I'm sure of it. Well, hopefully the part about being rich isn't a prank too.

Even as I thought this, I was completely freaking out. When I opened the door to head to the washing area at the back, I was met by a startling scene. Iona was standing over a bucket with her hands outstretched in front of her. And between her hands, water was floating. The water was formless and floating gently in the air!

"Raul, what's wrong?"

Splash. Iona dropped the water into the bucket with a look of slight surprise.

This is definitely not a prank. It's that thing... I've read a little bit about it, that kind of world in light novels. A world of swords and magic. It looks like I wasn't simply reborn as a child overseas.

It seemed I had been successfully reincarnated into another

world.

Having realized that I was in another world, I had breakfast in a panic. My father, Gram, was sitting at the head of the table, and Iona sat across from him. I was seated next to him, while Maria stood at the wall behind us. Breakfast consisted of hard bread, soup with lots of vegetables, and boiled fish. It wasn't bad overall, but a bit bland and unsalted.

Or maybe my sense of taste is shot because I'm so freaked out from finding out that I'm in another world.

Gram's meal was served with what appeared to be wine, and all of the tableware looked expensive and fashionable.

"Raul, I'm going to be home all day tomorrow. We can play as much as you want."

"Isn't that great, Raul?"

"Yaaay!"

For now, I just need to act like a happy three-year-old. But since I awakened to the memories of my previous life last night, my mental age is now thirty-one. Gram is six or seven years younger than me. I'm sure spending a day with him won't be my idea of fun.

"What do you want to do? Play knights? Or shall I tell you about an adventure?"

What do *I want to do? I want to know some more about this world. First, I want to see outside.*

"I want to go out for a walk."

"I see, I see! Then let's go out together with your mother. Should we ask Maria to come along too?" Gram said, his eyes full of joy. It seemed he was the kind of father who loved to spoil his children.

"Well then, my lord, would it please you if I prepared some sandwiches and sautéed chicken for your lunch?" Maria asked.

"That will do, Maria! Prepare that! Let's take the carriage and go on a little trip."

Gram had become even more enthusiastic.

"I am at your service. Then, I will prepare lunch for you in the morning," Maria answered while pouring more of the wine-like liquid into Gram's now empty glass.

I only meant for it to be a simple walk, but now it's turned into a picnic? I'm excited about it if it allows me to see even a little of this new world.

Gram seemed to be getting sleepy, both from the alcohol and having been on guard duty until the early hours of the morning. After eating, he went directly to the bedroom to sleep. Iona said she was going to look after the plate armor she had just washed. As for Maria, she cleared the dishes and went to the kitchen to eat her meal, leaving me alone in the living room.

Since I had nothing to do, I went out to the garden by myself. I saw that it was well-maintained, with plants that looked like an expert gardener had pruned them. The garden wasn't very big, but it was filled with colorful flowers. Impressed by the beauty of the garden, I went around to the backyard and sat down with my back against the wall of the house. I took the bullet that Iona had given me earlier out of my pocket and looked at it carefully.

Is this what took my life in the previous world? Is there a reason I was reborn with it?

As its cartridge was now missing, only the tip was left. With all sorts of emotions churning in my chest, I closed my eyes and gripped the bullet.

I suddenly felt lightheaded. I opened my eyes in a panic.

What was that just now? I had a strange feeling like I was shaking.

I gripped the bullet again and closed my eyes. Once more, I was overcome by the sensation of blood flowing and my body burning hot, but this time I tried to keep my eyes closed. An image of the entire bullet, including the cartridge, appeared in the dark space of my consciousness. It was so realistic that it felt like it was right in front of me.

9x19mm Parabellum, full metal jacket.



The bullet floating in front of me looked so solid that I felt like I could touch it. I instinctively reached my hand out. The moment my hand reached it, I felt a definite sensation.

Something fell onto the ground with a thud.

A 9mm bullet with the cartridge attached! What happened? It just suddenly appeared!

I was still holding the bullet that Iona had given me, but on the ground was now a separate Parabellum bullet with a cartridge attached. As I hurriedly put it in my pocket, I was suddenly overcome by sleepiness. I leaned against the wall of the house and fell asleep without having time to think about what had just happened.

When I woke up, I was in bed. Someone had carried me inside. Maria noticed that I had woken up and hurriedly ran out of the room, calling out, "Lady Iona!"

Apparently, I had been asleep, though it might be more accurate to say that I had fainted.

"Raul, are you okay?" Iona asked as she entered the room.

"Yes."

Iona and Maria looked very worried. Gram, who was standing behind them, asked me something strange.

"Raul, before you fell asleep, did you feel like some kind of power was running through your body?"

"I did," I answered honestly.

"And you fell asleep after that, right? That's likely a symptom of running out of magical power. Could it be that he's discovered magic at the age of three?"

"Running out of magical power? Magic?" I asked.

Magical power is that thing that mages use, right? Does that mean I'm a mage?

"Yes. Each person has a set amount of magical power they can use, and when it runs out, your body becomes tired. In the case of small children like you, you may even faint."

"Is there a limit to magical power?"

"There is."

"Um...can anyone use magic?"

"Humans with magical abilities are rare. Originally, magic could not be used unless one studied its principles and learned how to manipulate their consciousness and the flow of power. However, training doesn't increase that magical power. Well, you're still too young to grasp all that."

Huh? I haven't studied anything like that. So how did I use magic?

"Can you use magic?" I asked him.

"I can't. I can manipulate the flow of life energy to make my body stronger, but that's different from magic."

Fortifying your strength isn't magic? What is "energy"? There's so much information that I can't understand it.

"What else?"

"There are eight types of magic: water, fire, earth, wind, light, darkness, holy, and healing. Magic can be small or big."

"Big magic?"

"That's right. If you become a court wizard, you can cast fireballs and freeze monsters. A priestess can even heal injuries and cure illnesses instantly. A person who loses their leg can have it regenerated."

There's magic that regenerates missing body parts?! That's incredible!

"I wonder what his magical attribute is?" Iona asked.

"He'll find out as he gets further in his studies," replied Gram with a grin.

Come to think of it...did I fall asleep after conjuring only one 9mm bullet?

I put my hand in my pocket where I had placed the bullet. I didn't know if there were guns in this world, so I was hesitant to show it to my parents. I felt like it wouldn't be good if people found out I'd been reborn.

Instead, I just cheerfully said, "I'm looking forward to seeing what kind of magic I can use! I hope it'll be helpful."

I can already use magic, right? There was nothing about summoning magic in the explanation I just heard. Though calling it summoning is a bit much for only a single pistol bullet. Aren't

summons usually things like spirits, demons, or magical beasts? It seems like this world doesn't have the modern guns from my world, so summoning just bullets seems pretty useless? If this were a light novel, the title would be The Slow Life of a Mage Who Earns His Living by Selling Bullets*. With a title like that, it probably wouldn't sell at all.*

I smiled, trying not to let my disappointment show while everyone looked at me with faces full of expectation.

The day of the picnic was beautiful and sunny. Maria had laid out a blanket near the shore of a lake, and was now deftly preparing the food. I approached the lakeside and looked down at the surface. The water was surprisingly clear.

"Put your feet in," Gram suggested kindly. I took off my socks and carefully dipped my toes into the water.

It's cold! I suppose it is still spring. Actually, does this world even have four seasons? In my memories, it was winter a few months ago, so it must. But the water is so cold that I can't handle it anymore.

When I took my feet out of the lake, Maria came and wiped them.

"What a lovely day!" my mother said.

"It's all thanks to Raul for suggesting we go out," my father replied.

No, you don't have to praise me for everything. That's no way to raise a child.

The weather was calm, and a refreshing breeze stirred. The fragrance of flowers seemed to enhance the flavor of the food. With butterflies fluttering about, this was the very picture of a peaceful family gathering.

"Why did you become a knight, Papa?"

"Hmm? The reason I became a knight? As a second son of the Forrest Barony, it would normally be impossible for someone like me to get a job at the royal palace. But I managed to catch the eye of the captain of the royal guard."

"How did you do that?"

Gram thought for a moment. "Raul, do *you* want to be a knight?"

"I don't really know, but I want to grow up and be like you."

Gram smiled broadly. "But it's very tough! Though I was the second son of a baron, I was an adventurer in my teenage years. You see, I've been good with the sword since I was little, and I even defeated some pretty strong monsters in my time. So I stood out a bit. After that, I was drafted and performed many feats in battle that the captain took notice of."

I see! Gram looks like he is trying to impress me, so I'll give him a bright-eyed look to show that I look up to him. He's a young father, so I'll need him to grow into his role.

"How did you and mama meet?"

"I met your father at a party in the royal palace. It was love at first sight," Iona replied wistfully.

"Love at first sight?" I didn't expect such a bold answer.

"At first, I had no intention of going to the party at all. When my father took me to parties at the royal palace when I was younger, I'd only be greeted by nobles with unpleasant looks on their faces, so I dreaded it. Even though this was the first party I'd gone to on my own, it was so boring. I was so fed up with it that I decided to take a walk outside."

"And what happened then?"

"Then I found your father standing guard, and he had such a stern look on his face. The feeling struck me like a thunderbolt, and I couldn't help but call out to him. But guess what he said when he found out I was a member of Count Nastalia's family! He said, 'I am most unworthy of the favor of a beautiful lady as highborn as yourself! I beg your forgiveness!'"

"Huh? Then how did you manage to get married?"

"I used my father's influence."

Wow... She said that with no hesitation. Is she just passionate, or is she more cunning than I thought?

My father then followed this by saying, "But listen closely, Raul. I've always loved your mother. She was well-known in the royal capital from her school days. There was a rumor going around, of a woman at the Royal Academy for Magic who was more beautiful

than even the goddess. I once even sneaked off with some fellow guardsmen to see if we could catch a peek. The first time I saw her, I thought to myself that I had never seen anyone so beautiful. Being a lowly guardsman, I never imagined I'd have a chance to even speak to her, but I never forgot her."

Understandable. I've never seen anyone as beautiful as her either, even in my previous life.

"So, I guess your father was the first to fall in love."

"That's right. I would never have thought I would meet you again at the Royal Palace, and that you'd suddenly call out, 'I adore you!' I didn't know what to do. That's why I gave you such a curt response."

"It's a little embarrassing to say, but...I'm so happy that I've been able to share my life with you."

It was a breath of fresh air to hear people be so openly in love. Although, Maria was right by their side.

"How long has Maria been with you?"

"Maria came to the Nastalia household to study etiquette. She was a kitchen maid, but we got along so well that I asked my father to make her my personal attendant."

"Becoming Lady Iona's attendant was an honor beyond my imagination as the second daughter of a trading company. When I heard that she was getting married, I felt lonely and even thought about quitting my job as a maid. But when I was told that she would be bringing me with her, I was so happy that I cried."

Iona seems to be the kind of person who uses her influence to make those around her happy.

After we finished eating and talking, Gram invited me to play knights. We picked up two sticks that had fallen nearby and faced off against each other. I let out a yell and charged in like a child would.

"That's it! Let's go, Raul!"

I couldn't even graze him, so I tried to swing back as hard as I could and hit him. After doing this for a while, I began to run out of breath and my body grew tired. Gram easily dodged my attempts, then effortlessly knocked away my stick with a *bang!* and sent it flying.

"I-I give up," I gasped.

Hearing that, Gram said, "That was well done, Raul. I'm impressed that you could keep going for so long!"

No, it isn't that amazing. Am I cut out to be a swordsman? I don't think so. I've never even tried kendo.

"Honey, could you show Raul one of your techniques?"

"Easy enough, m'lady."

Gram grabbed the sword he had left a short distance away. It was a European-style long sword and looked rather heavy, but he held it as if it weighed nothing. He slowly closed his eyes, and suddenly the atmosphere around him changed. I felt an intense pressure brush against my cheek. In spite of myself, I became afraid and clung to Iona. In a manga, there would probably be a flickering effect or an aura, but of course I didn't actually see anything like that.

He held his sword out in front of him and opened his eyes wide. A wave of heat slammed against my body. *Whoosh!* The tip of the sword blurred and seemed to disappear, and then suddenly it and my father were in the air. With no running start, he had suddenly leaped a full five meters. He swung his sword down as he landed, a loud *wham* echoing in the wake of his movement.

Gram remained in his stance and breathed in deeply. He seemed to be gathering energy. He turned his body towards a large tree about ten meters away, so large that even two adults wouldn't be able to lift it. He sheathed his sword, lowering his posture and pulling himself into a tighter stance.

The moment Gram exhaled, he disappeared. An unsheathing strike? A thrust? In the next moment, he was right next to the tree. There was the sound of multiple rapid strikes against wood, like a woodpecker. Gram turned to us, smiling, and sheathed his sword.

"Raul, come over here!"

When I ran to him, he picked me up and turned me towards the tree. *Whoa!* To my amazement, there were now five gaping holes in the tree.

"Papa! There are holes in the tree! I can see through it!"

I was genuinely impressed. It was astonishing to think that these

holes had been made in that single moment. It should have been impossible to drill a hole in such a thick tree without using a laser or a water cutter. Witnessing these surreal feats before my eyes had gotten me excited.

"Amazing! That was amazing, papa! How did you do it?"

Gram gave me a pat on the head. "See this? This is a technique that can be gained through serious training."

No way! No matter how much you train, this isn't something an ordinary person can do!

"Could I do it?"

Gram frowned. "Hmm. It would probably take more than the usual amount of training for you to reach this level, Raul. At that point, you'd be abandoning everything else in life. I wouldn't want you to travel such a difficult path. Well, in the end, it is your choice."

I understand, I won't overdo it. I mean, abandoning everything else in life? Not a chance!

"Thank you, papa. I'm happy that I'm your son."

Gram smiled gently at that.

Then I asked him about something that had been bothering me. "Um... Is there anyone stronger than you, papa?"

"Yes, there is."

No way! Really?! There are other people who can do these techniques straight out of a superhero movie?

This world I had come to was unthinkable.

That night, I quickly said good night to my parents, went up to my room, and crawled into bed. After seeing Gram's technique, I couldn't contain my excitement.

I need to do this to survive in this world! I'll probably run out of magical energy after one try, so I need to make sure I'm on my pillow and under the blanket! And the bullets might roll out, so I need to be prepared to catch them!

I concentrated and envisioned a bullet. A bullet that seemed real to the touch floated in the darkness. I reached out to touch it, and with a *thud* it fell onto the blanket.

Huh? I didn't become sleepy right away. Has my magical power

increased? But Gram said that magical power doesn't increase with training. Let's try it one more time... Oh! Another one came out! And I'm still not sleepy! Playing knights with Gram must have had some effect after all. But it's too early to draw a conclusion. If training your body increases your magical power, then everyone would do it.

For now, I hid the bullets under the bed.

Maria would definitely be startled if she found them. But does this mean I can produce an infinite number of bullets? I could end up buried in them by morning. Ugh! And what if I run out of space to hide them? I guess this means I was born with an especially large amount of magical power. Am I actually cheating without realizing it?! Is this that *kind of story? I guess that makes me the usual overpowered protagonist you see in isekai stories. How embarrassing!*

Grinning ear to ear, I tried my magic again. I closed my eyes and tried to imagine a bullet.

Plonk.

I passed out that time.

The next day, I was thinking about summoning a weapon. Once it was night again, I went to my room and crawled under the covers. I focused on remembering the last day of my previous life, the fateful day that changed everything. Images of the paintball competition came flowing back to me.

I had been a military otaku to my very core. As a child, I'd loved weapons and war movies. There was one I had wanted to see no matter what, so I went to the movie theater by myself. There were posters of all different kinds of movies, but one in particular came floating into my mind.

The protagonist was holding a combat knife, an OKC-3S bayonet that could be attached to an M16 assault rifle.

That brings back memories! Sadly, none of my friends in elementary school were into war movies.

An image of the combat knife floated into the dark space of my consciousness. As my surroundings faded, the knife seemed so realistic that it felt like it was right in front of me. I reached out and

touched it, my hand coming into contact with smooth metal.

Success! I was able to do it!

Opening my eyes, I saw a military knife sticking out of the bed from in between my legs...just in front of my crotch.

Ohhh, that was close! I was too close to losing my balls!

It had just barely missed. I needed to be very cautious when summoning things. But still, this was a big step forward. As I thought, my magical power had increased and I could now summon weapons. Maybe one's magic abilities had to do with their childhood or things that were deeply etched into the psyche. It seemed that summoning larger objects drained more magical power out of me, but the most crucial part was being able to visualize it.

Iona and Maria both could conjure the image of fire and water, but I couldn't do anything like that at all. I guess it was just because people in my world were convinced that they couldn't produce water or fire. That's why having a childhood full of adventure and exploration was so important. It would be difficult for someone like me to genuinely believe in having that kind of power.

Well, that's my theory anyway.

I'd drawn and researched weapons my entire life. This was especially true as a child. I would imagine having a weapon in my hand, or actually wish that I could magically summon a weapon. On top of that, I had been reincarnated with a bullet. This was a very important point. It was an undeniable fact, and seemed to be enough to trick my consciousness into believing that I could really do these things.

In addition, there was knowledge of weapons stored in a massive database on my computer in my previous life. Each weapon was listed one by one with its name, capability, image, and a reference URL. It was safe to assume that I could summon any weapon as long as I could recall its form with all of its intricacies.

Moreover, it felt like my magical capacity grew each day that I remembered my previous life. It was possible that my magical capacity was increasing with my knowledge. As evidence, I had plenty of magic left over even after summoning the combat knife.

There was just one problem. Being a child, weapons were much

too big for me. I wanted to summon even bigger weapons, but I was too worried about where I'd hide them and what I'd do with them afterwards. If the weapons were found, everyone would definitely be suspicious of me.

I needed to learn if I could summon weaponry with a more complex structure, but if it was too big, it would be easy to find. What was I supposed to do if that happened? I also needed to make sure that my memories of my previous life didn't fade, so I could summon weapons in the future. In other words, my goal was to recreate the weapon database in writing.

A drawing that would become its image, its official name, its attributes, its cool points—it was important for me to keep a record of them, *especially* their cool points. To do that, I needed paper and something to write with. Since those things were probably expensive in this world, I decided that I'd first try to butter up Iona and see if she could buy them for me. It was best to strike while the iron was hot.

"Of course, Raul! I will give you a quill, ink, and parchment. Draw as many pictures as you'd like," Iona replied kindly.

"Really? Thank you!"

Cleared on the first try!

"What are you going to draw?"

"I want to draw whatever comes to mind," I said vaguely.

"Maybe you'll become a famous painter or writer!"

"Ha ha ha!"

Iona gave Maria the order to provide me with a quill, an inkwell, and a thick bundle of parchment. Now I could write. I would try to write as much as I could in my free time. I would vent my frustrations onto the parchment using this quill.

I went back to my room and began the slow process of writing. I started with the bullet and knife I had summoned. The goal was not to create a perfect picture, but to create an image I could understand well. What came to mind next was the gun that had shot and killed me. Those final moments had been burned into my mind with perfect clarity. I could see the hand holding the gun moving in slow motion.

Suddenly, my surroundings went dark and the gun floated into my mental vision. I felt the dizzying sensation of my blood rushing. It was clear that magic was circulating through me, but it felt more like a large, violent wave than when I'd summoned bullets. However, I would not reach out to touch the floating pistol. I wouldn't be able to hide it, or make any excuses for it. Regardless, I took a long, hard look at the gun that had claimed my life.

The SIG Sauer P320 was a semiautomatic pistol manufactured by SIG Sauer. It could be loaded with seventeen rounds of 9x19mm Parabellum bullets. Its dark brown frame was just the coolest! You could even say it looked sexy! It was a modular pistol with interchangeable grips, meaning even women with small hands could grip it. Without thinking, my hands started to reach for it...

"No, I can't."

I managed to pull my hand back. I drew its image and features, then began writing the details for the next gun.

The Beretta 92 handgun, a pistol that had been used by the US military for decades. I went ahead and wrote this down on the parchment too.

Next was the Desert Eagle, a handgun manufactured by Magnum Research Inc. and Israel Military Industries. It could be loaded with .357 Magnum, .41 Magnum, .44 Magnum, and .50 AE rounds. This gun appeared in a variety of movies, so it was considered to be the most powerful semiautomatic pistol and a star of the action movie genre. Although the number of loaded rounds was limited, its incredible destructive power was nothing short of epic.

I continued to draw more pistols. Before I knew it, it was dark outside. Each time, I'd been tempted to reach out my hand and grab them. And finally, I had come to the star of military simulation games: the assault rifle.

The first one that came to mind was the M16A1 assault rifle manufactured by ArmaLite. It had been the airsoft gun that started my military simulation game life. After seeing it so much on the television and the news, I had fallen in love and bought one. It could be loaded with a magazine of twenty to thirty rounds, and could fire at a rate of nine hundred rounds per minute.

The next assault rifle I drew was the one everyone thought of: the AK-47 assault rifle manufactured by Kalashnikov. It was another classic—I thought it was even recognized by *The Guinness Book of World Records* as the most used military gun in the world. I continued to write down information about weapons nonstop. I had no way of knowing that this fanatical hobby of mine would have such a large impact on my life in this world.

Knock, knock! came a sound at the door.

"Yes?" I asked.

"The master has just returned," Maria said.

I tucked the parchment I'd drawn under my mattress and hurried to the living room to meet Gram.

"Welcome home, Papa."

"Raul! Have you been good?"

"Yeah!"

Gram seemed somewhat tired.

"There's something I need to talk about with everyone. Let's talk while we eat dinner. Maria, you listen too."

When the meal was ready and everyone sat down to eat, Gram began to speak.

"It's been a year since our family came to the Royal Capital. Raul, this might be difficult to understand, but please listen."

"Okay."

"Right now, the Kingdom of Eucrit is in a difficult situation. Since the military of the Bargius Empire in the south is so powerful, they conduct trade on very unfavorable terms. They've enacted expensive tariffs, which puts the burden on the countries they are trading with."

I see. So there is friction between countries in this world too.

"Our vassal states in the north, such as the Kingdom of Rashtal and the Kingdom of Schladen, depend on us. If we sour our relations with the Bargius Empire, they will be in an even more difficult situation. Even though we're friendly with the Holy Land of Fattoria in the east, that doesn't work in our favor when it comes to the Empire. There has been some talk of forming a coalition, but nothing has come of it. There are even rumors of disturbing

developments in the Bargius Empire, that they are building up their forces. That said, war might not be their goal. After all, I've also heard of monster sightings in the villages near the woodlands, at the foot of the mountains to the west."

"Are those villages safe?" I couldn't help but ask.

Gram answered with a frown. This seemed to be a heavy topic for him.

"It's not too bad, but harm may come to the elderly and children."

The dining table became deathly quiet.

"That is why I have been called to the Royal Capital. I have received orders to assist the knight captain while helping with the reinforcement and preparation of the army. Well, I'm sure that the real reason I've been summoned is the monsters in the west; my knowledge as an adventurer would be valuable. They probably could have just asked any adventurer, but I suppose it's more convenient to have me, who came from a noble family and became a knight, when some of their units are nobles themselves."

That's a delicate position to be in.

"The goal is to reorganize the military and restructure the castle's guard. And that end is in sight. I've already instructed the knights on how to safely defeat monsters. Once I have taught the soldiers in the borderland armies, my role will be complete."

"Dear, don't overexert yourself. Please take care."

"I still can't rest yet, but I'll be okay. Regardless, I must leave soon."

"I understand."

"Yes, my lord."

Iona and Maria both responded, so I decided to follow suit.

"Raul, you're almost a man of four years. Take care of your mother and Maria."

I can't exactly do much as a toddler, but leave it to me!

"I will!"

Gram smiled, his eyes softening.

"Dear, Raul will turn four in about ten days," Iona said.

"I see! Then let's have a celebration when things settle down."

"You'll look forward to that, right, Raul?" she asked.

"Yes!"

"By the way, dear. Raul said he drew something."

Huh?

"Is that right? Did you start drawing while papa was gone?"

Wait, wait! This isn't good. I can't let them see my drawings. There's no way I could explain it! What do I do?!

"I haven't seen it yet either. What did you draw?"

Don't panic. I'm just a normal three-year-old. There's only so much a child of my age can draw.

"I'm drawing a picture of...papa."

"Really? A drawing of me? I'd love to see it!"

Crap! I dug myself into a hole! Uh...

"Um...I just started drawing it, so it isn't done. I'm sorry."

"That's okay! I can't wait to see it when it's done!"

I got another pat on the head from Gram. It seemed like I had made it through!

That evening, I drew a few sketches of Gram before returning to my developing catalog of weapons. My hand was a blur, and I was laughing wildly like an old-school biker gang hooligan. Like a machine, endless details about modern weapons flowed from my memory to the parchment.

I then noticed something strange. I started to see the weapons I had recorded as if they were displayed on a screen in my mind.

It's almost like I could scroll through it using my fingers.

I reached out my hand, and the screen began to scroll rapidly.

What is this? It's not just an image. I can actually touch the data. Have the images materialized in reality? It's like a hologram floating in the air. No, these weapons even feel *real! I've seen this in a sci-fi movie! I can control this 3D screen with my hands as it floats in midair.*

When I thought of the first SIG Sauer P320 I drew, its interface appeared. I scrolled sideways and was able to view each size the modular gun came in: full-size, compact, and subcompact.

Incredible!

I was so excited, I touched the P320 subcompact without thinking. It landed with a *thump*.

Now I've done it! I touched it by mistake! What do I do?

I looked at the fallen P320 lying in front of me, stunned. But...it *was* cool... I picked it up by the grip, but my hands were too small to reach the trigger. The magazine was empty. I quietly hurried to the closet and took out the bullets I had stashed there. When I tried to load them into the magazine, it fit perfectly.

Ugh, I want to shoot it, even if it's at an empty can. Please, let me grow up quickly!

I had no choice but to place the pistol into a hidden place in my closet.

This is beyond amazing. I can summon even complex weapons easily! My amount of magical power is no longer a problem either! I'm so excited, I don't know if I'll be able to sleep! Today, I'll work late. I wish I had an energy drink though.

After that, I continued to draw weapons single-mindedly. As I continued to draw, I suddenly felt like trying to see if I could summon food. I tried combat rations. I had eaten military food from many different countries, but the Self-Defense Forces' food was the best. I had eaten it many times, so I could remember its exact name and appearance. I quickly drew it. Its image came out just as I had imagined it. As my surroundings grew dark, its appearance became more solid. I checked my mind database.

Success! It's in the data! With this, I can keep fighting even if I'm caught in a siege. Not that I think that will ever happen. In a drawn-out war, food supply is the difference between life and death! I wish I could give this to Gram, though. He looked like he was going to be worked to the point of exhaustion...

Thinking of my father, I added as much food as I could remember to the database—MREs, canned goods, hardtack, and more.

Once I realized that the weapon calling system was in my mind, I was completely absorbed in it. I suddenly had the ambition to summon all the weapons I'd had on my computer in my previous life! In the course of writing all the information I could, I had become a *hikikomori*. I had already been drawing in my room for six or seven days, not leaving except to eat or go to the bathroom.

One day, after breakfast, Iona asked me, "Do you love drawing that much, Raul?"

"I do! I love it!"

"I understand liking it, but...you're starting to stink, dear."

Seriously?! I hadn't noticed at all. I guess that's what happens when you hole up in your room for a week.

"I'm sorry."

"Then, Master Raul, let me prepare a bath for you," Maria said before heading to the washroom.

"You need to take care of your hygiene, Raul. Girls won't like you if you're dirty."

"Uh... Okay."

You have it all wrong, Iona! I chose *to stay a virgin! I just never had any time for girls because I was always playing military simulation games. I was a man who staked his life on the battlefield. That's the reason I didn't care about bathing!*

I made excuses in my mind for things that Iona didn't even accuse me of. Actually putting it into words made me feel kind of hollow.

"Anyway, go take a bath!"

I got lectured by my mother! After a while, Maria came to get me.

"Master Raul, your bath is ready."

"Thank you."

I started undressing in the bath's changing room. Maria helped me take my clothing off. Normally, Iona or Maria would just fill a basin with water and wipe me down, but I was excited to take my first bath. As I stripped down and was about to enter alone, Maria called out to me.

"Master Raul, wait inside."

Hmm? I kind of want to get started right now because I'm itchy. Where's the soap anyway?

As I was rummaging around inside, the door behind me opened with a clatter.

"Maria, where's the—"

Maria entered with a single piece of thin cloth hanging from her

chest. She was completely nude!

"I have everything prepared for you, of course."

Wait, wait, wait! Are you coming in with me?! You're a seventeen-year-old girl, as I recall!

I turned my back instinctively. A beautiful, naked seventeen-year-old girl was right behind me.

You've gotta be kidding me! A virgin hasn't built up any resistance to this. Oh, but wait... I'm a toddler. I wouldn't be allowed to take a bath alone. What am I freaking out about? This is to be expected. Besides, I was a pro in military simulation games. This is no problem, no problem. Even though I was a virgin, I wouldn't think anything of a seventeen-year-old kid! Probably...

While I was freaking out, hot water was suddenly poured over my head. Maria took the soap in her hands and began to lather it up before putting it in my hair and rubbing.

"Do you itch anywhere?" she asked me. She sounded like a run-of-the-mill hairdresser.

"A little more towards the top, and just above the ear."

Maria washed precisely where it itched. I felt refreshed. She poured hot water over my head again, and I let out a sigh like a middle-aged man. Well, I practically *was* a middle-aged man on the inside, after all. Next, Maria lathered soap onto some cloth and began to gently wash my back.

Ahh...I feel the thirty-one years of dirt being washed away from my heart! However, something has been bothering me since she began washing me. Something is rubbing against my back. What is it? What's touching me?!



Maria suddenly circled around to face me, and I lost the ability to speak. Maria washed my body looking like she was in a very good mood. However, as she was using the cloth she was wearing earlier to wash me, she now had nothing covering her body.

Th-They're big. Is she really seventeen years old? Uhh...

I hurriedly lowered my eyes, but that just caused me to see something even worse.

I-I can s-s-see it... No, officer, this isn't what it looks like! I don't do that sort of thing. I'm not thirty-one, I'm just a toddler.

I was at wit's end when it finally happened. My secret weapon, which I had been trying to keep concealed by staying composed, was suddenly fully cocked.

Ow-ow-ow! My secret weapon hurts! A-Anyway, keep your cool!

Maria kept washing under my arms as if she hadn't noticed anything amiss. Then, as she began to bend down to my feet, I swore she suddenly stopped for a moment. But she just continued on to wash my feet, then poured hot water on me again. She picked me up as if nothing had happened.

Oh no, she saw...

"Pardon me."

She put me down into the bath to soak, then used a bucket to pour water onto my shoulders. Every once in a while, she would glance at me.

This is so embarrassing! I can't relax at all!

However, as if she understood what I was feeling, Maria just patted my head and smiled.

A few days later, when I entered the living room, I found a gray-haired, good-natured old man with round glasses I had never seen before.

"Raul? Hello." The old man smiled and greeted me.

"Hello."

"This is Magister Sauer Morris," Iona said.

"I'm Raul."

"What a clever boy. I look forward to working with you."

Working with me? What does he mean?

Iona explained, “Your father asked him to come. He’s going to be your teacher.”

“However, it has been a long time since I worked at the school of magic, so I might not be able to teach you all that much.”

“Oh! Thank you for coming to teach me!”

A tutor! I needed this badly! And it looks like he’s been teaching for a super long time!

“I haven’t had a student in a long time. Normally I would have declined, but how could I refuse Gram’s son?”

“He was also my principal when I was in school. Magister Morris is a sage, so he’ll know anything you might want to ask him about.”

“Oh, so Raul here has the heart of a scholar even at his age. I’m impressed,” Magister Morris said. He then studied me closely, with an inquisitive look on his face.

“Let me get a good look at your face...”

He stared at my face for a while, then said, “You’re quite incredible, Raul. I can’t believe you’re only four years old. I can feel a lot of potential, but...what’s this?”

Hmm? What’s what? Can he see something?

“Your magic flows in a strange way. It’s very organized, yet it also has disturbances. It’s like he is part sage, yet part child. Or perhaps something darker, like a magical beast.”

“Um, what does that mean?”

“It’s as if you have both sage and demon inside of you.”

What does that mean?

I suddenly felt anxious.

From that day on, I was to learn from Magister Morris. In the mornings I was taught letters, then in the afternoon I was taught history and the principles of magic. If I were to compare it to my previous life, it felt like Japanese, math, and science. His lessons were suited for a four-year-old, so it wasn’t difficult at all. Rather, my progress was so quick that Magister Morris was surprised.

“Truly, the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. Iona was also a very quick learner.”

“It’s because you’re such a good teacher.”

“You absorb so much that I forget that you’re only four years old.

I've been raising the level of your studies higher and higher."

"I'll tell you when I don't understand something, so please continue."

"You're a wise child. Almost like an adult. You're a teacher's dream pupil."

He seems happy, so I'll just keep eagerly absorbing his knowledge.

For the next month or so, I took classes with Magister Morris. One day after he left, I opened the closet to look at the handgun I had hidden. My blood ran cold. It was gone! The P320 handgun was nowhere to be found! All that remained was the bullet which had been reincarnated with me.

"What's going on?" I spoke without thinking. My heart was racing.

The weapon is gone! Did Maria find it while she was cleaning? I hid it here because it should have been impossible to find! I-I guess I'll just have to ask her in the morning.

The next morning, I went to the living room early and found Iona. She was pouring water into a vase.

"Mama! Where is Maria?"

"What's the matter? Maria is in the kitchen."

"Thank you."

I went straight to the kitchen. Maria was baking something in the oven.

"Good morning, Maria."

"Good morning."

"Um... Maria..."

"What is it?"

"Did you happen to find something recently?"

"Like what?"

"It's like...something...small? How should I say it... Small and hard..."

Maria made an "Aha!" sort of face.

I knew it! She did *find it! But seeing as she hasn't said anything about it, maybe she'll keep it a secret.*

"Um... Is it possible that you're keeping it a secret for me?"

"Of course, Master Raul. I understand that you want to hide it.

It’s something that all boys go through, though, so you don’t need to worry about it.”

Something all boys go through? Summoning magic?!

“No, I think I’m the only one. I don’t think there are many people like that out there.”

“I see. You’re confused, aren’t you? That’s adorable,” she told me with a big smile.

What? What does that *mean?! She’s too relaxed about this! It’s a weapon, you know?! There’s nothing more dangerous!*

“You don’t understand how I feel at all!” I said, raising my voice a little.

Maria suddenly hugged me tightly. “It’s nothing to worry about. Boys can get like that when their bodies are touched,” she whispered to me in the gentle, kind voice of an angel.

Huh?

I could feel my face turning red. Maria was referring to my “secret weapon” which had reared its ugly head when she bathed me.

Thank you for your kindness, Maria. Virgins are vulnerable, and that kind of concern is important. It isn’t a big deal now, but it will be in the future. Also...it didn’t happen because I was touched. It’s all your body’s fault. It’s not my fault at all.

“I hope you understand... Please don’t tell mama.”

“I understand. It’s our secret.” Maria smiled as she wrapped her pinky finger around mine to make a swear.

Back to the mission... It seems she didn’t find the weapon after all. I’ll go back and ask Iona.

“Mama? Um...have you seen anything unusual recently?”

“Hmm? Raul, did you see a ghost?”

“N-no! Never mind, it’s nothing.”

It seems Iona didn’t find it either. Where is it? My weapon is gone.

After that, I wandered around restlessly and waited for...Magister Morris! That’s right!

“You must love studying so much, you can’t be still.”

“Yes, well... You’re right.”

Knock, knock!

He was here! I ran to the front door at breakneck speed and opened it.

"Oh! You're in good spirits. Good morning."

"Good morning, Magister Morris! This way, please!"

"Ah, it's good to see you so motivated."

Maria arrived just behind me.

"Good morning, sir. I will take your hat and cloak."

"Thank you."

"Sir, please come inside!" I said eagerly.

"What's the matter, Raul? You're in such a hurry."

"N-no, that's not—"

"All right, all right, I'll hurry."

I brought him to the living room just as Iona was coming through the door.

"Now, Raul! You shouldn't rush Magister Morris like that!"

Iona was angry with me, but Magister Morris said calmly, "Iona, I don't mind. Oh ho ho!"

We came to my room. Shortly after, Maria came in, poured us cups of tea, and then left.

"Sir, I look forward to working with you again today!"

"Oh, such motivation!"

As soon as class started, I decided to ask him. "Um...sir? I need to ask you something."

"What is it?"

"How long does a spell last?"

"Oho! We're starting with magic today, eh? So you want to know how long an effect of magic will last?"

"Yes."

"Well, let's start with nature magic. Water will dry up if the magic is interrupted, and fire magic will fade if there is nothing left to burn. It's the same for wind, light, and darkness. If you stop the flow of magic, it will disappear."

"So no magic will last forever?"

"That's right. Nothing created by magic is permanent. Water will hydrate the body when drunk. Fire can warm you or burn you. Wind,

darkness, and light can fly or dazzle your eyes, but whatever is created by magic is destined to disappear."

"Then what about earth magic and restorative magic?"

"That's a good question. Both of those work a little differently."

"They're different?"

"Flesh healed by restorative magic will keep its original state if it is not damaged again. The effect is only momentary, but just as something that is burned away by fire magic will not return, an arm that grows back will not disappear."

"Then what about earth magic?"

"You can use earth magic to send rocks flying, and those with immense magical power can build a stone enclosure in the place of a tent. But it will crumble and disappear in a day or two."

I see. So how long something you build lasts does correlate to the amount of magic being used. That probably means that my weapon has also lost its effect and disappeared.

"Is there any kind of magic that summons something?"

"I suppose so."

"There is?"

"It's forbidden, but it's still a form of magic."

"Forbidden? What kind of magic is it?"

"A number of mages would use a large amount of magical power and prepare living sacrifices to call forth demons, spirits, and other things."

"Living...sacrifices?"

"Yes, but humans should not do such things."

So summoning magic *did* exist...but it was much more terrifying than I had thought.

"It's forbidden to use that magic?"

"That's right. There's a fairy tale about a terrible demon who was summoned and destroyed an entire nation. Whether that story is true is unknown. Either way, it's better for everyone if nobody can use that kind of magic."

I was able to summon weapons without living sacrifices or multiple mages. It seemed to be different from the summoning magic that had been forbidden.

After the class ended and Magister Morris left, I stared closely at the bullet I had summoned.

Then how long does it take for my weapon's effect to expire?

So I decided to experiment. I decided to check the bullet every day from when I summoned it to when it disappeared, marking a tally each day. In the end, it took exactly thirty days for the bullets to disappear.

On the thirtieth day, around the same time I had summoned it, the bullet disappeared from the palm of my hand like a magic trick. A bullet I had created a day after the first disappeared the next day. The results for the others were the same. My summons were limited to thirty days.

One day, during Magister Morris's class, there was suddenly a lot of noise outside.

"I'm home!"

It was Gram. We all headed for the entrance.

"Oh! Magister Morris! I'm glad to see you're doing well."

"You seem to be in good health too. Oh ho ho!"

"How have Raul's lessons been going?"

"He's a true prodigy. I cannot praise his efforts enough!"

"Could he even become a court official?"

"Easily. He truly is a genius."

"That's incredible, Raul. Just as I thought, you are a genius." Gram was very pleased. He was a good father.

"Thank you."

"By the way, Gram, how are things in the west?" Magister Morris changed the subject.

"Right. The woodlands are troubled, and monsters have been descending on the villages. We have also requested guilds in the area to gather adventurers and work with the army to bring the situation under control."

"That's good. It will make the adventurers' coin purses grow fatter."

"You're right. But it's still puzzling why the mountains and the woodlands have been so astir."

"The woodlands? Is Eucrit the only kingdom affected?"

"That's currently being investigated, but..."

"What did the court say?"

"They told me I could go home, as the subjugation of monsters has gone to plan. The rest was left to the Lords of the West to return to their own lands and pacify the region."

"What a convenient excuse."

"No, Magister Morris. It was too big a role for someone as lowly as me."

"Hah! Gram, you have no ambition!"

"I don't want to hear that from *you*."

"What? I'm full of ambition! Oh ho ho!"

It seems like they have a good teacher-student relationship. I can see just how much they trust each other.

"Iona, let's take Raul back home to our territory of Sanaria!" Gram said.

"Oh, that would be wonderful! It's so stifling here in the Royal Capital."

"I've put you both through a lot. Let's prepare to leave right away."

"I've already written a letter and had it delivered there," Iona replied.

"You're as efficient as ever, Iona. Lord Morris, how can I compensate you for teaching Raul?"

"No need, my boy," Magister Morris said. "In any case, I'm happy for you, Raul. Sanaria is a beautiful land! You'll be able to play to your heart's content. If you ever feel the need for more guidance, come to me."

"I'll keep studying the things you taught me, Magister Morris."

"That's a good boy."

I won't be able to learn from the magister anymore, but life experiences are important too. I'm glad I'll get to visit a new place. Maybe I can even learn to use other types of magic.

A few months later, the Forrest family returned to Sanaria.

The first thing that surprised me about this land was the size of

the manor belonging to Lord Forrest. Many maids and butlers worked there, and the chamberlain, Jenos, had been the acting administrator during father's absence. Jenos looked like an old man from the countryside, but he was really only in his late thirties. A butler named Stephen was in charge of the maids and servants. He had a classy mustache, so I really took a liking to him.

But there was something that surprised me even more: some of the servants were demi-humans. It seemed that demi-humans were often enslaved, but Gram treated them as equals. Overall, Gram struck me as an excellent humanitarian.

"Come in," I said when someone knocked at my door.

The demi-human servant Famille entered. She had cat ears and a fluffy tail. The juxtaposition between her kind down-turned eyes and her maid uniform left a good impression.

"I came to change your sheets."

"Thank you."

Every time she had come to change the sheets, I felt the urge to touch her tail.

"Um..."

"Yes? What is it, Young Master?"

"How do your clothes allow your tail to come out?"

"There's a small hole in it which lets the tail through."

"A hole? Doesn't that make it breezy?"

"Not at all. My tail keeps me warm."

I stared at it.

"Would you like to see it?"

"Would that be okay?"

"Yes."

It's true, the tail is growing from just above her butt, and there's a small hole in her clothes. Is her uniform custom-made?

"So there are maid outfits like this too..."

"Not quite. Therians aren't usually allowed to be maids in the homes of the nobility. Master Gram and Lady Iona are special."

"Do most Therians live in your homeland?"

"Yes, that's right. Um... You're not afraid of Therians, are you, Young Master?"

"Not at all! I think you're rather cute."

"C-Cute? The Forrests truly are an unusual family."

Famille smiled and wagged her tail as she left.

I guess I'm just a simple, pacifist Japanese person at heart. I respect Gram for his egalitarianism.

I'd also been working on building the weapon database since coming to Sanaria. It already contained guns, rifles, machine guns, Gatling guns, bazookas, flamethrowers, grenades, mines, missiles, combat vehicles, aircraft, and even ships. This was my lifelong hobby; I couldn't stop, even if I wanted to.

Knock, knock!

Someone else was at the door.

"Please excuse the intrusion."

This time it was Maria, the woman in this world who understood me best. I had called her to my room to confide in her.

"I'm sorry to make you come all the way here."

"You asked me to see you this evening, so... Is anything the matter?"

"Actually, I wanted to talk to you about something."

"Okay."

"It may shock and disturb you..."

"I don't think anything could make me feel that way towards you."

"Then..."

I had decided to summon a weapon in front of Maria. I could no longer keep it a secret, and it was getting hard for me to keep it to myself. A food ration appeared with a *thump!*

Maria let in a sharp breath.

It was no surprise; I had expected that kind of reaction.

"I'm sorry I startled you. It's just that—"

"Young Master Raul, you finally decided to confide in me!"

"H-Huh?"

"I was a little worried about how you kept refusing to say anything to me."

"What?!"

"Did you think I didn't know?"

"I suppose so..."

"I've known for a long time," she said.

"I-I see!"

"I've seen you do it a few times, but I haven't told anyone."

If that was the case, I should have talked to her about this earlier! But on the bright side, this saved me from needing to give a long-winded explanation.

"Um, is there a place in the mansion to hide these things?" I asked.

"There's a basement. If you left a box down there, I don't think anyone would open it."

"Thank you. Also, there's *this*..."

"What in the world is this?"

"These are canned goods."

"'Canned goods'?" she repeated, puzzled.

"It's food."

"Food? It looks like a hunk of steel."

"There's food inside it. Next time I want to eat outside, could you bring two spoons?"

"Yes, Master Raul. I will have them ready. Is there anything else troubling you?"

"I'd like to know if there are any inconspicuous woods or secluded areas around here."

"Then I shall propose to Lady Iona that we take a trip to show you the territory tomorrow."

"Please do so," I said.

"It will be done. In any case, if you have any other problems, please talk to me right away."

The next morning, Maria and I went out together. I greeted the people we passed by as we headed to the outskirts of the town. After two hours of walking, we reached a forest.

"Lord Raul. There are no houses in this place, and people rarely come here."

"There are no monsters around here either, right?"

"Nothing stronger than a fang rabbit. Do not worry, I can use my

fire magic to drive them away."

"Let's go then."

Maria and I entered the forest. It was a bright place with rather sparse growth.

"Maria, did you bring what I asked for yesterday?"

"Yes, I have them here."

Maria took two spoons from her bag. I opened the lid of a can and dug in.

Finally, food! And it's delicious! Rice! With flavor!

"You should try it too!" I said.

Maria took a spoonful.

"Wh-What?!" she gasped.

"How is it?"

"It's delicious! These small grains...I've never had anything like it!"

"It's seasoned rice cooked with vegetables."

We both ate the food happily. When we finished eating, I sat down by Maria's side.

"Shall we begin then?" I asked.

"Begin what?"

"Target practice."

"What is 'target practice'? What do we do?"

"Well, just watch me."

I placed the empty can from our food on top of a stone some distance from us. I took out the P320 subcompact I'd brought from home and steadied it with both hands. My hands were almost too small, but I managed to get them around the grip and put a finger on the trigger. I focused my attention.

Blam! Ka-ping!

I sent the can flying. It looked like my senses hadn't dulled.



"Ah! What was that?! What happened?"

"You can do it too. I'll show you how," I said, and went to place another can about ten meters away. Then I handed Maria the gun.

"First, grip here with your right hand like this. Then drop your shoulder just a little and look through these two bumps here and line them up with the can. Take your time to aim and pull the trigger."

Maria concentrated while staring intensely at the can. She took a breath and pulled the trigger.

Blam!

Not only did she not hit the target, she dropped the gun in surprise.

"Um... Nothing happened," she said.

"It just didn't hit."

I had Maria hold the gun again.

"Try to focus."

"Okay..."

I had her stand ready again, correct her arm position and posture, and pull the trigger.

Blam! Ka-ping!

"Amazing!" Maria exclaimed as she looked at the can she had hit and knocked to the ground.

"Master Raul, may I try one more time?"

"Of course! Try as many times as you like!"

I know that feeling! It's fun, isn't it?

"Now, try two shots in a row."

"Yes, Master Raul."

Blam! Blam!

She missed both times.

"Huh..." she said, disappointed.

"Hey, it's okay! But wait for a second."

I took the gun from Maria, took out the magazine, and reloaded it with bullets.

"Here you go."

Maria took the gun and readjusted her posture again.

Blam! Blam! Ka-ping!

"I hit it!"

"How did it feel?"

"It's fun!" she cried.

Those eyes... Those are the eyes of someone who is completely hooked!

"Right?!"

After that, we practiced shooting for a while, but there was something else I wanted Maria to try.

"Maria... Can I ask you to do something?"

"What is it?"

"Could you put magic into the gun when you shoot it?"

"Put magic in? I'm not sure it will work, but I'll try."

Maria got ready to shoot again. The moment she shot, her hands began to glow.

Whoosh!

The gunshot sounded different this time. The bullet left a blurring trail as it missed the can and hit the watermelon-sized stone under it. The stone shattered into pieces.

"Maria! That was amaz—"

When I turned around, Maria was collapsing onto the ground.

She ran out of magical power! This is bad. This forest is relatively safe, but there are still small monsters here!

I dragged Maria and leaned her against a tree. I loosened the strap of her apron around her waist to give her some breathing room. She wouldn't wake up for a few hours, and even if she did, she wouldn't be in any state to move around. For the time being, I needed to protect us. I stayed alert and didn't let Maria out of my sight.

But...what was that just now?

When Maria had put her magic power into it, the bullet's destructive power was incredible. It wasn't like I had replaced it with a hollow-point bullet. It was just the usual full metal jacket. And yet, the rock had exploded like a watermelon. Even if it *had* been a hollow-point, a 9mm bullet wouldn't have been able to do that. On top of that, Maria had run out of magic in just one shot. It looked like guns from my previous world consumed a considerable amount

of magical power.

"For now, let's not use magical bullets..."

For the next three hours, I watched over Maria as she slept. I had grown weary due to the tension, but I couldn't allow myself to let my guard down.

Suddenly, a lone fang rabbit appeared!

Blam, blam!

Got it. That takes care of that.

"Master Raul?" a voice from behind me called out.

"Maria! Are you okay?"

"I must have run out of magic. I apologize. I should have been protecting you."

"It's not your fault. This happened because I pushed you too far."

"That's not true."

"No, it is. But look! I took down a fang rabbit!"

"Master Raul...you must have been desperate to protect us"

"I *was* desperate!"

"Thank you. You saved my life."

"Can you stand?" I asked.

"Yes, I think I can manage."

A bit unsteady, the two of us left the forest. Our shoulder bag was quite heavy with two loaded guns in it. We started slowly walking back home.

Three years passed after our forest shooting practice. In the time since, Maria had become addicted to guns and always went out to hunt monsters on her days off. The people of the manor had begun to gossip about our trips to the woods, but we kept going out to hunt fang rabbits regardless.

After another day of hunting in the woods, I returned home to find that we had visitors. Gram was talking with two messengers from the royal court in the reception room. Iona, Jenos and Stephen were also present. It seemed that the messengers had rushed here from the capital on horseback.

"Please read this first, Lord Gram," one of the messengers said, handing him a letter.

“Understood.”

The letter was sealed with the royal coat of arms. Gram’s face clouded over as he opened the sealed letter and read it.

“Is this true?”

“Yes, it’s quite urgent.”

“Why didn’t this come sooner?!”

“That’s because...the Holy Land of Fattoria double-crossed us and joined the Bargius Empire without warning.”

“The Holy Land of Fattoria,” Gram mused. “It’s hard to believe, but it must be true. To think that our army was this fragile...”

The two royal messengers looked at each other and then turned to Gram, their expressions deathly serious.

“I know this will be hard to believe, but their army appeared with a large number of monsters in their ranks.”

“Impossible. No monster would ever serve humans.”

“We saw it with our own eyes. There were soldiers riding on the backs of red bears and great boars.”

“Giant monsters were allowing humans to ride them?” Gram asked.

“Yes.”

“That’s unbelievable! How many monsters were there?”

“It’s too early to be certain, but I’d say there were several thousand—”

“Several thousand?! Impossible! That can’t be!”

“The enemy knights and mages astride those beasts overran our armies like a stampede.”

“How soon will the enemy reach the capital?”

“Count Nastalia’s forces are still holding out in the west, but it seems they will only last for three cycles of the moon.”

“Ninety days,” Gram said, then nodded. “Then our Sanarian army will hurry to join them!”

“We are most grateful for your prompt response! We must leave for the neighboring territory, as fast as our horses can carry us. Farewell!”

“Be safe!”

“You too, Lord Gram!”

And with that, the two royal messengers sped off.

"Lord Gram!" Jenos called. "I will send out immediate summons to our forces. Let's dispatch the men here in the manor!"

"Please do so, Jenos. Let everyone take time with their families and prepare themselves. I'll coordinate with Stephen on the preparations for the march and ask the people to ready themselves. I will meet with the mayor as soon as possible and explain the situation to the townspeople within the next few days."

With their orders, Jenos and Stephen rushed out of the room.

"Your Majesty...please stay safe until I get there," Gram said.

Gram called me to him as soon as he left the room. His expression made it clear that something was wrong.

"Raul, listen to me."

"Yes?"

"A war has started in our country, and I am duty bound to serve in it."

"What?!"

"Your mother is with child, your younger sister or brother. Take care of them both in my stead."

"Dad...please stay safe!"

To hear that I'm going to have a younger sibling... It should be a happy occasion, but...

Iona came to me. "Your father always said that he wanted you to choose your own path in the future, but now that this is happening, you must act as the next lord of Sanaria. We have a duty to protect the people of our lands. You must help me support Sanaria."

"Yes, mother."

"As the son of a nobleman, you must bear this burden. It's possible that something may happen to me as well. You can no longer play in the woods. From now on, you must do what must be done, learn what must be learned, and be prepared for anything. It will be tough because you are so young, but I believe you have something special within you."

"I will do my best to live up to your expectations," I answered.

"From now on, you are to always be at my side. For now, just watch what I do."

"I-I understand."

Iona then spoke to the others in the manor. With words of reassurance and encouragement, she told them that they need not be worried about the future and reached out to give each of them guidance.

The day of the Sanarian army's departure soon arrived. Two thousand soldiers were assembled in Sanaria's town square. It was an incredible sight. Iona and I stood to the side of the temporary platform as Gram took to the podium.

"Today, we must go to war. We are going to save the people of our country who are being overrun and subjected to violence! The situation is bleak, but justice is on our side! The Holy Land of Fattoria has betrayed us and joined with the Bargius Empire. But should we allow ourselves to be overrun by them? Should we allow our loved ones to be taken? I know I am responsible for the lives of those here, but I will not sit idly by as they come for us! And I am sure you also feel the same way! *We* have the blessing of the gods. We may not be able to return until we have driven all of our enemies from the capital. But let me say this: We will return without leaving anyone behind! We will not give up until we step onto the soil of our beloved Sanaria again! We will return victorious!"

The soldiers whooped and hollered in response.

"Forward march!"

The battalion commanders gave the orders for the troops to advance towards the town's outskirts. Gram came up to us.

"Iona, Raul! I love you both! Iona, take care of yourself. And Raul, take care of your mother."

"Please come back safely," Iona said.

"Father! Make sure you come back to us!"

"I will!"

Gram mounted his horse and rode off at the head of the army.

He'll be okay. He's strong. He's the OP hero who can cut down a monster with a single stroke. He'll turn the tide of the war and return to us.

The enemy was the allied forces of the Bargius Empire and the

Holy Land of Fattoria. The Bargius Empire on its own was twice as powerful as our country, and that was *before* Fattoria turned on us. The enemy's strength was many times greater than that of the Kingdom of Eucrit. But Gram was superhuman! He would definitely come back. But I could only pray for his safe return.

Seventy days had passed since Sanaria's army departed to defend the Royal Capital, and nothing had been heard from the front lines. Given the circumstances, Sanaria's army should have already reached the battlefield. What was going on? Iona was busy every day, meeting with the mayors of our lands and consulting with Chamberlain Jenos and Stephen about managing the territory. She had told me to stay next to her and listen, so I followed her everywhere. Then one day, when we were all having lunch together...

Noise suddenly erupted from outside, and Maria ran into the room with a very pale face.

"My lady!" She was panting so hard that she could barely get the words out. "My lady, please come quickly! To the gate!"

When we got there, there were horses by the gate and a lot of servants gathered around.

"What happened?!"

Iona ran to them. Lying on the ground was a man dressed in rags. He raised his body only halfway up and reached out to Iona with a look of grim determination on his face.

"L-Lady Iona... I'm so s-sorry..."

It was Leonard...or what remained of him. He was almost unrecognizable. His left arm was missing below the shoulder, and his once-handsome face was cut from the right eye down to the chin. Only his left eye was able to vacantly stare up at Iona. When I caught a glimpse between the gaps in the bloody rags, I nearly vomited.

Iona gasped when she recognized him. "Leonard?! Why are you... What happened?! Where is..."

Iona was beyond herself, and everyone listened with hushed voices.

“Sanaria’s army...has been wiped out. I’m sorry.”

Leonard could hardly speak. He seemed to be on the brink of death.

“It can’t be! How is that possible? Are you the only... We need to get you inside. Quickly! We need to help him!”

Stephen and the maids began to mobilize, but Leonard called out, “Please wait!”

Leonard pleaded with the last of his strength while he held on to Iona’s sleeve.

“Wha—” Iona gulped as she looked at Leonard’s determined gaze.

“We don’t have time. They will be here soon... They followed me.”

“Who?”

“The enemy.”

“They’ve come this far already? Wh-What about Gram? What happened to Gram?”

“He...has fallen.”

“N-no...”

Iona was speechless.

“The royal family has also been killed. The armies of each province...they all surrendered... But the executions began without a response.”

“How could they be so cruel?”

“Lord Gram...he pleaded with them to spare the lower ranks of Sanaria’s army.”

“A-And then?” Iona asked, her voice strained.

“They took his head.”

“That can’t be...”

“And the two thousand men of Sanaria’s army were all slaughtered. No one escaped.”

Leonard wept, and everyone joined in. I, too, cried uncontrollably.

Damn it! He was so strong! He couldn’t die that easily!

“How were you able to return?” asked Jenos.

“Before Master Gram surrendered...he entrusted this to me. He told me to be sure to give it to Master Raul. He told me to take it

and go back to Sanaria first...but I remained there, looking for an opportunity to rescue Lord Gram. But in the end, I could only watch as everyone was killed...”

Blood had mixed with the tears on Leonard’s face. His lips were chapped, and he looked gaunt. There was no trace of the handsome face I had seen before.

“Lord Raul... Take this. He told me it was for your eyes only.”

“For me?”

It was a letter with Gram’s signature.

“Then my job is done...”

“Get him to the infirmary! We need someone from the church who can use restorative magic,” Jenos called out.

“It’s too late, Master Jenos. I can no longer be saved. The priority is to evacuate the people. Everyone needs to leave immediately. I can’t—” Leonard was cut off as he coughed up a large quantity of blood.

“Leonard!”

Iona grabbed Leonard’s hand as if she were trying to feel his thoughts, her face deathly pale.

“Lady Iona... Please forgive me for returning without Lord Gram’s remains. You and Raul must survive... That’s the last thing that he asked of me...”

The light disappeared from Leonard’s remaining eye.

“Leonard! Leonard!!!”

Iona held up Leonard’s body. But Leonard was no longer moving.

“Leonard... Thank you for doing this. You completed your duty,” said Iona through her tears as she gently closed Leonard’s eye.

She then had Leonard’s body carried to the infirmary, and she gathered everyone into the great hall. The atmosphere around Iona had suddenly changed.

“Everyone, listen. As of today, the Forrest family is no more. Please return to your own families. The enemy is cruel and merciless. They will give you no quarter, so you must escape quickly. Take nothing with you that will slow you down.”

Chamberlain Jenos looked at her in shock. “Surely you are not suggesting we abandon Sanaria. It’s unthinkable!”

"The enemy has abandoned their humanity. There is no mercy in their hearts! Now, every second counts. We must keep our people alive! This is Gram's last will. The last wish of the lord of this land. Let us save as many of our people as we can."

Iona admonished Jenos through her tears.

"I-I understand. Everyone, return to your homes and prepare to flee! Lady Iona, I will immediately ride out to the village elders and tell them."

It seemed that Jenos had strengthened his resolve as well. But I worried that the people who did not see the current situation may not believe it. If they were told to defend themselves, they would wonder what happened to the soldiers. It would be hard for them to immediately accept that the army was completely wiped out. On top of that, the enemy was right around the corner. We didn't have much time left. How many people were willing to leave behind all of their worldly possessions?

Iona spoke up again. "Jenos! Take me with you to the town elders and leaders. Some may not believe us, but we must be as persuasive as possible! The rest of you must leave at once."

Maria asked, "Lady Iona, will the adventurer's guild help?"

"No. We are dealing with soldiers of the Empire and their allies. Even though the guild operates internationally, they won't be able to help here. I don't know if they could even escort me," Iona answered.

Maria could say no more.

"Then, I pray for everyone's safety. Now, go!"

Selma, the longest serving maid, cried out, "Lady Iona, I will not leave you! I will be by your side until the end, no matter what comes."

"I will not leave either! Even if it is an order, I will not obey it."

"Nor will I! I will stay!"

"Let me also remain by your side!"

The maids who served under Maria each clung to Iona.

"You..." Iona covered her eyes. "I will not be able to protect you."

They replied in unison, "We will protect you!"

"But..." Iona hesitated.

Jenos stepped in. “Lady Iona, you are Sanaria’s last hope. You must survive, all of you! Protect Lady Iona and Master Raul with your life. You are the only ones we can rely on.”

“Understood!”

Hearing Jenos giving the order to the maids, Iona could not hold back her sobs.

“B-But, we mustn’t leave our people behind,” said Iona in a strained voice.

Jenos answered calmly, “We, the people of Sanaria, love you. You are our sun, and just seeing you brings us happiness. Will you not listen to our last selfish request?”

The maids voiced their agreement.

“Lady Iona, let us depart,” Maria requested.

“Maria...”

“Please...”

“Mother, we must survive. One day, I will destroy those who have ravaged our home, who have committed these atrocious deeds! The ones who killed the people I love...I’m going to make them regret it!”

On that day, I decided to fight against the world.

I would be just as ruthless.

Chapter Two: A Deadly Escape

The nation had been destroyed.

Even if you lose a war, you would expect to get at least a third of the land back! But to kill everyone*? Destroy the whole country? What is this, Death Mode? How could Gram, who was so strong and full of love, be killed in that way?*

And it seemed that their army would arrive here soon. I was in my room getting ready to depart.

"Damn it! Gram...and all of those soldiers... I promise that I will avenge every one of you!"

I packed my shoulder bag with my P320, Beretta 92, and the letter that Leonard entrusted to me, and ran to the infirmary. In the infirmary, Iona and the maids were praying. Leonard's corpse almost seemed to be smiling, as if fulfilling Gram's last wish had brought him peace.

"Everyone, we depart now!" Iona called out before leaving the room.

It was around nine o'clock at night and already completely dark outside. We had three horses to ride; Iona and I with one other maid got onto one horse, another was ridden by Maria and Selma, and the final one carried Misha and a second maid.

As they exited the manor grounds, the evacuation of Sanaria had begun, with some heading north. There were people pulling carts full of their possessions, while others took only the clothes on their backs. Merchant wagons rolled out, carrying as many people as they could. The crowd moved forward, most people walking with grim determination.

A group of young men had brought weapons and gathered in a group. "We will fight to the bitter end!"

I looked up at Iona. "Mother?"

But Iona kept silent and kept staring ahead. There was an

endless procession of refugees on the roads ahead. The crowds were still thick even after we had left the city and reached the farmlands. Here, I saw even more people like those hot-blooded young men. In the end, it seemed like they just couldn't accept abandoning their homes.

"So many people will be saved thanks to the effort of two men. Raul, take a good look. Look at the expressions of everyone's suffering. Let these images burn into you, so that you may also see their will to keep living."

In my previous life, I had ignored conflict around the world while immersing myself in war games in a peaceful Japan. I never imagined that I would become a refugee. Here, I learned firsthand how painful and hopeless it was to know that help would not come. It was such a terrible feeling to have no place in the world.

"I should be staying here with them," Iona said. "But I will not waste this life that has been saved. How will I use it? What will I live for? For whom will I continue to live? These are the questions that I will continue to ask myself as long as I still have breath in me. That is our lifelong responsibility."

Iona truly is a wonderful person.

"Mother, no matter what happens, I want to protect you and the life of my younger sibling." When I said this, Iona squeezed her arms that were holding me.

"Yes. We will survive this."

An hour's ride on horseback brought us to Sanaria's borders. The boundaries of our territory were only marked by stone cairns, not by walls like in the Royal Capital. The refugees had become more sparse here.

"From here on out, we are in territory where things other than humans may reside. Everyone ready your daggers, and stay alert."

"Understood!"

After climbing to the top of a hill for thirty minutes, Iona stopped her horse and looked back. Following her lead, everyone turned to look back the way we came. A shocking sight met our eyes.

"That can't be..."

The town of Sanaria was burning. Plumes of fire rose here and

there. We really had just barely escaped. For a while, everyone stood stunned. The maids were sobbing.

Iona urged them ahead. “Let’s hurry.”

The horses continued forward as everyone cried. Having found the lord’s manor abandoned, they would surely send people to pursue us. There was no way of knowing how many enemy soldiers had reached Sanaria, but whatever the number, there was no one to fight them. The young vigilantes didn’t stand a chance.

At the top of the hill was a deep forest, which made the road difficult to pass. The horses were already slowed by carrying at least two people each. Normally, it would have been considered too reckless to enter the forest this late at night. The pursuers might reach us if we stopped, but entering the forest was still very dangerous.

“Mother, it will be dangerous if we meet any monsters in the forest at this hour!”

“The young master is right, my lady. Shouldn’t we wait until sunrise to enter the forest?” Selma backed me up.

We were stuck between a rock and a hard place, but continuing into a dark forest at night wasn’t an option.

“I suppose you’re right. There are also roads to the east and west, so it’s not certain that the pursuers will come this way. Let’s stop here for now and observe the situation.” Iona gave the okay, and everyone agreed.

We dismounted and sat on the ground together.

“We could freeze at this rate, and monsters could come out. Shouldn’t we build a fire?” suggested Maria.

Everyone gathered firewood, and Maria used fire magic to light it. The faces lit by the fire were exhausted. Everyone was feeling even more stressed by being this close to the forest at night. But I had a plan that might help us out of our current situation.

“Um...mother? Could I talk to you for a second?”

“What is it?”

“It’s impossible for us to fight a large army, but we do have some effective ways of escaping from them.”

Iona looked at me with a worried face that asked, “What is this

child saying?”

Maria was the only one who had noticed.

“What are you talking about?”

“Well, mother... You see... I haven’t said anything before, but I can use magic specialized for attacking.”

“Magic? Are you sure? But you never said anything.”

“The magic I can use isn’t exactly normal...” I began.

“It isn’t normal?”

“But I think that I can use this magic to help us out of this situation. Maria, will you help me?”

“Yes, Master Raul.”

“You knew about this?” Iona asked.

“Yes. I was aware of it.” Maria gave me a look, wondering if she could talk about it. I nodded. “Master Raul can use magic to produce weapons.”

“Weapons? Like knives and armor?”

“It’s a little different from that. If you see it, you’ll understand,” Maria said.

I quickly pulled the P320 handgun out of my bag.

“Mother, this is the kind of weapon I can produce.”

“What? This is a weapon? Is it...used like a club? It would be hard to crush even a rat with this.”

“Well, just wait and see.”

I made a pile of stones some distance away and placed some firewood on top.

“Look at that piece of firewood.”

I readied the P320, and... *Blam!* The wood exploded with a sharp crack, sending wood chips flying.

Everyone was speechless with surprise.

“What just happened? Was that magic?”

“No, not quite. This is called a gun. And that’s its power.”

“‘Gun’?”

“Yes.”

“Is Raul the only one who can use it?” Iona asked.

“No, anyone can.”

Iona and the maids were stunned. That was to be expected. I

had suddenly presented them with modern firearms, after all.

"Maria, could you show them how you can shoot with one in each hand?"

"Understood."

I handed Maria the P320 and the Beretta 92. I placed another piece of firewood on top of the stone pile I had made earlier, then set up a second target in another spot. Maria readied the two guns. With a single combined sound, bullets were fired at both angles. The two pieces of wood exploded in the same way as before.

"That's incredible!" Iona exclaimed.

"This is something that anyone can use, mother. It takes training to hit the target, but being able to use magic makes things easier. Maria uses magic to hit the target."

"Does that mean I could use it too?"

"Of course, but be careful. The more magic you put into it, the more powerful it becomes, but your magic will be depleted. You have to be careful until you get used to it, or it could easily knock you out."

"But what can we do with only two of these 'guns'?"

I knew you would say that, Iona.

"Actually, I can summon that weapon from nothing."

"What? Summon?"

"Yes. Not only this, but all kinds of different weapons."

"Different weapons?"

Iona and the maids listened with wide eyes.

"I'll show you."

I put my hands out in front of me like I was using magic. It wasn't necessary, but it helped get everyone's attention. I summoned an M16 assault rifle.

"This is your magic?" Iona asked.

"Yes, I can summon weapons."

"I've never seen magic like this, not even at the academy."

Even Magister Morris said that summoning magic requires sacrifices.

As I was explaining the weapons, I heard the sound of horses galloping up the hill. Everyone rushed to their horses.

"Everyone, hurry!"

Maria quickly pointed her P320 and Beretta 92 at the group of horses running towards us.

One of the men on the horses shouted, "Hey! Don't stop here! Keep running!"

There were three horses. It seemed they were our allies.

"Go deeper into the forest! The enemy... The enemy is coming!"

The men's horses disappeared into the forest. We looked down the hill in the direction the men had come from. We could see torches in the distance.

"Mother!"

"Into the forest!"

Everyone picked up lit firewood from the fire before Iona extinguished it with water magic. We got onto our horses and headed into the woods. It was dark in the forest, and we couldn't see very far ahead. The only light we had was from the firewood.

After riding for a while, I heard the voices of the men from before just ahead of us. They seemed to be staying in one spot and making a great deal of noise.

What are they doing?

Though only dimly visible in the torchlight, I saw that the men had drawn their swords and were fighting something. Right next to them was the wreckage of a carriage and the remains of the horses that had drawn it. Surrounding the wreckage were dead bodies, each seemingly missing their limbs and heads.

In the torchlight, something rose that chilled me to the bone. It was a shadow, six...no, seven meters in height. When one of the men tried to escape on his horse, there was a loud crack and the man's head was gone.

One of the men cried, "It's no use! We can't get past it! We have to turn back!"

"The enemy is behind us!" came the response.

The shadow took advantage of their hesitation. One man was knocked off with a thud and crashed into a tree, rendering him motionless.

"Shit!" The last man held up his sword, but the giant shadow

struck him from above. The man didn't even make a sound. The large shadow crouched down over him, and soon came horrible crunching and gurgling noises. It was eating the corpses.

One of the maids screamed at the sight. The shadow moved quickly towards her. In an instant, she and her horse were beheaded as well.

Misha, who had been holding the reins, fell off the now headless horse. She had barely managed to survive by ducking down.

When she saw the thing illuminated in the torchlight, Selma exclaimed, "A red bear! We'll die if we don't run!"

In response to her shout, the red bear swung and struck her with the back of its paw. With a thud, she hit a tree and stopped moving. Maria, who had narrowly avoided the paw, jumped off her horse, then turned and shot her P320 and Beretta 92 at the red bear. As the red bear momentarily faltered, Maria ran to Misha.

"Mother! I can't load my gun on horseback. Help me down!"

Iona and I hurriedly dismounted, and the scared horse rode off with one maid. The red bear was closing in on Maria and Misha. I got onto the ground and pointed my M16 at it.

"Maria! Get down!"

I fired. The red bear let out a roar and ran towards me. Maria shot the red bear's head from behind with her two pistols. It turned again to Maria with a roar. I similarly aimed at the back of its head and pulled the trigger. Being shot at from both sides, the bear flung its paws out like it was swatting at bees, then suddenly fled into the woods.

"Raul!"

"Shh!" I hushed Iona, who went silent. "It looks like it ran away."

I immediately turned to go to Maria and Misha. "Maria, Misha, are you okay?"

They both nodded.

"The other two..."

I ran over. Selma's limbs were bent in impossible directions, as if she had been run over by a truck.

I gagged involuntarily. The other maid was missing her head, and her body was mangled.

“It can’t be...” Maria was speechless.

Misha looked like she couldn’t even make a sound.

Iona was the first to speak. “The red bear might come back. We need to leave now.”

And so we walked on into the darkness.

“Maria, I need a light, please.”

Maria conjured a flame, allowing us to see a bit in front of us. The horse that had run off earlier was slowly returning to us.

“It’s the horse! Hey! Are you okay?”

But...the maid on the horse didn’t answer. As the horse came closer, we saw that the maid was missing the upper half of her body.

Misha screamed. Iona and Maria lowered the maid’s remains down off the horse. At this point, the two of them were covered in blood, and their beautiful faces were a gruesome sight. We kept walking while pulling the last remaining horse behind us. Iona, Maria, and Misha walked unsteadily.

We continued to walk on in fear, until finally we could see a road illuminated by moonlight down the path.

“I can see the moonlight! We’re almost through the woods!” Iona said, encouraging us to keep moving.

We were only a few dozen meters from the forest’s edge. We needed to escape this hell or our sanity wouldn’t last. I walked with heavy steps, dragging my feet towards the slightest hope. But it seemed even that wouldn’t be allowed. From the depths of the forest behind us, we heard the voices of people and the snarls of beasts.

“The hoofprints lead this way!” said one of the voices.

Maria said, “Lady Iona! They’re catching up to us!”

We all began running. If they reached us, we would be killed. We were desperate.

“Hey, you there! Halt now!”

I turned back to look in the direction the voice had come from. Our pursuers were riding wild boars that looked about five meters tall.

“Those are great boars,” said Misha quietly. It was incredible to see knights riding these fearsome beasts. I fully understood why the

Kingdom of Eucrit had been destroyed.

Human soldiers wouldn't stand a chance against an army like this!

We ignored the enemy soldiers and ran. One of the great boar riders rushed towards us while swinging his axe. Maria turned and fired at the man with her dual-wielded pistols.

"Augh!"

The knight threw down his axe before collapsing atop his boar.

All right! 9mm is enough to penetrate plate mail!

The great boar's momentum did not stop even though the knight had been taken out. Maria jumped to the side before she was hit. I had lain prone in the grass on the side of the road. Iona had placed herself between me and the enemy to protect me.

"Run, Raul! You must escape, even if it is alone!"

Iona yelled at me. I ignored her and, from my position on the ground, aimed my M16 just beneath the great boar's eye. The sound of rapid-fire bullets ripped through the air. A bullet hit the great boar's eye, and it began to wildly shake its head from side to side. The knight that had been riding it was thrown off of the great boar's body, but to my despair, two more knights in full plate armor and riding great boars charged towards us from deeper in the forest.

Are we going to die here?

I needed Iona to lend me a hand, but there was no time to explain.

"Mother! Put this over your shoulder!"

I quickly summoned an AT4 anti-tank rocket launcher. Iona put it on her shoulder without question. The two great boars were approaching, so I didn't have time to think things through.

"Mother, place this here! That's right! Now point the opening towards the great boars and get ready. There will be recoil, but you have to bear it!" I told her quickly while moving her hand into place.


3 AIM

"Wait, what am I—"

Iona had no idea what was happening, but she followed my directions. I hurriedly pulled out the safety pin and pulled back the cocking lever. Misha was hovering nearby, seeming to not know what to do.

I gave Iona her final instructions. "When I give you the signal, aim at the enemy and push this big handle! Air will come out of the back to suppress the recoil. Be careful and draw the enemy in! Misha! Don't stand behind her!"

I gave the instruction in rapid fire. The two great boars charged out of the forest and into the moonlight.

"Push it!" I shouted, and Iona did exactly as she was told.

With a great sound, the rocket launcher released and hit the lead boar around its neck. With an explosion, the great boar was instantly knocked into the air, leaving a trail of flesh and blood. The second great boar running in from behind was caught in the blast and pitched forward, tumbling head over hoof. The two knights riding the second boar were thrown forward with great force, and fell right in front of us. The first knight seemed to either have lost consciousness or could no longer move his body. The second knight was crushed under the body of the tumbling boar.

Serves you right! And that's *why you don't ride great boars!*

The lead great boar wasn't moving, seemingly dead. Iona and Misha were stunned. The boar that had been shot through the eye and the other that had tumbled both ran off into the forest, startled by the explosion. The first soldier, who had been thrown off his boar, let out a groan as he tried to stand.

"Please die!" Maria shouted as she pulled her trigger.

The knight fell onto his back with a hole between his eyes. Silence fell.

"Mother, are you okay?"

Iona dropped the empty AT4 from her shoulder. It hit the ground with a heavy thud.

"Raul..."

"That's called a rocket launcher."

Iona sank to the ground and didn't move.

“Lady Iona! Are you injured?!” Maria asked as she ran to her.

Iona remained silent. Misha was in the same boat; her eyes were wide and off-kilter in shock, almost as if she were a large doll.

“Maria, let me see your guns,” I asked. The cartridges of Maria’s guns were empty, just as I had suspected. It was lucky that she hadn’t run out of bullets before now. I returned a fully loaded P320 and Beretta 92 to her. Iona and Misha still hadn’t budged.

“Mother, there may be more soldiers pursuing us. Misha, can you walk?” I spoke to them calmly.

Misha was shaking, staring at the bloodbath in front of her.

“Misha! You need to pull yourself together. Our duty is to protect Lady Iona and Master Raul!” Maria yelled at her.

Misha began to shake. Then she suddenly reached out to cling to Maria and began crying.

As Misha was crying, we heard a sound come from behind her. It seemed that one of the soldiers was alive. He picked up the sword he’d dropped beside him and approached us.

“You really did a number on us, huh? I’m gonna kill you...”

Iona stood between me and the soldier.

“I am Iona Forrest, wife of Gram, Lord of Sanaria! Did you attack us knowing that, ruffian? Vulgar beast! You should be ashamed of yourself!”

“Huh? You are? I heard that you was quite the beauty, even outshinin’ a goddess. Now, I see why they wanted you captured alive!”

The man gave a vulgar sneer as he looked Iona up and down, taking in her entire body.

Iona was indignant. “How unrefined! You are a disgrace to all knights.”

“You’re one to talk! You tore apart my mates!”

“Are you a soldier of Bargius?” Iona asked.

“And what if I am? Just try to use that magic again! I’ll bet it takes a long time to cast. I’ll kill every last one of you before you can!”

Even as he said this, his steps towards us were hesitant. He was wary of the magic.

"You really are beautiful, ain't ya? After I kill the rest of the women and children, I'm going to take *real* good care of you. I'm sure no one will mind. First, I'll strip you nak—"

The rest of his sentence was drowned out by a gunshot. The man died with blood gushing from his temple.

Maria had pulled the trigger. "I won't stand hearing any more disrespect to Lady Iona. Breathe your last."

But he's already stopped breathing...

She walked to his corpse and fired the gun again. And again.

Note to self. Do not *get on Maria's bad side if this is what happens when she loses her temper.*

I broke the silence. "Well...let's get going."

We got up and started walking again. Luckily, our horse hadn't run too far away. As Iona was pregnant, we had her ride the horse and Misha take the reins. We walked until morning, before we became too tired to go on.

"Let's rest here," I suggested. We tied the horse to a tree on the side of the road to let it graze. Everyone was hungry, and it was affecting our ability to think.

"Mother, we should eat."

"I'm sorry, Raul. We don't have anything..."

"Actually, we do."

I summoned the Self-Defense Forces Combat Rations Type II from the database. A meal in a retort pouch with dry bread fell on the ground in front of me. I had a variety of foods thanks to my daily cataloging of new material in my database.

"What is this?" Iona asked.

"Wait a moment."

I didn't have much of an appetite, but I needed to eat or I wouldn't be able to keep moving. I gave everyone food and a spoon.

"Now, let's eat."

I started to eat it, and Maria followed my example.

"Lady Iona, it really does taste good," Maria assured her.

Seeing this, both Iona and Misha took a bite with trepidation.

"It's delicious!" Iona exclaimed. "I've never tasted anything like it. What nation does this come from?"

"True, it does taste strange...but it's good!" It seemed that Misha also enjoyed it.

Thank goodness. I'd been afraid they wouldn't be able to eat it if they didn't have an appetite, but their curiosity prevailed.

"Raul...how long have you been able to use this magic?"

"Since I was about three or four."

"For that long? I thought you had no talent for magic. This is incredible. I... I just wish Gram could have lived long enough to see it."

Iona began to cry. Maria and Misha, both having let go of their tension, began to cry too.

"Mother, it's still too early to let our guard down. We need to find a place to hide."

"You're right. Let's get moving as soon as we finish eating."

We continued down the road, eventually coming to a river. We could see other people on the banks.

"Those are villagers. Let's ask them for help," I suggested.

Maria immediately stepped towards them.

"Excuse me, sirs. Are you from around here?"

"Oh! Did y'all run away from Sanaria too?" asked an older, rustic man.

"Have there been others before us?"

"A few came on horseback. Though they left 'round sunset."

"Actually, we're looking for a place to rest for a short time," Maria said.

"In that case, y'all can use my cabin."

"We are most grateful."

We followed him, and he let us put our horse in his stable.

"It ain't much, but use it to get some rest," said the old man as he led us to the cabin.

"Sir, do you live by yourself?" I asked.

"No, I live with my granddaughter. Hey, Misetta, come out here!"

"Coming!"

A girl around my age appeared. She smiled at us and waved.

"Her father lived here with us too, but...he went off to war and hasn't come back."

“I see... I have some news I should share with you,” Iona said gently, before telling him about the war and Eucrit’s defeat.

“I apologize for my manners, not knowing you were the wife of a lord,” said the old man, whose name was Vance.

“I am the one who should apologize. We will leave as soon as we get a bit of rest,” replied Iona.

“I’m truly sorry for not having any means of helping you. But...I have a favor to ask of you!”

I could see Vance’s mind working quickly as he began to talk.

“What is it?”

“If she stays here, this child might be in danger. Please take her with you!”

“Then why don’t you come with us too?”

“I can’t. I would, but I’ve got a bad leg. An old man like me will just slow you down. The enemy will eventually come here. When they do, I’ll send them in the wrong direction. I’ll try to buy you time, even if it’s just a little bit.”

“When they figure it out, they’ll kill you.”

“If my death slows them down, then so be it. Please.”

Vance was willing to lose his life to protect the last thing his son had left him in this world. I understood his pain.

“I understand. We will take Misetta with us.”

“Grandpa, what are you talking about?” Misetta was having trouble keeping up with the conversation. Her confusion was understandable. “But...dad will come home! Won’t he be sad if we’re not here?”

“Child... The men last night said it too. Our kingdom has fallen.”

“But...” Misetta turned to Iona with a stricken look on her face.

“I... I’m sorry. All of our soldiers were lost...” Iona said.

“B-But...”

“Child, that’s how it is. You have to understand. We have no time to waste. The enemy could be right around the corner.”

Misetta stood stunned. “I won’t do it! I’ll stay with you, grandpa! Dad will come back! You’ll see!”

“You must go. The enemy has monsters with them! Do you understand?”

"I won't! I won't! I won't!"

"You will *listen* to me!" Vance said with a raised voice.

Misetta was startled and fell silent.

"Lady Iona. Please take our wagon. If you use it, the horse will be able to pull you all. And please take a few blankets with you."

"I am grateful," Iona said.

"Misetta, I'm sorry. Your dad ain't comin' back. If I don't protect you, I won't be able to look him in the eye in the afterlife. Forgive me," Vance cried as he tried to persuade her. He had taken her into his arms.

Misetta began to wail. A sudden parting from a father who would not return, and a grandfather clinging to his granddaughter, weeping. I could only curse this cruel world.

"Now go, child! Your father and I will be watching over you, wherever you are."

"Please! I don't want to go! Grandpa?! Grandpa!"

Iona held the screaming Misetta in her arms.

"I'm sorry... I'm so sorry," Iona whispered to her.

There was no time to say goodbye in this life. Iona grabbed Misetta and forced her into the covered wagon Vance had given us. Misetta stared speechlessly at her home until it disappeared from sight.

A soft breeze blew across the meadow, gently brushing Misetta's hair.

For the time being, the best plan was to head north to the Kingdom of Rashtal, a vassal state of Eucrit, and seek aid. So we hurried north to escape the fallen kingdom. The sun was setting as evening approached. We hadn't stopped the horse since leaving Vance, out of fear of pursuers.

While we were sitting in the bed of the wagon, Maria looked through the shoulder bag I had given her.

"Master Raul. The letter from Lord Gram..."

I forgot about it! The journey here has been so stressful that I forgot to read it.

"That's right! I'm going to read it right now. Misha, could you stop

the horse?”

Leonard had risked his life to get this to me. His bloody fingerprints were still on it.

Raul,

My precious son, if you are reading this, then I am no longer in this world. I plan to beg for the lives of two thousand Sanarian soldiers. Forgive me for not being able to return home. An enemy this fierce will surely engulf this kingdom in no time. Before it is too late, leave as fast as you can, and protect your mother and the baby. I know that this is an impossible task for a child. But from what Magister Morris told me, you have an immense capacity for magic. You haven’t been able to use magic yet, but I believe deeply that you can. You should flee to the northeastern tip of the continent, to a nation called Gladrom. Ask for a man named Galdzin. I am certain he will be able to help you. Live a good life with Iona and the baby. And no matter what happens, never forget this, Raul: to me, Gram Forrest, you are the most precious treasure in this world. Take care of your mother.

The letter ended there. It had moved me to tears, but had also given me more questions than answers.

Where is Gladrom? Who is Galdzin?

“Mother? What should we—”

“We head northeast to Gladrom. If Gram said it, I have *no* doubt that it is the best course of action,” Iona said with conviction. There was nothing I could say to that.

“I understand. Let’s go.”

If the enemy had the strength to destroy the kingdom of Eucrit in a matter of months, Rashtal and Schladen were also doomed. There was no other choice but to head to Gladrom to meet this man named Galdzin. And so, we headed northeast.

A few days into the journey, we happened to encounter a merchant caravan passing by. The merchant’s name was Nikul. There were three wagons in the caravan, one with passengers and two with trade goods. The caravan was escorted by three

adventurers. They said they were on the way to Gladrom from Rashtal. Iona, Misetta, and I were invited onto the passenger carriage, and Nikul was asking Iona a lot of questions.

"I'm glad we met when we did," said Nikul.

"Yes, we are most grateful for your aid. We really can't thank you enough," Iona replied in relief.

"I'm happy to hear that. I hear that this road has become more and more dangerous recently. It seems that thugs have wandered through, and merchant caravans have been attacked."

"Thugs?"

"Yes. And it seems they are quite strong too. It's why I've hired these adventurers."

"And also why we've gotten so many escort assignments recently," one of the adventurers interjected.

The adventurers were named Erik, Paige, and Laury.

"Is this road that dangerous?"

"Usually, no. The road that connects Rashtal and Gladrom is pretty safe. But around a month ago, one of the trade caravans being guarded by adventurers was completely wiped out," Erik said, looking bitter.

"He's frustrated because adventurers died," said Paige with a look of regret on her face. Laury nodded beside them.

"It's just as they say. Even so, we merchants cannot stop doing business," Nikul said earnestly.

The day continued, and it began to rain in the afternoon. We stopped the horses, and everyone climbed into the covered wagons. We waited for the rain to let up, but it just got stronger. In Japan, this is what we would have called a guerrilla rainstorm. Visibility was so poor, I couldn't see more than ten meters in front of me. The rain hitting the canvas of the wagon cover made sounds like we were in an overturned bucket, drowning out all the other surrounding noise.

"That's a lot of rain," Maria said as she wiped raindrops from her skin.

"It really is. I can't see anything," I replied.

"We'll just have to wait until it stops." As she said that, an arrow pierced the canvas siding.

I rushed to the front of the wagon.

"We're under attack!" I yelled.

We called out for help to the other wagon, but the downpour made it impossible to communicate with them.

"This isn't good, mother."

"Yes, I know. Be calm."

"Lady Iona, Misha, and Misetta. Go to the middle of the wagon, please," Maria instructed as she pulled out the P320 and Beretta 92 and released their safeties.

"Mother and Misha. You two should also carry guns," I said.

"If it's necessary. Misha, calm down and get ready," Iona answered.

"Y-Yes."

We had made it through that forest of terror; we would make it through this too! Since we were in the bed of the wagon, if anyone approached us, we'd have the advantage. I needed something with a lot of firepower, even if it was a bit heavy. I summoned *it* onto the back of the wagon.

"Mother, Maria, and Misha. You three watch the front," I said.

"What about you?" Iona asked.

"I'll watch the back using *this*."

"Wha— By yourself?"

"I'm sorry, I don't have time to explain! If you need to, cover me if I'm in danger!"

What I had summoned was a 12.7mm M2 Browning heavy machine gun. Would I be able to handle it with this body? It was heavy, but it looked like I could move it side to side on the tripod.

And then, it suddenly began. A shaggy-haired man with a scarred face tried to climb into the back of the wagon, brandishing a sword. I quickly pushed down on the trigger, opening fire with a loud noise. The man's head blew off, spewing spinal fluid like a watermelon bursting. Five or six men in full plate armor rushed to help the man I had shot. I fired a barrage of shots when they had gathered around the body. The men, exposed to heavy machine gun fire at close range, were torn apart and dyed the surroundings red.

At the front of the wagon, Iona, Maria and Misha were shooting

their guns frantically. The rain finally subsided and became a light drizzle, making the wagon in front visible. Five soldiers had swarmed Nikul and his people. Erik and Laury were fighting back, but Paige was nowhere to be seen. The two of them were focused on their fight and didn't seem to notice soldiers trying to approach them quietly from the back of the wagon.

"Maria! Cover Erik and Laury!" I yelled.

Maria lightly activated her magic and shot at the soldiers approaching the wagon in front of her. Maria hit each of the five soldiers in front of her with a bullet. They all fell to the ground. It looked like Laury had been stabbed from behind, but Erik noticed and put his sword to the soldier's throat.

How many enemies are there? I've killed seven, and Maria, Iona, and Misha have killed eight or nine. The direction the arrow had come from was to the right side of our wagon, and the guys I had taken down with the machine gun had come running in from that direction too. If we were to get off on the other side of the wagon and take cover, we wouldn't be shot at.

"Mother! You and Misha keep watching our front! Maria, come this way! If the enemy comes from behind, hold these handles with your hands and press this button. If you see the enemy, shoot!"

"Understood. What will you be doing?"

"I'm going to jump out and search for them. Please cover me so I won't be targeted when I get out."

"I will."

"All right. I'm going on the count of three. One...two...three!"

I jumped out. Maria leaned out of the wagon and shot at the other side. I immediately got under the wagon and quickly called up a weapon from the weapons database.

A McMillan TAC-50 sniper rifle.

It had a 737 cm barrel and a muzzle brake to reduce recoil for greater accuracy. I lay down, faced the woods, and looked through the scope. I slowly moved the rifle from the left to the right, looking for the enemy. There was one in a tree about seventy meters away, and another a little farther behind them. I summoned a 12.7mm round and slid the manual rotating bolt back to load it. I put my eye

on the scope and aligned the sights. I needed to take each enemy down with one headshot. A distance of sixty to seventy meters may as well be called close range for this weapon.

Now, concentrate!

I aligned the sights with the first enemy's head, and pulled the trigger. They fell out of the tree and crumpled against the trunk. It looked like the archer hadn't realized that his buddy had been taken down. He seemed to be more focused on making sure he didn't lose sight of me. I loaded a second round and aimed at him. The second bullet hit the archer, and he fell to the ground like a rag doll.

"I've suppressed the archers. Mother and Misha, please stay in the wagon! Maria, come with me!"

I summoned two loaded VP9 handguns and handed them to Iona and Misha.

"Let's go, Maria!"

"Understood!"

"Raul!" Iona cried, "Please be careful!"

I raised my own VP9 subcompact handgun and started forward. Five armored knights were lying near the front wagon, several of them still alive and groaning. Maria calmly shot each in the head. As we moved forward, we saw Laury collapse.

"Laury's down!"

Erik was fighting two knights in front of the wagon. We each shot a lead bullet into an enemy's head, watching them fall like puppets whose strings had been cut. Erik made sure it was us, then crumpled to the ground.

"Are you okay?" I asked him.

"I wish I could say yes, but I think I messed up," Erik said looking up at us with a pale face.

"We need to stop the bleeding!"

Maria ripped fabric from the apron of her own maid uniform and wrapped it around Erik's arm.

"How's Nikul?"

"He put up a fight too, but he's hurt."

Inside the carriage, Nikul sat bleeding from the midsection.

"Boy! Those were no bandits! They were soldiers. To think that

soldiers are attacking passing merchants...”

“Whatever they were, we need to stop your bleeding. Maria!”

Nikul absently mumbled with a look of disbelief on his face.

After a few days, the bodies we had loaded into the covered wagons began to smell of rot. It may have felt like fall, but it was still summer, so the daytime temperatures were high and the bodies were decomposing quickly. It wasn’t likely we’d be able to make it to town with them.

“Erik? I’d like to talk about Paige, Laury, and the servants...” Iona broached the subject.

“Yes, Iona—” Erik answered before being interrupted by his own violent coughing.

“Their bodies are decomposing so fast that they are unlikely to last until the next town with an inn.”

“I see... May I ask that you help me hold a funeral for them?”

“We can cremate them together with the wagon and then bury them under stones.”

“That would be nice,” Erik said before coughing again. “You know...they would have loved knowing that they were going to be mourned by a beautiful woman.”

Erik was getting weaker by the day. Nikul was even worse, only waking up occasionally but falling asleep again as soon as he drank water. No matter how much he struggled, he would surely die in a few more days.

“Then I will go and burn their bodies. The rest of you, please wait here,” I said before heading to the covered wagon.

I cut the ropes of the horses tied to the wagon and let them go.

I said a nembutsu and prayed for their souls to find peace. While chanting, I summoned a M9 flamethrower and set the wagon on fire. The fire spread quickly.

Misetta then shouted, “Lady Iona, there is a carriage coming from behind us!”

The carriage approaching from behind stopped, and the driver nodded his head at us. A guard who was quite tall approached us. It seemed there was only one guard in their escort.

“Are you stuck out here? Is that why you’re burning your wagon?”

“Yes. We have run into some trouble,” I answered.

“Then, I will provide what help I can.”

This guy was absurdly handsome! He had long, golden hair and looked like the smart type, yet he talked to me, a child, in such a friendly way. Then two men dressed like monks stepped out of the carriage.

“What has happened? It looks like your wagon is on fire,” one of the monks, an elderly man, asked me.

Iona came and spoke in my place. “We were attacked by bandits and five of our people were killed. We are cremating them with the wagon and are going to bury them.”

“How terrible. But there must be some reason we have met in a situation like this,” said a third monk, coming out from behind the other two. This monk was a young woman who was beautiful and without blemish.

“What a terrible thing to go through. Let us pray for those who have passed away.”

We dug a hole, buried the bodies, and erected five gravestones.

“God’s love is deep. Let us pray for a world without suffering or hatred.”

The monks began to pray in a practiced manner, and everyone listened to their beautiful voices. The voices were like the sound of bells that penetrate the heart as if shaking your soul. Maybe this is what they mean by speaking with power.

“Please save these precious souls.”

It was as if something came out of the tombstones and floated towards the heavens.

“May our hearts be saved as well,” the monks said and pressed their hands together.

“I apologize for my directness, but are any of you able to use restorative magic?” Maria asked abruptly.

“Yes, to an extent.”

“We have some wounded. Could we ask you to take a look at them?”

“Of course. It is our calling, after all.”

The elderly monk climbed into our wagon and held out his hand towards Erik, who was sleeping. Something that looked like a golden orb flowed from his hand, and Erik's pained breathing became calm.

"He will regain consciousness after some rest. If you are able to feed him something nourishing, he should be able to walk in about ten days. Richell will take care of the other man."

"Yes. He's lost a lot of blood and there seems to be an infection, but I will do my best."

When Richell held her hands above him, Nikul's body began to glow faintly. After a while, she lifted her hands from him.

"This man was in very dangerous condition. He will awaken in a few days. If you feed him with nourishing food, he, too, will get better."

"Thank goodness." We all let out a sigh of relief.

Now all we could do was pray for their recovery.

"And with that, we must take our leave."

"Where are you headed, if I might ask?"

"We are heading to Fattoria."

Are these people from the Holy Land of Fattoria? It's probably better if we just go our own ways.

"I apologize for interrupting your travel. Please take care on the long road ahead," Iona thanked them politely.

"May you be blessed."

I watched the monks' carriage as it left. When it was out of sight, I said, "They didn't appear to be chasing us. And they didn't seem to recognize you either, mother."

"Yes. I heard them say that they had lost contact with the Holy Land. In any case, I'm glad we didn't have to fight them."

Thanks to the passing monks, Erik and Nikul were able to survive.

Ten days later, by the time we reached town, both of them had fully recovered.

"I can't believe how many people are here," said a fully revitalized Nikul in wonder.

"Will there be an open room at the inn?" I asked.

"They may have a room if you're a regular. I'll head to the

merchant's guild and ask around," said Nikul. He and Erik entered the merchant's guild.

"There's so many people here, so if we can blend in, we should be able to stay hidden," said Iona.

"We were already seen by those monks from Fattoria," Maria said.

"It's just a hunch, but I don't think they will report us," I mused.

"Just a hunch?" asked Maria.

"Just a hunch."

"Oh, Nikul and Erik have come out of the guild."

"Sorry we took so long. We're in luck! Because the number of people has increased so much, it seems the town is short on supplies and business is very welcome! I was worried about having lost people, but it seems like everything will be okay."

Truly the spirit of a salesman.

"There is one thing, however, that is very troubling."

"What's that?"

"Well, due to the sudden boom, they are short on staff and don't have any people they can loan us to help out with business."

"Oh? If you would like, *we* could help you. We are friends after all," suggested Iona.

"No, no! I couldn't ask a noble lady like you to help out!"

"We owe you for bringing us here in our time of need."

"I really wanted to ask you for help straightaway. I can't tell you how grateful I am that you offered, Lady Iona."

"You have also given us a carriage that will help us reach Gladrom. We're the ones who are grateful."

"If you insist, then at least let me take care of the inn situation. You have saved me the expense of hiring three staff members."

"Thank you!" Iona, having successfully negotiated with Nikul, turned and gave us a wink.

As soon as Nikul's shop opened, a long line had already formed. The goods were sold in no time at all, and Iona suggested that we raise the prices. Even with the price increase, every single item was sold by evening. Nikul was stunned. Apparently, word had spread about the beautiful women working the shop.

"I can't believe we sold everything! And for double what they'd go for in Gladrom!"

"Oh? I apologize. Did I do something wrong by suggesting you raise the prices?" asked Iona coyly.

"Not at all! I'll pay you double your wages out of gratitude!"

"Are you sure?"

"Sure or not, we earned nearly double the profit I had expected. I'll give you a quarter of the profits."

"Oh! That's so kind of you! It would be very helpful."

She just can't say no, can she?

We decided to take the now empty carriage and head to the inn for the night.

The next day, Nikul said he wouldn't be opening up shop because he had no more goods to sell. As further thanks, he invited us to accompany him as he replenished the supplies he always bought in this town. And that's how Maria and I ended up shopping with him. The bazaar was full of people as usual. As we entered the marketplace where we'd worked the day before, we stopped in front of a certain shop.

"There's some kind of smell coming from in there. It's aggressively sweet."

"Oh? Is this the first time you've seen a shop like this, boy? This is an apothecary's shop. The apothecary here is famous, you know."

"Why are they famous?"

"I've heard it said that she came from Fattoria, long ago."

An apothecary from the Holy Land of Fattoria? We need to be cautious here.

The smell was even stronger inside. In the back of the shop was a woman who was the very image of an old witch.

"Welcome! Oh? If it isn't Nikul. How have you been?"

"The same as ever. You look like you've been doing well, Daisy."

"And who is this? You've brought along such a cute servant, haven't you?"

"This is the child of an acquaintance."

"I see, I see!"

The two seemed to know each other well.

"Good morning," I said politely.

"What a cute kid. It seems that your tastes have improved, Nikul."

"Oh, stop it," he said. "I came here to get my usual."

"Coming right up."

Daisy soon presented wooden boxes with pink vials stacked inside, twenty in each.

"I'd like an extra box today, please," Nikul said.

"Oh! Made a lot of money this time?"

"A little."

"Well, either way, I'm happy for you. Here you are," she said, bringing out another box.

"How much for all of them?" I asked.

"Same as always."

"Daisy, you need to think more about making money. This stuff is top quality, and at such a reasonable price!"

"I don't worry about the money. If my medicine helps someone in need, that's all that matters."

"Selfless as usual, I see."

"All my customers back in Fattoria were greedy church clergy or military brutes, so I just overcharged them and made a fortune! Thanks to that, I've got plenty saved up."

"Oh, right, didn't you say you were selling these for five times as much as here?"

"That's right! I even made a killing on low-potions. But a person's life is worth more than money."

Potions?! It's just like in a light novel or an RPG!

"By the way, Nikul. Since you bought so many, I'll throw this in to mark the occasion."

Daisy brought out a potion that was a deeper shade of red than the others.

"A mid-potion? I can't accept something like that," Nikul said.

"Don't worry about it! I'd give you a high-potion if I had one, but this is as much as I can do with the materials I have now," Daisy said.

"This is more than enough. Thank you," Nikul replied politely. "Now, here are medicinal plants and herbs I've carefully selected for this store. Ten kilograms each, for a total of twenty kilograms. Their purity is high, so you should be able to use them."

Daisy smiled at the herbs in front of her. "I appreciate you always going through the trouble, Nikul. The herbs you bring are always high quality."

"Then, I'll be back soon," said Nikul.

"I'll see you then. Be careful on the road."

Nikul strapped the boxes of potions to his back and gave Daisy a polite nod before exiting the store.

"I always stock up on potions here," he said to me.

"I can see why you like her store."

"Daisy is an incredible apothecary. Her low-potions are nearly as good as your typical mid-potion."

"She seems really impressive."

"Uh-huh." Suddenly, Nikul turned to me. "In any case, here. This box is for you, my boy."

"Really? Are you sure?" I answered in surprise.

"You'll need it on your journey. Please give my best regards to Lady Iona."

"Thank you!"

And just like that, I'd received a box of potions.

On the way back to the inn, some kind of commotion had drawn a crowd.

"I'm asking if anyone has seen a noblewoman enter the town!" a knight yelled in frustration.

"Do you know how many people come and go through here? How are we supposed to recognize every single one?" someone in the crowd jeered back.

It looked like a knight was arguing with the townspeople.

"What are they fighting about?" I asked a woman who was watching from the marketplace.

"They're looking for some noblewoman and her party. Fugitives, apparently. But there are plenty of nobles visiting right now, so if

they keep looking around they're going to get into trouble. Look, he's arguing with the mayor now."

"I see, thank you."

I wasn't sure if this was one of our pursuers, but I could see at least ten more knights on the south side of the marketplace. We needed to leave as soon as possible. I walked away from the scene as normally as I could, returning to my room and Iona.

"Mother, the knights have caught up to us."

"Then we leave immediately," she said.

"It looked like they just entered through the south gate, so let's go through the east gate."

This inn was on the east side of town. If we took the road that led to the east gate, we would be able to leave without passing through the marketplace or the town square.

"One more thing," I added. "Everyone, please attach these to your guns. You put it on the tip, like this."

Everyone followed my example and placed a silencer on their gun's muzzle.

"This will muffle your gunshots and allow you to shoot quietly. If the worst comes to pass, we will be able to take them down without making much noise."

We left the inn and got into the two wagons that had been tied together outside, one in front of the other. Our wagons moved through the streets, the only noise being the horses' hooves clip-clopping on the stone. But even that sound alone put me on edge. Sunlight reflected off of the 12x7mm M2 heavy machine gun placed in the rear wagon.

"Okay, let's stop. Maria and I will get off the wagon here," I called out.

"What are the rest of us to do?" Iona asked me.

"Misha, you take the reins. Mother, you sit in the back. Keep your hood on just in case. If they've set up a checkpoint at the east gate, could you talk to them and draw their attention?"

"I can," she replied.

"Maria, you sneak in to the right, and I'll take the left. I haven't checked the buildings near the east gate, so I don't know how far it

is between them and the gate. Do you think you can run in?”

“Yes. We’ve had lots of practice hunting fang rabbits in the forest,” she replied with a determined look.

“All right. Misha, take the wagons to the gate!”

After making sure the wagons were moving, Maria and I spread out and began to head to our positions. We slipped through the alleyway and went around the back of the buildings. I looked at the east gate, peering around the side of the building. As expected, there were soldiers standing guard. The four soldiers were standing on both sides of the wagons.

When Iona began to speak from inside the wagon, I gathered all of my focus and dashed towards them. With a pair of suppressed shots, I pierced two in the back of the head. Passing the fallen soldiers, I slid under the horses.

The other two soldiers heard Maria’s footsteps behind them and turned, drawing their swords. From my position sliding on the ground, I looked up at the soldiers and fired. My bullets entered the base of their skulls and exited from the other side. I continued sliding, passing through Maria’s legs. The corpses had holes right between the eyebrows; Maria’s shots had been on target too. We quickly took out four large bags and hid the bodies in them.

“Let’s get the bodies into the wagons quickly. Mother, please wash away the blood on the road with your water magic,” I said.

“Understood.”

Maria, Misha, Misetta and I quickly wrapped the bodies and hauled them into the back of the wagon.

“That’s done. Mother, let’s get the horses moving.”

We moved the wagons out quickly, as if nothing had happened.

“Mother, where were these soldiers from?”

“They appear to be from the Bargius Empire,” she answered.

“They’ve already come out this far...”

“And so quickly. They must have had some method of transportation,” Iona said with a thoughtful look on her face.

“Was it horses?”

“No. It would have to be faster than a horse.”

“They have been using monsters, haven’t they?”

The other soldiers would eventually notice that their friends at the gate had gone missing, but since we had left no traces, they would probably waste time searching for them. Until then, we needed to put as much distance between us as we could.

After driving the wagon for a while, Iona said, "Let's get rid of the soldiers' bodies."

"If we burn them, the smoke may be visible, so we should either bury or toss them," I suggested.

"Exposed like that, they could become zombies or undead skeletons...but I suppose we don't have much choice."

While Iona and I were talking, Misetta, who had been trembling in the wagon, spoke up. "If I place a ward onto the corpses, I don't think the smoke will escape if we burn them."

"What? Wards? You can use holy magic, Misetta?" Iona asked.

"I can."

"I had no idea! Then let's get it done quickly."

Iona stopped the wagon. We dragged the four bodies out and carried them into the woods. Misetta surrounded the corpses with a magic ward, and I took out the M9 flamethrower.

"You can put things in from the outside," Misetta explained.

I put the muzzle of the flamethrower into the ward and covered the bodies in fire. The area inside the ward was enveloped in flames, but nothing escaped from within. The four bodies burned quickly in our makeshift crematorium.

As we left the town of Luton, where the enemy had ambushed us, Iona whispered to me that there was something she needed to tell me. She had Maria, Misha, and Misetta step away for a moment. Now that I thought about it, it had seemed like she'd wanted to say something about Gram's letter, but had hesitated when the merchant was around.

"Raul, listen to me carefully."

"Of course."

"This may be a shock for you, but remember that I am your mother, no matter what."

I was caught off guard by just how serious Iona sounded. "Yes?

Of course you're my mother. What are you—"

"Listen, Raul. You are not the child of Gram and me by blood."

Not the child...by blood...blood... Iona's words echoed in my ears.

"Blood? Huh? But...! What...?! Wh-What do you...?!"

My voice was shaking. There was no way that I wasn't Gram and Iona's child. I *was* their child, there was no doubt!

"Calm down and listen. Eight years ago, Gram returned from work, and brought you with him out of the blue."

"I wasn't born from you?"

"I am sorry for not telling you until now. But Gram and I raised you as *our* child."

"You have. I know."

"I will tell you exactly what Gram told me. Do you remember the name from the letter?"

"Do you mean Galdzin of Gladrom?"

"Yes, that is him."

"Who is he?"

"He is your birth father."

Your birth father...birth father...father... Enough of that. I didn't need to keep doing the echo bit.

"What are you saying?"

"From what Gram told me, you are the offspring of a demon."

"A-A demon?! Me?!"

"It's said that the magical power of a demon is unmatched by humans, but only a few of them can use magic."

"They have magic, but can't use it?"

"Instead, their magical power grants them incredibly strong bodies, and can manifest as other physical characteristics."

"What do you mean by 'physical characteristics'?"

"They say that demons have gray, red, or blue skin. And they look nothing like humans."

There were red and blue demons in the stories from my previous life. But were there gray demons too?

"But...I look human. So I don't think I'm a demon," I said hesitantly.

"And there's the rub. Stories say that the influence of magic in the

bodies of demons causes them to grow things like horns and wings."

"I don't have horns. And I don't think I'm growing wings," I said, checking over my shoulder.

"That is true, and I've only heard these stories from Gram. I've never seen a demon myself. You are clearly human, but that is why you were being hunted."

"I was being hunted?"

I didn't understand. Why would anyone want to kill me?

"Galdzin had ruled as king of the demons, until his position was weakened by a power struggle. He wanted to place his own son on the throne, but then you were born..."

"...and the heir, who was to become the next king of the demons, came out looking like a human," I said.

"That is what I was told. Gram said that when you were born frail like a human, Galdzin believed that you could not be raised among the demons and wanted to send you away."

"So Galdzin took pity and entrusted me to Gram, my father?"

"Yes."

You can't just say "yes" after all of that!

"That doesn't—"

"It is understandable that this comes as a shock to you."

I see. I'm not human. Then, as soon as I can, I want to become *human.*

"This is why you are so fast, even at your age, and why you are so strong. At least, that is what I think."

"I guess I *am* stronger and faster than an eight-year-old should be. Plus, I can use magic."

"Yes. Exactly. I knew you would catch on quickly."

"I understand what you're saying...but I'm not completely convinced. However, there was something else I figured out while I was listening to you, mother."

"What would that be?"

"I become stronger when I kill people. Maybe I feed off something in people..."

Iona went silent.

"And then there's what happens after I kill them."

"What would that be?"

"My blood boils."

Iona was lost for words. That was understandable. She'd just heard that her son gets excited every time he kills someone.

I broke the silence. "You must think I'm disgusting."

"I know that demons and monsters use human beings as a source of nourishment. But you have always fought to *protect* us. That tells me all I need to know."

"Mother, I want to continue to be your child!"

"Raul. There was never any doubt that you are my child. Nobody can say otherwise."

I now knew I was on my way to meet my birth father. However, now that I knew that his position in the demons' hierarchy was unstable, I was starting to wonder if that was even necessary.

Iona continued, "I want you to live on, no matter what happens. And I know that it is selfish of me. But I do not want to lose my son."

Before I knew it, tears were running down our faces. Even though she was with child, she truly loved me and was doing everything she could to keep me alive. That love was all I needed.

Two days had passed since we began to ascend the mountain. I did not know the name of the mountain, but it was much steeper than the ones I had been to in Sanaria.

"This mountain feels pretty dangerous at night, doesn't it?" I said.

"It does. We've been lucky so far that we haven't seen any monsters, but I don't think that will last," Iona replied.

"Lady Iona, Master Raul! Do not worry about monsters. I will protect you, even if it costs me my life," Maria said from behind us.

I had attached a second 12x7mm M2 heavy machine gun to help us cross the mountain safely.

After a while, Iona declared, "We should get ready to set up camp."

"You're right. The sun is setting," I agreed. "There is a wider path just over there, so let's set up a campfire on the cliff to watch over it. We'll sleep in the wagon, and Maria, Misha, and I will take turns

keeping watch."

"There's no firewood here," said Misha.

"Then I'll climb up the cliff to the forest and look for some," I said. I turned to get ready, feeling confident that I could climb a cliff that high, but Maria was there.

"Will you be okay?" she asked.

"There's still some daylight, so I can handle it."

I holstered my VP9 handgun and climbed the rock face like a bouldering wall, clinging to the branches and jutting rocks that grew on the cliff. I couldn't believe that my fingers and feet were able to find purchase. I could even hold my full body weight using a single finger on my left hand. I ascended the cliff as smoothly as a certain secret agent who performed the most dangerous missions with ease. Before I knew it, I had climbed the cliff and reached the forest.

"Now, where would the firewood be? Oh, there's some!"

I threw myself into the task of gathering firewood for a while, then went to drop it down the cliff.

"Heeey! I'm going to drop the firewood farther down in front of the wagon! So watch where you are standing!"

"Understood!" I heard Maria's voice come up from below.

I enthusiastically rolled the firewood down the cliff face

"That's all of it! Is it enough?" I yelled to Maria.

"That's a lot! I think it will do! Please come back down quickly!" Maria shouted, sounding worried.

When I turned to start the climb back down, I saw it. About three meters behind me was a red bear about eight meters tall, much larger than the one we had encountered earlier. I hurried and tried to pull out my VP9, but it was too late.

"Guh!"

For a moment, the red bear's arm disappeared, then something hit me on my left side like a ton of bricks. The landscape whizzed past as I flew in the opposite direction. My body slammed against a tree, leaving me concussed but still conscious. But I couldn't get air back into my lungs.

I coughed out some blood and was able to breathe a little. My left arm appeared to be broken.

"Shit!"

My VP9 was no longer in my hand. The blow must have knocked it out of my grip. The red bear began to approach leisurely, as if it thought I would no longer be able to resist. Feeling slowly came back to my leg and I thought I could make a run for it. I dashed like a bat out of hell into the forest, and the beast began to chase me.

I have no choice but to round back and get a gun. Can I get back to the carriage without revealing its location?

But I was naive. I heard the sounds of something large stepping on dry logs from the opposite direction.

There's another one?! You have to be kidding me!

A red bear of about six meters, smaller than the one from before, was approaching me. Having no other choice, I headed for the cliff at a breakneck speed, knowing that I was going to reveal the location of the wagon to them.

My left arm hurts, my lungs are nearing their limit...and I think I have some internal organ damage.

The two red bears were already about thirty meters behind me.

Why the hell are they so fast?!

I decided to slide down the cliff face on my back; it was around forty meters to the bottom.

"Here goes nothing!"

I jumped down the cliff!

Ow! Ouch! Ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow!

I slid down, my body slick with blood.

How bad is it going to be when I hit the ground? Please, body, please *make it through this!*

I bounced and rolled a few times, but my body was surprisingly okay. I looked up and saw the two red bears about to slide down the cliff, hind legs first, but they seemed to be descending at a slower rate. I ran towards the wagons as fast as I could. I couldn't even breathe with how much I was exerting myself to move, but I still shouted as loud as I could.

"Red bears are coming! Get the rocket launcher ready!"

"Raul!" came Iona's voice, followed by the maids exclaiming, "Master Raul!"

Seeing my battered appearance, Iona and the others put their hands over their mouths and turned pale.

"I'm doing fine. Mother, get ready to man the machine gun! The red bears will arrive soon!"

Everyone who heard me grabbed anti-tank rocket launchers from the wagons. I also held a rocket launcher up with my good arm. I had Misetta, who was riding on the coach of the wagon, help me handle the rocket launcher, and I was able to get in position to fire. I pushed through the terrible pain and was able to lift my left arm to help support it.

"They're here!" Misha shouted.

"Lure them in! When I give you the signal, shoot in order, starting with Maria."

Thirty meters to go!

"*Fiiire!*"

The rocket launcher directly hit a red bear! The upper half of its body was blown away.

"Here comes the other one! Get ready!"

Only Maria was able to set up her rocket launcher in time. The red bear was already only twenty meters away!

But Maria, having rushed too much to get in her stance, missed her target.

"Everyone! *Run!*"

The red bear's momentum never wavered, and it had come as close as ten meters away. It was probably enraged by the death of its partner. The red bear flew towards me when...

Rat-a-tat-tat!

Gunfire erupted from the wagon! It was the 12.7mm M2 heavy machine gun manned by Iona. The red bear, however, was still standing.

"You must be joking," I said in despair.

Misha finally fired her rocket launcher, taking the bear down at the last moment.

I gasped for air and lurched forward as the ground before me blurred.

"Raul!"

"Master Raul!"

"Young Master!"

"Rauuul!"

Their screaming voices reached my ears, but I let go of my consciousness.

I later learned that I had nearly died. My ribs had caved in, my left arm was mangled, and I carried deep lacerations from my chest to my neck.

I'm lucky to be alive...

But there was now no doubt: my body was getting stronger, beyond what a human was capable of. My flesh should have been rent asunder from that direct hit with the red bear's claws. Despite crashing into a tree, my body hadn't been mangled, and I had managed to stand back up on two legs. For a human, it should have been instant death.

"But man, the red bear meat sure did taste good," I said quietly to myself.

After the incident, I was given many potions, and boy was I hungry when I woke up! I let everyone know how hungry I was and gulped down the quickly butchered red bear meat. Then I went back to sleep and slept for a whole day. Or so I heard. When I woke up the next morning, I had already almost fully recovered.

"Raul," Iona called out to me.

"What is it, mother?"

"Have you been growing?"

"Hmm?"

Iona looked at me with curiosity.

"Is it my imagination?"

I certainly hadn't intended to grow any. I mean, I was a human who had somehow survived a direct hit from a red bear's punch, but I don't see how I could have changed in such a short amount of time.

"Young master, I think the mistress is right. Though, I'd say it is instead that your body seems thicker." Even Misha was getting in on it.

“Huh? You think?”

“Hey, Raul! Come stand next to me!”

I stood up straight in the rocking wagon. Misetta was looking up at me. I could have sworn that we were the same height just yesterday.

“Your shirt buttons are bulging.”

“Huh?”

I looked down at my body. The buttons on my chest really were bulging.

“Let’s take off your clothes and look,” Iona told me.

I did as she asked and took them off.

Everyone stared at me in shock.

I looked down at my body again. Toned and bulging pecs, eight-pack abs, and my biceps were clearly thicker. This was *not* the body of a child.

“You have grown up so strong,” Iona said in wonder.

“Um, mother. Did those potions have some muscle-building side effect?”

“No, I’ve never heard of such a thing,” she answered.

“Could it be because I ate the red bear?”

“We all ate some.”

Once again, I was made to realize that I was not human.

Chapter Three: Meeting with a Demon

Maria drove the wagon smoothly down the mountain, and the village at its foot came into view.

"We've finally made it over the mountain!" Maria cried triumphantly.

"We did. For a while, I thought we wouldn't make it, but here we are," said Iona.

"All that matters is that the young master is well," Misha said with a look of relief.

Once we got to the village, we would be able to get some rest. But just as we thought we could stop and gather our breath, three people walked out of the forest in front of us.

Is it the enemy?

We grabbed our guns and moved the wagons closer.

"You! Halt!" one of them yelled.

When we got closer, I could see that they were not human. They were demons. One had reddish skin, while another was grayish. What stood out even more were the horns growing from their foreheads.

"Mother..."

"Yes."

We stopped the wagon in front of the demons.

"Has something happened?" Iona asked as if nothing was out of the ordinary.

"Do you not fear us?"

"It seems that you good people are demons," Iona said respectfully.

"We are ogres, but yes, humans do call us demons."

Holy crap! They're like those ogres you see in games! We called

them oni *in Japanese. I can't believe I'm seeing a real one! A real* oni*!*

"So, what do you gentlemen want with us?" asked Iona.

I gripped the gun in my hand.

"Right. A venerable personage has asked us to search out a certain person."

"And that's why you're calling out to us in a place like this?"

"Correct."

"Where are you from?"

"We hail from Gladrom. And from whence do *you* come?"

"From the Kingdom of Rashtal."

"From Rashtal, you say?"

"Yes," Iona said, giving them false information for now.

However, it seemed they were going to probe further.

"Could it be that there's something you cannot tell me?" asked the ogre.

"Something that I can't tell you?" asked Iona, still playing dumb, but it looked like the ogre had sensed that something was off.

"I must ask you about another matter. I wonder, is it possible that you carry one of our brethren in your wagon?"

"No," said Iona flatly. "Do you often see humans that harbor a demon among them?"

"We have the ability to sense one of our own. We sense one with you. That is why we called your carriage to a halt."

Iona paused and took in that information before asking, "May I inquire as to who asked you to search for this person?"

"Our Master, Lord Galdzin Sarash."

Bingo! Out of the blue, the man we were looking for came to us.

"O-Oh..." Iona seemed to choke on her words and did not know what to say.

"Have you heard of the honorable Gram Forrest?"

"Y-Yes. He's my husband."

"Oh! Lady Iona!" the red one said, suddenly with recognition in his eyes. "You have done well to travel this far. I am Lord Galdzin's underling, Gersham!"

"Ah, we have finally, *finally* made it." Iona slumped down in utter

relief.

"We received a letter from Lord Gram. We have come to meet you by order of Lord Galdzin."

Upon hearing this, I leaned out of the wagon and looked at the ogres.

Gersham turned to me. "Oh! Honorable sir, might you be...?"

"I am the son of Gram Forrest."

"Oh! Master Algarde!"

Algarde? Who the heck is that?

The ogres looked at me, deeply moved.

"I am Gersham, Galdzin's underling and his second-in-command lieutenant."

"My name is Gazzam."

"And I am Gog."

Though the red Gersham and the blue Gazzam both looked tough, Gog was a small, adorable boy. A *shota*, maybe? He was pale, had blue-silver hair, and really wasn't scary at all.

"My name is Iona Forrest. And...Gram Forrest is dead."

"That's a shame. He was a great man."

"Yes, he was."

The conversation between Iona and the red ogre Gersham trailed off.

"For now, shall we hurry forward?"

Since the three ogres were escorting us, all we could do was get in the wagons and follow them.

"Mother, is it just me or are the ogres very polite?"

"Yes. I've heard that while they do not receive education in schools, they are taught how to be polite."

"Is it a good idea to just let them escort us like this?"

"I don't know. But we don't seem to have much of a choice. They are ogres, after all. It's not like they would let us politely ask them to leave."

Isn't that the truth. They seem incredibly powerful. We definitely don't want to get on their bad side.

"Sir Gersham, that thing on your waist is a sword, isn't it?" I asked him.

"Yes, it is."

"Sir Gazzam's is short though."

"I fight with daggers and hand to hand."

"Hand-to-hand?"

"Well, all of my body, really. I kick them, break them, and sometimes strangle them."

"And how about Gog?"

"I use these."

At some point, Gog's hands had grown claws.

"Gog, you see, is half ogre and half lycan."

"Ogres can have children with a lycan?"

"Yes. There are even children descended from both demons and humans."

"I had no idea."

"That's no surprise. I'd wager there aren't any demons in Eucrit at all."

"I guess you're right. You're the first demon I've ever seen."

"Though you are a demon by nature yourself, Master Algarde," Gersham said with a look of amusement.

"Being called 'Algarde' doesn't quite feel right."

Then Maria asked in surprise, "Um...Master Raul, *are* you a demon?"

"Uh, well... I just found out recently, so it doesn't feel real."

"You don't look like anything other than human to me."

"*I* consider myself a human. But how would you feel if I were a demon?"

"Hm? You are you, no matter what. I mean, watching you grow up, I should have guessed that you were no normal human."

"Well, when Master Algarde was born, he was no more than a human baby," said Gersham.

"Um, Sir Gersham...my birth father is Lord Galdzin, isn't he?"

"Yes. There's no doubt about it. Your souls have the same root."

"The same root? How do you know something like that?"

"Instinct."

Well, there's not much I can say to that.

We arrived at the town as we were talking. We left our wagons in

an empty barn near the entrance of the town. The sun had set, and we needed to find some food as soon as possible.

"Humans are afraid of our kind, so we will wait outside the town," Gersham said.

"I see. Then we will try to complete our business as quickly as we can," I replied.

We parted from the ogres and hurried to find a market in the dark town. However, we noticed that something was off.

"Mother..."

"I know. There's no one here."

We headed farther into the town and came to a place that looked like a market, but there was still no sign of anyone.

"How can the town be empty?"

"The sun has only just set. You'd think there would at least be some shoppers still around."

"Mother, let's turn back now."

Just as we turned around to leave, people began to swarm out from inside and between the buildings. It had gotten dark, so I couldn't make it out, but it looked like there were people crawling along the ground as well.

"Doesn't the way they walk look strange?" I asked nervously.

"I wonder why that is?" Iona also seemed confused.

"Maria, could you throw a fireball at their feet?"

Maria produced a fireball the size of a softball and threw it in front of them. What the fire illuminated in the dark made our blood run cold.

"Lady Iona, Master Raul!" Maria stood in front of us, as if to protect us from the enemy, and drew her gun.

People swarmed towards us, groaning and gurgling horrible sounds.

"Mother, we need to run!"

But it was already too late, and they were gathering in droves behind us. Their faces were desiccated, with no sign of life, and their skin was ashen. Even though they were moving, they were clearly dead. I had memories of watching a movie like this in my previous life. There was no doubt these were zombies!

“We’re surrounded!” Iona shouted.

Maria’s P320 and Beretta 92 immediately opened fire, and the rest of us followed suit. But the zombies kept walking through it all.

“Everyone, aim for their heads! Mother, Maria, put your magic into the bullets!” I shouted.

It looked like the zombies fell when a bullet hit each of their heads. But in the next moment, all I heard was the clicking of guns that had run out of ammo.

“There’s too many!”

Everyone had run through their supply of ammo. There were zombies everywhere, in all directions. I was so terrified that my hands were shaking. This was the end.

Misetta’s scream pierced the silence.

“N-No! Stay away from me!” Misha had also given in to the terror.

Iona, Maria, and my faces were all drawn in horror.

It was all over...

The moment I thought that, about ten heads flew off of the zombies in front of me. Slashing sounds whirled around us.

“Wha—”

I looked at the zombies behind me, just as they fell to the ground in pieces. More of them began to collapse, one after another. The remaining zombies were split vertically, their two halves falling in opposite directions.

“Is everyone okay?”

It was Gersham, Gazzam, and Gog.

“A bunch of zombies? What the hell happened here?” asked Gersham.

“We don’t have any idea either.” I felt sick.

As Gersham and I talked, the child, Gog, interrupted our conversation.

“A curse was placed on them, forcing them to become zombies. The curse was probably performed after these people had been killed.”

“How do you know that?”

“He has lycan blood, so he can see through the magic of his natural enemy, the vampire,” Gersham explained proudly.

"*That's* how you did it?"

"Never mind that! Let us take care of the zombies. Gazzam! You stay here and protect Master Raul and the others!"

Gersham and Gog ran towards the zombie horde, then returned ten minutes later.

"We took care of them, for the most part." Gersham shrugged.

"Who in the world would do something like this?" I asked.

No one seemed to have an answer to that.

"Well, you three are incredibly strong," I said, changing the subject.

"Thank you, Master Alg— Sorry, Raul!" Gersham quickly corrected himself. "I believe we are the most powerful of Lord Galdzin's men!"

"It's amazing that you were able to fight off opponents like zombies."

"If anything, zombies aren't even worth being called an opponent."

Whoa, that's so reassuring! Does my birth father have a lot of cool underlings like this?

"Then let's burn what's left of them."

I summoned my M9 flamethrower and started burning zombies. While I tried to thoroughly burn every last trace, Gersham came up to me.

"Master Raul, are those flames magic?"

"No, this is a weapon," I said, hurrying over to burn some more zombie pieces.

"A weapon? That's incredible."

"Oh! You can give it a try, if you'd like."

"Huh? I can use this as well? May I try?"

I handed him the M9.

"Oh!" he exclaimed.

Gazzam and Gog also approached.

"What in the world?" asked Gazzam, who looked somewhat jealous.

"It's the weapon Master Raul uses!" Gersham yelled over the roar of the flames.

"Could I try too?" asked Gazzam. Standing behind him, Gog

looked like he wanted a turn himself.

"In that case, wait a moment."

I summoned another M9 flamethrower in front of the three of them. "Go ahead and use this one."

They looked at me in shock.

"How did you do that just now?" asked Gazzam.

"Well, this is my actual magic. It's the only magic I can use, but I can produce weapons like this."

"Incredible!" the three said in awe.

After showing them how to work it, the ogres put the tanks on their backs and began to burn every piece of zombie they could find. They continued to spray fire until they'd used up every last drop of fuel.

The wind sent waves across the autumn meadows.

It had been four days since we'd left the zombie-infested village. The road was relatively easy and continued straight towards the horizon, but no matter how far we traveled, it didn't feel like we were getting any closer to the mountains across the meadows. Incidentally, we had retrieved two horses from the village, and gratefully accepted a beautiful horse-drawn carriage.

"Now, the journey should be much more comfortable," I said to Iona.

"It does certainly help. Thanks to them, it seems we'll arrive in Gladrom much faster."

Above all, the softer seats and smoother ride were a blessing for Iona while she was pregnant.

"I think we'll make it to Gladrom safely."

"I think so too. Though, it's hard to imagine our pursuers giving up."

"They followed us all the way to Luton, so they must be searching over a very wide area."

"And I'm starting to have a hard time moving," Iona said, putting her hand on her belly. "My belly is getting quite big."

"I'm sure this journey's been hard on your body."

It had already been a few months since we had left Sanaria, and

her belly had become more noticeable. How much longer would it be until we arrived in Gladrom? It was hard to tell if Iona would be able to hold out for that long, but we would have to rely on these three ogres who said that they would help us.

"Sir Gersham, has the enemy not invaded Gladrom?" I asked.

"Gladrom lies between the Land of Demons and the sea. It acts as a corridor to the continent, so I do not think humans will attempt to attack it."

"The Land of Demons?"

Gersham nodded. "Because our master, Lord Galdzin, was defeated by the current leader of the Land of Demons, we now reside in Gladrom, but most demons live in the Land of Demons."

"Does that mean you and the other ogres followed Galdzin even after he was defeated?"

"Yes. He is the only one we bow to."

"But who is this new king?" I asked.

"The new king of the Land of Demons is named Lusemia."

"So this King Lusemia must be really strong, then?"

"Though Lusemia is a woman, she is strong indeed," Gersham said.

Whoa! The king of the Land of Demons is a woman?! I was imagining some brute like King Enma! Well, she is *a demon king, so she probably has upturned eyes like a yokai and a mouth like the kuchisake-onna.*

"And Galdzin lost to her?"

"That is correct. After all, Lord Galdzin lost his wife. Your mother, Lady Grace Sarash."

"What does his wife passing away have to do with his defeat?" I asked.

"Because of Lady Grace's passing, Lord Galdzin was stricken with grief for a very long time."

"So...my father loved my mother that much?"

"Very much so," Gersham answered. "On top of that, you had only just been born. The two thought they could not be happier."

"How did that cause him to be defeated?"

"He was utterly consumed by despair, unable to swallow food nor

stomach any drink. He secluded himself in a deep cave."

So, basically, he was so devastated that he became a hikikomori*.*

"What happened after?"

"Lord Galdzin announced that he would not be able to protect you."

"So that's when he brought me to the human continent... I was in danger, and so he sent me away."

"Just as you say. The difference in size between the two forces was simply too great," Gersham said.

"But...my father still lives?"

"Yes. Though he has lost much of his power, he yet lives."

I nodded. "I see. But about their difference in numbers, did Lusemia really have the upper hand?"

"Not at first. Demons are creatures who follow the strongest leader. It's in their nature. Their king's magic grows and wanes with the number of demons who follow him."

"So as my father's despair weakened him, more of his followers abandoned him for Lusemia?"

"That is how it turned out," Gersham said.

"But then why hasn't King Lusemia already killed him?"

"That would be unthinkable. You see...Lady Lusemia loves Lord Galdzin."

Okay, this is getting messy. Let me see if I have this straight... Galdzin was married to Grace, but Lusemia is in love with him?

"So you're saying Lusemia didn't kill him because of her feelings?"

"It would seem so."

"Is that the only reason?" I asked.

"Lady Lusemia came to Lord Galdzin after Grace had passed away, offering to become his new wife."

Ah, so she really wanted to marry the man she loved.

"But he wouldn't marry her," I said.

"He told her that Lady Grace was his only companion in this life."

"And then she attacked?"

Gersham replied, "Lady Lusemia wouldn't accept his answer. She believed that he had refused her all because of *you*, Grace's child. That is why she sent her subordinates to capture you."

“And so Galdzin gave me to Gram.”

“Exactly.”

It was a relief to finally hear the full story. It seemed that this was also the first time Iona had heard this, and she was deeply moved.

“I understand,” I said. “I’m looking forward to seeing my father more and more.”

“Yes, Master Raul. Your father is truly a wonderful man.”

The sky had begun to darken as we talked.

“Sir Gersham, should we consider stopping?”

“We can keep going.”

“I think the horses are beginning to tire.”

“I see. Then we shall stop the carriage when we find a suitable place.”

We slowed down the carriage and looked for a place to camp for the night. It was then I heard a voice from outside.

“Gersham!”

It was Gog.

“There’s something across the road!” he said.

“Understood,” Gersham responded.

We stopped the carriage to assess the situation. It was too dark for me to see what was out there, but the ogres seemed to be able to see it.

“Master Raul, tell everyone to get inside!”

Gersham stood motionless, keeping his eyes fixed on whatever was in the darkness.

“Is there something so dangerous out there that Gersham has to be on guard?”

“It looks like it,” Gog said.

Gersham then gave orders to the other two ogres.

“Gazzam, you protect Master Raul and the others in the carriage! Gog, do you know what those are?”

“Vampires,” Gog growled.

“I thought as much.”

Overhearing this, I began to understand the situation.

“Mother, is it possible that these are the vampires who turned

that town into zombies?”

“They might be,” Iona replied.

“Master Raul, what should we do?” Maria asked.

“For the time being, get your pistols ready,” I answered.

Everyone unholstered their guns. The night was pitch-black, with no light from the moon or stars. We couldn’t see anything. We needed to find a way to search the perimeter. I decided to go outside by myself to check it out.

“I’m opening the door! Maria, cover me!”

“Understood!”

When I opened the carriage door, Gazzam was right there.

“Master Raul, what is it?!”

“Sir Gazzam, if anything happens, we can cover you.”

“It’s dangerous! I don’t know if I’ll be able to protect you.”

Even a demon as skilled as Gazzam was wary of whatever was out there. They must have been incredibly dangerous. But I ignored his warning and got on the ground, summoning a 81mm mortar and loading it with an illuminating round. I launched the flare into the sky. It shot up with a *whoosh*, lighting up the sky as it exploded overhead.

What I saw sent a chill through me and made my skin crawl. Something—or rather, a *lot* of something—was covering the sky! The primordial fear that flowed through me was no joke.

“What was that?!”

What I had seen was the grotesque sight of a large number of people with bat wings flying around the sky.

“Master Raul, please return to the carriage! It’s a group of vampires!” Gazzam said, forcing me back into the carriage.

The reason there was no light from the moon or stars was because it had been blotted out by countless vampires.

What was that? Do vampires usually move in a group? Mother and the maids would probably faint at the sight.

“This is bad, Gersham! There are too many of them!” Gog yelled.

The flare was still lighting up the sky, showing an insane number of vampires. Suddenly, a lone vampire alighted right in front of the carriage.

“You there, ogre! It looks like you’ve got humans with you.”

She wore a regal, tight-fitting dress and carried a parasol in the night. Large black wings sprouted from her back. With her long, blonde hair and bewitching beauty, she possessed an otherworldly level of erotic allure. But her conspicuous, pallid features and the contrasting red of her lips were a warning that she was not among the living.



"Move, vampire!" Gersham shouted. "I will not answer to the likes of you!"

"Hmph. There's a demon boy inside that carriage, isn't there?"

It seemed the vampire was already aware of my presence.

"Move! Or I will cut you down!" Gersham said.

Things were getting tense out there.

"Oh? And what do you think three ogres can do against our numbers?"

"If you will not move, then we shall simply cut you down."

"If you give me the demon child, I will let the rest of you pass—"

She suddenly disappeared, Gog's claws slashing at empty air. He'd tried a sneak attack on her, but she had managed to evade it. Gog could only grunt in surprise.

The vampire returned with a swipe of her own claws. Gog stepped under them and delivered a kick upwards, but the vampire floated away unharmed, as if blown back by the wind.

"What a short-tempered little boy."

The vampire's parasol transformed into dozens of bats which swarmed Gog, interfering with his movements.

"Tch!"

Gog waved his claws to shake the bats off, swatting down every one. But the vampire took advantage of the distraction, diving headfirst from above and raising her claws to pierce his throat. But Gog suddenly disappeared from sight, just as quickly appearing above her. He swung his claws down, but she was already reacting. His claws barely grazed the vampire, only tearing a bit of her clothing.

"You mutt!" she spat.

"Silence, bloodsucker."

Gog and the vampire continued to go back and forth. At the same time, Gersham was slashing at every vampire who tried to land on the carriage.

"There's too many," he said under his breath.

No matter how strong an ogre might be, it would be tough to deal with this many vampires. And with them having to protect me and the carriage, they were unable to move freely, putting them at

even more of a disadvantage.

"We can't hold them all off, Gersham! Take Raul and run!"

Thousands of vampires were being reduced to ashes around Gersham and Gazzam, yet there was no end in sight for this swarm. But we paid that no mind, opening windows to fire on them. I pointed my gun at a vampire and shot, but they only flinched before flying off as if nothing had happened. One vampire then peeked into the window. It had a pale white face, bloodshot eyes, and very long fangs.

"Crap!"

I shot the vampire right between the eyes, and its head flew back...before slowly moving forward back into place to stare at me. A smile crept along its repulsive face.

For real?!

Suddenly, the vampire's face was split vertically, burning into ashes and vanishing.

"Are you all right?" Gazzam called out.

"How are *you* able to kill them?!" I yelled back, exasperated.

"Our blades contain silver, and Gog's lycan claws are also effective against vampires. But this number...!"

While we were talking, a vampire grabbed Gazzam from behind.

"Argh!" He grimaced and distanced himself from the carriage.

The door began to shake, and the handle rattled as someone tried to turn it. Soon, the entire carriage was wobbling.

"This is bad!"

I rushed to the door and tried to hold it closed, but it swung open with a bang! A male vampire stood there with a satisfied grin on his face.

"Whoa!" I screamed, falling onto my backside.

Maria, Iona, and Misha all fired at him, pushing him back outside with the force of their bullets. But a female vampire took his place and clung to the doorway. When she was shot, she hit the floor and almost rolled out, but instead grabbed the edge of the door and tried to pull herself back in.

There was a slashing noise, and the vampire immediately disappeared.

"Master Raul, get away from the door! Quickly!"

Gersham had sent the vampire's head flying, then closed the door. We could hear the sounds of a great number of vampires flying around the carriage. The ogres had held them back so far, but they couldn't keep this up forever.

"It sounds like a storm out there," Iona whispered in fear.

The carriage rocked back and forth, and the door opened with a bang again. It was Gog this time, standing there and bleeding from his forehead.

"We may not be able to hold out against these numbers! I will take Master Raul and run. We may be able to at least save him!" he shouted, his body covered in wounds.

Behind him, Gersham could be seen fighting, slashing his silver sword at the surrounding vampires. But sharp claws cut him from behind, and his blood flew in all directions. Even though the vampires were individually weak against the ogres' fierce fighting and silver swords, they could stay out of reach by flying, and their numbers showed no signs of dwindling.

Gersham shouted as he fought, "Quickly, Gog! Take Master Raul and run!"

I turned around to look at everyone. Misetta, Misha, and Maria all had looks of determination on their faces. Iona nodded.

Wait a minute! What is going on?! Why are you nodding to this?!

"No! I will not leave any of you behind!" I yelled.

No! I won't! My mother means the world to me, and these women have treated me so kindly. I would rather die than abandon them! I will not let these batty bastards kill everyone!

"Please go with him, Raul! You, at least, must live on!" Iona said with conviction.

"Master Raul, I apologize for not being able to protect you to the end. Please go!" Maria said.

"Master Raul, you must! Please, avenge us!" Misha added.

Iona, Maria, and Misha yelled for me to go. Misetta sobbed and screamed my name.

"Shut up! I am not abandoning any of you!"

I needed to *think*!

Damn it! Damn it! Am I really going to lose to these bats! Wait...bats?

"Gog! What traits do vampires possess?"

"There's no time for that! We must leave now!" He looked at me like I was insane.

"Just tell me!"

Gog sighed. "Lycans like me have a heightened sense of smell, but vampires excel in their hearing. They hunt prey using their ears. They won't die unless they are attacked by lycans or silver!"

A light bulb went off in my head. I had an idea!

"Gog, put these in your ears!"

I quickly summoned TCAPS hearing protection. These were high performance smart earplugs that the US military used to protect eardrums from noise-induced hearing loss caused by explosions and other loud sounds, while conversely boosting the ability to hear quiet voices.

"What are these?" Gog asked.

"Just put them on! And have Gersham and Gazzam put them on too!"

"In the middle of a fight?"

"Yes! Now go!"

I gave Gog the TCAPS, then pushed him through the door and closed it. I then summoned the weapon I had thought of at the entrance to the carriage.

An LRAD, or long-range acoustic device—a sound cannon.

This was a state-of-the-art acoustic weapon used to suppress riots or enemy soldiers. An LRAD acted like a laser beam of sound that could narrow its projection angle to about thirty degrees and send sound as far as ten kilometers away.

"This isn't exactly putting down a riot, but maybe it will work?"

I pointed the LRAD towards the carriage door, set the volume to maximum output, and put it on standby.

"Maria! Put this in your ear and open the door!"

I gave Maria a pair of TCAPS.

"Three, two, one!"

She opened the door. Directly in front of us, a female vampire

contorted her pale face in a grin and let out a screech. I switched the volume on!

"WHAAAAAGH!!!"

My screams rang out through the LRAD at maximum volume.

The vampire fell, clutching her ears and thrashing on the ground. And the rest of the vampires in the line of fire behind her fell out of the sky like flies. Gersham and Gazzam were able to quickly finish off the fallen vampires who were no longer avoiding their blades by flying. I then carried the LRAD out of the carriage and switched it to security alarm mode. It let out a horrible, constant noise like a car alarm. A vampire in its range held his ears and fell down in a heap.

"Ha ha! They're dropping like flies! Maria, Misha! Please come out here and put these on!"

I had Misha put on a pair of TCAPS as well.

"I'm going to bring two more of these machines out, so scream your hearts out!"

"Yes!" they answered.

I summoned two more LRADs, and they screamed into them.

"TAKE THIS!!!"

"AAAAAAA!!!"

Their screams echoed through the dark night.

One after another, the vampires fell out of the sky, screeching. But despite all this, the acoustic weapon couldn't actually kill them.

"Mother and Misetta, please put these on too!"

I threw two pairs of TCAPS into the carriage. Gersham, Gog, and Gazzam went around to finish off those who fell to the ground.

"I'm going to go ahead and burn those who have fallen!" I called to them, summoning my flamethrower.

With the roar of the flames came the sounds of hundreds of vampires screaming.

Even vampires seemed to suffer when burned, and it looked like they could not fly if their wings were burning.

"Oh, it's working! They can't fly if we melt their wings!"

"Give me one too!" Maria called out.

I summoned another flamethrower and gave it to her. She began to spread flames on the fallen vampires.

"I'll start it up again," I told her.

There were still so many vampires in the air. They had caught on to the LRADs and kept their distance from them, but they still watched us, looking for any opportunity.

"Gersham!" I called out.

If things kept going this way, we'd be at a disadvantage, but I was thinking of a way out. A trump card of sorts.

He came to my side and yelled over the sound, "What is it?"

"We need to retreat! All of us!"

"Master Raul, I don't think we can— Ugh!"

It was hard to have a proper conversation while fighting vampires.

"The horses are dead! How can we retreat?" Maria's piercing cry came to me. Hope was draining from her voice.

The horses in the carriage were already dead, torn apart by the vampires. At this rate, we were all going to die. But my resolve hardened.

We have to bet everything on this! This might make me faint, or even kill me... But there's no other choice!

"Maria, I may pass out!"

"What are you talking about?" Maria asked me anxiously.

"Have everyone ride the thing I'm about to summon!"

"Is it a weapon?"

"No, it's a vehicle! The door is on the back. If I faint, open that up and have everyone get in! I'm summoning it now!"

I quickly selected my trump card from the weapons database, and a lump of steel appeared.

An M93 Fox six-wheeled armored personnel carrier.

It could carry two soldiers up front and eight in the back. It was equipped with a four-stroke V8 liquid-cooled turbocharged diesel engine with 370 horsepower. Maximum speed: 105 km/h. Range: 800 km. It was an incredible machine that could even travel through water. But my magical power had completely drained, and I could no longer stand on my own.

"Maria, lend me your shoulder," I said.

Gersham and Gazzam were swinging their swords around the

perimeter to keep the vampires away from us.

"Abandon the carriage! Mother, just bring the potions!"

The LRADs were still blaring, and the vampires seemed unwilling to approach us.

"Misha! Hit the vampire that Gog is fighting with your LRAD!"

Misha aimed her LRAD at the area where Gog and the regal female vampire were fighting. The vampire covered her ears and flinched, but her reaction was different from that of the other vampires.

"Gazzam, call for Gog!"

While the vampire was flinching, Gog was able to escape and run towards us.

"We're going to be riding this now! Everyone, follow me!"

The rear hatch of the M93 Fox troop carrier opened towards us.

"Mother! Maria! Misha! Misetta! Everyone inside, please!"

We all boarded the M93 Fox. Gazzam was guarding the rear hatch and preventing the vampires from entering.

I dizzily asked him, "What happened to the LRADs? Those white metal things that were making the noise."

"Ah, those. I set them up so that the vampires can't get close," he answered.

"Can you bring those on board with us?"

"Gersham! Gog! Bring those things here!" he said, pointing at the LRADs.

Those two carried them to the vehicle. We stood the three LRADs directly in front of the rear hatch.

"The three of you should be able to fight freely now. But first, take this."

I give Gazzam a low-potion.

"This is a low-potion. Does it work for demons?"

"This will help! It works well enough for us, but it's poison for vampires!"

"Poison?"

"Because vampires are a type of undead."

Huh? A vampire is a type of undead? And the potions are poisonous to them? Say something like that earlier!

"I would like to ask Gersham and Gog to bring weapons here from the carriage," I said.

"Understood."

I was already so depleted of magical power that summoning any more weapons might have rendered me unable to do anything else. I asked him to aim the LRAD over the path to the carriage to cover them as they went to retrieve the machine guns and rocket launchers that had been left there.

After some time, the two returned to us, covered in wounds. But they had only been able to bring back parts from the machine guns and two rocket launchers. The rest had apparently been destroyed by the vampires.

"Are...these what you wanted?" Gersham asked as he lowered the parts in front of me.

"Yes..."

They destroyed my beautiful guns! I don't care if they're vampires or not! I'm going to kill all of them!

"Maria, please use the rocket launcher to shoot the swarm of vampires around the carriage," I asked her calmly.

"As you command."

Maria held the rocket launcher up and fired as easily as if it was second nature. The vampires took a direct hit and scattered.

"Maria, come with me!"

I brought Maria to the front hull and started the Fox's engine. The vehicle began to shake, and the bulletproof glass window in the front was quickly covered by vampires trying to reach us.

"Maria, listen to me. This is a vehicle. It's something like a carriage made of steel."

"A carriage? But there are no horses!" Maria panicked.

"Not to worry. This thing's got 370 horsepower."

"370 horses?!" Maria looked at me like I had lost my mind.

"Maria, I'm too small for my feet to reach the pedals, so I need you to move this."

"This whole thing?"

"It's not difficult. First of all, please pull this lever near your hand. Now, there is a place that you push down with your foot to make the

vehicle go forward. And if you step on this one, it will stop. This thing here you turn left and right, and the vehicle will follow."

"A-All right!"

"Don't worry. I'll be right here when you're moving it. Now, wait a moment."

I headed to the back and was met with a flurry of movement.

"What's wrong?!"

"I-It's Gog!" Misetta yelled and pointed at Gog, who had collapsed on all fours.

"I'm sorry, Master Raul. Th-That woman got me."

He was bleeding from his abdomen.

"Gog!"

It was as if his stomach had been ripped open. But he tried to stand and began to stumble towards the rear hatch. From the hatch, I heard Gersham and Gazzam call out to us.

"We can't hold out any longer! Please escape without us. I'm sorry."

"We'll buy you some time."

The two of them were covered in wounds.

"Gersham! Gazzam! Bring the LRADs with you and get in here!"

They did as I said and brought the LRADs into the vehicle.

"Maria! Put your foot down hard on the thing that makes us go forward!"

"Yes!"

The M93 Fox took off, kicking up a cloud of dust!

"Now, take your foot off and keep us going along the road!"

"Understood!"

The vampires were wary of getting close, wanting to avoid the LRADs that were blasting sound outside the open back hatch.

"Mother, hand me a low-potion! How many more do you have?"

"There are still more than fifteen left!"

I had Gog drink the potion. The wound across his stomach closed somewhat and the bleeding stopped. But it still looked like it would open back up if he moved around. The back hatch remained open, but the vampires were having difficulty landing on the vehicle as it moved at full speed.

A six-wheeled armored personnel car sped through the meadows under the night of another world. A wave of vampires chased after them, like a slithering black dragon in the night sky.

"Are you okay, Gog?"

"I can't say that I am. But my wound has closed and I can fight," he said, attempting to get off the ground.

"No, stay there. Mother, can you and Misetta look after him?"

"I will," she replied.

Gog was an important asset; we couldn't afford to lose him at a place like this.

"Gersham, how are your and Gazzam's wounds?"

"We're fine. We drank some potions and are recovering."

"Good. I'm going to summon a weapon now, but my magic depletion will cause me to faint. You said that potions are poisonous to vampires, right?"

"Yes. They are undead, so even a little will have an effect on them. It can be lethal to them, but they certainly wouldn't be willing to drink one." Gersham shrugged.

"That's all I needed to know."

Phew. Can I get them to understand this in one go?

"I'd like the two of you to come out onto the roof with me."

"All right."

"There, I will use my last bit of magic to summon a weapon."

"Understood."

"I can only hold out for a few seconds after I summon the weapon, so listen carefully to my instructions. Gersham, when I summon the weapon, I will tell you how to use it. You'll only get one chance to figure it out. And Gazzam, I want you to sit on the right side of that weapon and pour *this* on the part called the bullet belt."

I handed him the box of potions.

"You want me to pour the potions on it?"

"Yes. Once you use up all of one potion, then open the next one and use it."

"Understood."

"Do either of you have any questions?"

They shook their heads.

"All right. Gazzam, tie me to you so that I won't fall when I faint."

"Got it."

"Once you've run out of potions, bring both me and the weapon back into the vehicle. That's all I will be able to do."

The two seemed to understand.

"Then, let's begin."

We opened the overhead hatch and climbed out. We were traveling at nearly eighty kilometers per hour, and the wind was blowing so hard that I had to plant my feet to keep myself from falling off. Gazzam grabbed me by the back of the neck to support me.

"Master Raul! The vampires seem to be a little bit faster than us. They'll catch up to us soon."

"Then let's hurry!"

I had Gersham sit down near the gun seat, and Gazzam next to him. As expected of demons, they didn't budge under the pressure of the wind or movement of the car. The sense of stability he gave me was no joke.

"I'm starting the summoning."

I didn't know how much magic I had left. I didn't even know what level of summon I could bring forth at this point. If I failed, it was likely that I would faint even without summoning a weapon at all. Perhaps I would then be taken by the enemy...

"If I fail to summon anything, please get us through this."

"We will do our best."

"Then here goes nothing!"

I picked *that* out of the weapons database. A firearm, tripod, battery, ammunition belt, and box.

The M134 Minigun.

A beast of a weapon that fired four thousand rounds of 7.62mm ammunition per minute. It had six gun barrels that rotated and shot a large number of bullets loaded from the feeder. Including the battery, it weighed one hundred kilograms in total.

"Okay... Gazzam, keep me steady..."

I was beginning to lose consciousness due to magic depletion. I was at least able to complete preparations to run the wire from the

battery for power supply.

"Gersham...when the enemy gets close..."

"Yes?"

"Aim...this at them... Aim well..."

"I will."

"Press this button... It will shoot..."

"Understood."

"Gazzam...pour the potion...here."

"As you say."

"I leave it to—"

At that point, I slipped out of consciousness and into darkness.

. . . . . .

Gersham's Point of View

Master Raul lost consciousness, but thankfully he was strapped to Gazzam.

"Gazzam, we must protect Master Raul!" I said.

"I know. If it comes to it, we must be prepared to sacrifice our own lives to ensure his safety."

"For now, let's do as he said and give this a try."

I looked up at the vampire swarm. They were closer than before.

"The way they move... It's like a black dragon."

"Master Raul said to wait until they were near, then point this at the front of that swarm and push here," I said, pointing.

"He did, didn't he."

"Maybe something will come out of it, like those tubes that spit fire?"

"That's what I would guess."

"Lord Galdzin's son sure has an interesting power."

The root of his soul was definitely the same as Lord Galdzin's, but I felt a different, strange flow of magical power from him.

"They're here!"

"Good! Pour the potion!"

“Got it.”

I made sure that Gazzam had poured the potion where Master Raul had said, then I pressed the button.

The cylindrical rod began to spin with a loud whirring noise, then suddenly burst into flames! When the things called bullets hit the swarm, a swath of vampires scattered into flames and ashes.

“That’s terrifying!” I yelled over the whirring.

Before me, great numbers of the vampire horde were being scorched into dust. In the face of this weapon’s overwhelming violence, I felt fear.

“That woman is probably their leader,” Gazzam said as he popped the corks of several more potions.

“She seemed to want to capture Master Raul at any cost.”

The sky was full of vampires lighting up and scattering into ash. The black swarm that once looked like a dragon had already shrunk to a cloud less than five meters long. Suddenly, the weapon’s whirring stopped with a loud clink.

“Hey, Gazzam! The bullets stopped coming out!”

Gazzam looked closely at it. “Ah, the thing he called a ‘bullet belt’ is gone.”

But the swarm that had once seemed unending was now only a few meters in length.

“There are no potions left either,” he said.

“All right then. Let’s get Master Raul and this weapon back inside.”

“Raul!” Lady Iona cried, clinging to Master Raul as soon as we returned.

“He’s okay. He’s just sleeping due to magic depletion.”

“Thank goodness,” she sighed with relief, though I could still see her body was trembling.

Misetta, who was standing next to her, pointed at Master Raul. “But Raul is...”

Iona looked closely at what Misetta was pointing at. “What is...”

They were looking at Master Raul, who was still tied to Gazzam, in shock.

“This is...”

Master Raul's body was covered in marks.

. . . . . .

When I came to, I was surrounded by noise.

"Raul!"

Is that Iona yelling? It sounds like something has scared her.

"What is this?!" Iona seemed to be angrily accusing Gersham of something.

"Well, it's... I'm not sure. We didn't notice it until now either."

Huh? What are they talking about? Is there something wrong with my body? That's frightening to hear. Am I dying?

Then Misetta screamed.

Wh-What's happening?!

"Ugh! You!" Gog yelled.

"How dare you kill my thralls!" This was a new voice, high and haughty.

"Damn you!" Gersham yelled.

"Gazzam!"

What happened? What the hell's going on?!

"Guh! Let go!" Gazzam yelled.

Ah, I'm still tied to Gazzam. I felt the sensation of wind against my body. Was I outside? It felt like I was soaring through the air. *And now I'm falling?*

"Guh!" I heard a deep grunt as we hit the ground.

No, it felt like I had landed with a cushion beneath me. That was likely Gazzam using his body to protect me. I felt my body separate from his, and then I felt the coolness of the ground.

"Enough! You *will* give me the demon child!"

Oh, was that the voice of that female vampire?

I heard a whipping sound and a feminine grunt. "You obstinate red-headed ogre!" she yelled.

"*I'm* obstinate?! What about *you*?! Why are you so persistent in taking the child?"

"Ha! Why even ask that? There is no way I would tell you!" she replied, then suddenly went silent.

I figured as much. But...did the atmosphere change all of sudden? Why? It's almost as if something she's seen has her on the back foot.

"Eh? That child... Those marks... What are they?"

It seems like the vampire is shaken too. What the hell happened to me?

"That's right! If you understand what those are, then back off!" Gazzam came back at her.

"Even more reason not to! If I don't bring him back unharmed, I'll be turned to ash!"

"Who sent you?"

"What does that matter?!"

"Agh!" Gazzam cried in pain.

"Ah ha ha ha! You can barely stand! Do you really think you can win against these numbers?"

This vampire lady acts like she's completely untouchable! She really pisses me off! But...this is pretty bad for us, isn't it?

I heard footsteps running towards us.

"Hmm? If it isn't the little pup who was about to die. You still live?"

"I'm not about to die at your filthy hands."

Oh, it's Gog! He's alive! That's incredible news! But please don't die now!

I could hear the voices of different vampires coming from here and there, all around me.

"Gog!" Gazzam yelled. "You won't survive with your body like that! Get back!"

"No! I'm going to take her down," Gog said through gritted teeth.

"I dare you to try!" the vampire cackled.

There were suddenly the sounds of battle and blows being exchanged.

"Gog!"

"Damn it! Her thralls are getting in the way!" Gog yelled in a rage.

"They *are* a part of me, you know."

It sounded like Gog wasn't going to make it. But suddenly, I heard gunshots.

"Misetta, get back here now!" I heard Iona's voice say.

Oh, Misetta was helping Gog out of his pinch!

"Lady Iona, you can't! Maria, you too!" This time it was Gersham who sounded desperate.

"Ah ha ha ha ha ha!"

And there's the vampire lady again! Man, that's an annoying laugh! What are we going to do about her?!

Then even more gunshots rang out.

"Ahhhh!"

That was Misha screaming! *Please, body! Move!*

"I won't let you!" yelled Gersham.

"Oops! Is it such a good idea to move without thinking?" the vampire taunted.

"Gah!"

That was Gersham yelling! *Move! Move! Move! Move!*

"AHHHH!!!"

"Misetta!" yelled Gog.

Move! Move! Move! Move! Move! Move! Move! Move! Move! Move! Move! Move! Move!

"R-Raul?" said Iona.

"M-Master Raul!" This time it was Maria.

"Master Raul, why?" came Misha's muffled yell.

"Raul!" Misetta screamed.

Huh? Why are they all calling out to me? No, wait... Are they scared?

"Gazzam, Gog! Take everyone and run!"

"Guh!" Gog sounded like he was in pain as he began to run.

"Gahh!" Gazzam didn't seem happy about it either.

"We can't leave him!" Iona was panicking.

"We have to bring him with us!" Maria said.

"Save Master Raul first!" Misha piped in.

"I won't leave him!" yelled Misetta.

I see... The plan is to hand me over to the enemy and run away. Yeah, that's good. If we can save everyone that way, then I'm okay with that.

"What is—"

Hmm? The vampire seems to be surprised by something, but who else could be here? Who could it be?

Suddenly, the world erupted into a cacophony of gunfire and explosions!

What's happening? Are those guns? Explosions? How many weapons did I summon before? Wait, my body feels like it's on fire! What's going on? Who is it? Who is attacking?!

And within that chaos came an inhuman scream.

Eh? What is that weird screaming? Is it someone new? Am I going to die?!

Then...everything became silent at once.

Wake up, wake up, wake up!

Eventually, I felt my eyes open up just a little.

Thank you, body! I'm waking up! I need to find everyone and run!

But what awaited me was an ocean of fire. My face was burning from the heat of the flames, and I was floating in the sky.

"What...is this?"

The earth was scorched as if it had been bombed. Here and there, craters had been gouged from the earth, and the corpses of the vampire's thralls littered the ground.

Huh? What the hell happened?! Wh-What happened to my arm?!

Attached to my body in place of my arm was a Mk 19 grenade launcher!

It was a weapon that shot out 40x53mm grenades. It was a grenade machine gun, so to speak, and an exceptionally effective weapon against clustered groups of enemies. In addition, there were M134 Miniguns on both of my shoulders.

Eh?! What the hell is going on?! Weapons are growing out of my body!

And an AT4 rocket launcher was attached to my waist.

Hold on! This isn't a mecha anime! "I can see them! I can see the enemy—" Wait, that's not right!

My body floated down and landed on the ground of its own accord. The female vampire knelt before me and bowed, as did another vampire behind her. In the distance I could also see

Gersham, Gazzam, and Gog kneeling. Iona, Maria, Misha, and Misetta were lying on the ground, unmoving.

Mother! Maria! I tried to yell, but the voice that came out was...

"RrgyahruuuuAruuiii!!!"

What the hell?! Is that noise coming from my mouth?!

I tried to move towards Iona, but my consciousness rapidly faded away and I was dragged into darkness.

"Master Raul!" Gersham's voice cut through my fading consciousness.

U-Ugh. That was close. I had nearly blacked out. Little by little, I came to by focusing on Gersham's voice.

"Master Raul, I am so glad that you're safe!"

Everyone was recovering beside the M93 Fox.

I looked at Gersham. "You were able to slay the vampires?"

"No...it was *you*," he answered.

But how?

"Have you awoken, my lord?" asked a feminine voice.

"Huh?" I looked around to see who it had come from.

It was the aristocratic vampire from before, kneeling before me with another vampire.

Uwah?! There're still vampires around! Wh-Where's my gun?!

As I looked around for a weapon in a panic, the aristocratic-looking vampire said, "Do not be frightened, my lord. I have no intent to defy you any longer."

"Wh-Who are you?!"

"Whatever name I once had is no longer of value. I now wish only to be known as your servant."

I looked around again. The women of my party were all lying down, their slow breathing indicating that they were asleep. They were safe. Gazzam and Gog lay to the side, heavily wounded but still breathing. Gersham was leaning next to me.

Gersham is tough as nails, huh?

"Just what is going on?" I asked him.

"As you can see, the souls of demons compel them to obey the one they recognize as most powerful. In other words, these ones are bound to follow *you*," he replied with a look of awe in his eyes.

"What? No, I mean, is my family safe?"

"Yes, of course. They are safe."

"Thank goodness!"

But what about my body?! What was *that? It seemed like weapons were growing from all over my body! It was creepy and grotesque. But...they're gone now? That's good...*

"And who are these guys?"

"They are vampires."

"I can see that! I'm asking why they're just sitting here and not trying to kill us!"

This time, the aristocratic-looking female vampire replied. "Please forgive us for any rudeness we have shown you. We will wait here for the morning sun to consume us in flames. That is the only way we can atone for our sins against you."

"Huh? Gersham, what's wrong with her?"

Again, the vampire answered instead. "I did not know you were the Demon of Origin. To bare my fangs at you... Even if I did so because I was ordered to, the only path to forgiveness is by offering you our deaths."

"The Demon of Origin? What is that?"

"Since your awakening, we have been linked to you by the genealogy of our souls. We are now under your command." She said this all with her head lowered, refusing to look at me.

"You're now under my command? Since my 'awakening'?"

"Yes."

What are they talking about? What's this Demon of Origin? I don't get it.

I turned to Gersham. "How long have I been out for?"

"I believe it's been about half an hour."

I turned back to the aristocratic vampire. "What should I call you? What's your name?"

It would be hard to keep dealing with her if I didn't at least know her name.

"My name is unworthy of your ears."

"Come on, just tell me."

"Of course, and I am grateful for your benevolence. My name is

Sharmilia Mistroad.”

“And what about you?” I asked the other female vampire, who was bowing so low her head touched the ground.

Sharmilia lowered her head and answered, “This is one of my thralls. I do not wish for you to have to speak to someone so lowly.”

“This is getting really bothersome. Just tell me your name yourself.”

“M-Maquina, my lord!” she said, before quickly lowering her head again.

“C’mon, lift your head up. It’s hard to have a conversation like that.”

“Please, forgive me! It would be but an eyesore!”

“Oh, for heaven’s sake, lift your head!”

“Y-Yes!”

Maquina lifted her head. She was beautiful, with sharp facial features, almond-shaped eyes, and a pale face in stark contrast to her crimson lips. Both she and Sharmilia were the type whose beauty made them difficult to approach.

Are all vampires beautiful?

“Sharmilia, there was something I wanted to ask you. Was it you and your brood who turned everyone in that village into zombies?”

“Of course, my lord! It was our handiwork! I personally turned them all into undead,” she preened.

“‘Of course’? Why?! Why do you sound so proud of that?!” I couldn’t understand it.

“We found out that the humans we were looking for were being escorted by ogres, so we laid a trap by turning the people in that village into undead who could weaken the ogres.”

Turning an entire village into undead to set a trap... Like I thought, there was no way demons and humans could coexist peacefully.

“How did you find out that the ogres were escorting us?”

“We had been tracking them from Gladrom. We believed that they would lead us to you.”

“From Gladrom? Under whose orders?”

“King Lusemia’s.”

It was the name of the demon who had fallen in love with Galdzin and tried to take me as a baby.

"What did she tell you?"

"She told me to find and take the demon child from the ogres."

"Why would she ask you to do that?"

"She told me that the one she loved, a demon named Galdzin, would come to her if we kidnapped the child."

So all this is really just over a private matter?!

"I get it. For now, just sit there."

"Yes, my lord!"

I turned to Gersham. "How are Gazzam and Gog?"

"They are pretty wounded, but they should survive."

"Really? That's great news!"

"What should we do with them?" he asked, gesturing towards the vampires.

That's a good question. I mean, they didn't kill any of us, and it kind of feels like they're just as much at the mercy of this whole situation as we are.

"You two, if you really are prepared to die for what you did, why don't you work for me instead? Use your power to help me."

Sharmilia looked at me in surprise. "You want us to serve you?! Y-Y-You give us too great an honor!"

She once again bowed so low her head grazed the ground.

I turned back to Gersham. "I'd like to put them under my command. What do you think?"

"If that is your wish, my lord, then I see no problem with it."

"You don't need to call me 'my lord.' Just call me Raul like before."

"Yes, Lord Raul."

Close enough. I don't feel like anything has changed about me, so why do these demons seem so terrified?

I turned back to the vampires. "Okay then, you heard me. From now on, you're under my command! Got it?"

"My lord, thank you for your mercy. Please allow us to serve you however you wish. If I could be of use in any way, it would give my humble life purpose." While speaking, Sharmilia retreated with her head still grazing the ground.

"You said that you would burn up in the sun, right?"

"That is correct, my lord."

"In that case, the first thing I want you to do is get into the vehicle there."

"Yes, my lord."

"Why is mother and everyone else passed out?" I asked Gersham.

"It's because they heard the cry of the Demon of Origin. Usually that would be enough to kill a human, but I believe their lives were spared thanks to those things you asked them to place in their ears."

Wait, I *almost killed them? That can't be...*

"Anyway, let's get them into the vehicle."

Gersham carried them into the car, with Iona being laid down on the floor. I'd asked Gersham to do so because it afforded her ample space, and I was afraid that sitting her upright might put pressure on her stomach.

"Gazzam! Gog! Can you walk?" I asked them.

"Yes," said Gazzam.

"I'm fine," said Gog.

"Gersham, help Gog into the vehicle."

He straightened, said, "My lord!" and then went to Gog to help him stand.

I walked over to Gazzam and lent him my shoulder.

"You two," I said to the vampires. "Come in after us and sit on the floor. I'll make some changes so the sun won't get through."

"Yes, my lord!" they answered in unison.

With Sharmilia and Maquina sitting on the floor, I summoned light-blocking US Army tents.

"Wrap these around your entire bodies," I said, handing them the tents.

"Yes, my lord! We will do as you order."

"And I'll say it just in case: no violence!"

"You need not worry, my lord. We are only here to protect those you care about. We wouldn't dare try to harm them."

Weren't you just *trying to kill us all?*

"All right then. Gazzam, Gog, I'm sorry to ask this of you while you're in such a bad state, but keep an eye on them, will you?"

"As you order. What should we do if they do something?"

"I leave that to you. It's not like I can do anything about it myself."

Sharmilia said shakily, "I would never disobey you, my lord. Being but the lowest ranking member of your party is an honor. Please do not worry about me betraying you!"

"Okay, okay, I get it," I said, raising my hands in defeat. "In the meantime, make sure you cover yourself when the sun comes up."

The only person still able to move freely was Gersham, who I needed to steer the M93 Fox.

"I'm sorry to ask this of you while you're so tired."

"I'm not tired at all! Your wish is my command, Lord Raul."

"Then, come to the front with me."

Gersham shoved his big body into the driver's seat.

"Ready, Gersham? You use this here to steer left and right. Now, look at your feet. That one on the end is used to move us forward, and next to it is the one that stops us. I'll start the engine. Do you know how to get to Gladrom from here?"

"Of course."

"Then step on the pedal that moves us forward."

The M93 Fox began to drive through the moonlit meadows.

After about six hours of driving, it was morning.

"Lord Raul, we are approaching the Gladrom border," Gersham said.

"We're almost there?"

"Yes. This carriage is so fast. A horse-drawn carriage would have taken much longer."

"I get the feeling that we won't be able to ride this into the city," I said.

"It would stand out, wouldn't it?" Gersham replied. "I have never seen anything like it. But do not worry; if anyone complains, we'll dispose of them."

Saying that just makes me worry even more! Don't go around "disposing" of people for things like that! Unless they're enemies, I mean. Even so, I think we should get out and cross the border on

foot, just to be safe.

"Gersham, I want to get rid of this vehicle. Is there anywhere convenient for that, like a volcano or something?"

Gersham looked surprised. "Why would we get rid of something this wonderful?"

"Well, we're getting close to running out of this thing called 'fuel,' and it's going to stop working then."

"Oh, I think I understand. But there's nothing between here and the border like that. No lakes or...volcanoes."

"What about a forest?"

"There is one."

"Then let's head there."

Gersham turned the steering wheel to the right, driving off-road and into a meadow. After driving for a while, a forest came into view.

"Here it is. There seems to be monster trails too."

"Pull over."

The M93 Fox stopped at the entrance to a monster trail leading into the forest. Large trees had been knocked over, creating a path. Strangely, the trees that had been felled were pressed deep into the ground, as if they had been steamrolled.

"Gersham, is this really a monster trail? What's with all the trees pressed into the ground?"

"Well, I'd guess that these are the tracks of a venomous red viper."

"What's that?"

Gersham stepped out of the M93 Fox and looked for something in the trees. He seemed to have found what he was looking for, as he brought over something that had been stuck in a tree. It was a scale, gigantic and ominously red.

"This is one of its scales."

"Why is it so big?!"

It was much bigger than my head.

"It's from a giant, venom-spewing serpent. But this is pretty big even for that species. It must be the Master of this forest."

"It must be huge..."

"Perhaps, but its poison is even more dangerous than its size."

"What happens if we continue down this trail?"

"It would be best to not do that," he said seriously.

Even for an ogre, that would be a bad idea.

"Okay, let's wake everyone up first."

I went around the back and opened the rear hatch. Cold air entered the car.

"Eep!"

Ah, was that one of the vampires? Oh, it must be because of the sunlight.

I went inside and closed the hatch.

"My bad," I said to the two lumps of canvas that were the vampires.

"N-No need to worry about us, my lord," Sharmilia said with a trembling voice.

"Maria?"

I put my hand on Maria's shoulder and shook her lightly.

"Yes...?"

Maria opened her eyes ever so slightly and looked to see who had shaken her awake. She suddenly jumped up, blinking.

"Master Raul! Are you okay? Do you have any injuries? What happened to the vampires?" she questioned while looking me over for anything out of place.

"It's okay. The vampires have been taken care of. We even turned two of them to our side."

"To our side?" she asked, her eyes wide. She looked completely lost.

"Don't be too surprised, but...you see those two big lumps of canvas? Those are our vampires." I pointed at the floor where the vampires were wrapped up.

"What the—?!"

"It's okay."

"A-Are you sure?"

Maria looked at me long and hard.

What is it? That's embarrassing. You're making me blush...

"Master Raul...you've grown again, haven't you?"

"Have I?"

"Yes." She looked at me with pride in her eyes. "The way you talk... No, not just that. You are beginning to *look* like a man too."

Now that she mentioned it, I did feel a little different. It was a weird feeling that was hard to describe, but...it was almost like something violent was growing inside of me.

"I do feel like I've gotten stronger."

"Your body looks completely different."

"I see..."

I'd have to look in the mirror to see for myself. While we talked, the others had begun to awake as well.

"Raul? You've grown up again, haven't you?" Iona asked.

"Yeah, I feel weird, like my body is on fire."

"And your voice sounds so grown up now," she said, laughing gently.

She gave me a dazzling smile. Ah, there was something soothing about seeing a smile like that on a beautiful face.

"Huh? Is that Master Raul?"

Misha seemed to have noticed my change too.

"Lord Raul, you have tremendous magical power," Gazzam said stiltedly through his pain. "It seems you truly *are* the reincarnation of the Demon of Origin."

Actually, I'm just the reincarnation of Takayama Junya, a boring thirty-one-year-old office worker who happened to be a military otaku and a virgin.

"Gersham, are we in danger here?" I asked.

"It's relatively safe. The presence of the red viper keeps other magical beasts at bay. We'll be safe here until sundown," he answered.

"Will the red viper not attack us?"

"It only moves at night."

"Then we should be okay. Let's pitch our tent here!"

We got off the M93 Fox and I summoned a military tent. It covered 30 square meters, large enough to accommodate everyone and be used as a command post. Since we were setting it up beside a forest, I summoned one with a camouflage pattern.

"The vehicle we've been moving around in is nearly out of fuel, meaning that it'll stop moving soon. I think we should get rid of it, then proceed across the Gladrom border on foot. The vehicle will disappear in thirty days, but I don't want it to be discovered by anyone chasing us. Would it be safe to dispose of in these woods?"

"I doubt humans would poke around a red viper nest."

"Good. Then I'll leave it here. And...I also wanted to talk about what we should do with the vampires."

"The vampires?"

"Now that they're under my command, I want them to do something for me. They'll be destroyed if they're out in the sun, right?"

"You'd have to ask them for the details," Gersham said. He didn't seem to know much either.

"Then I'll go ask them directly," I told him, and got into the M93 Fox with Gersham.

"Are you awake?" I asked the canvas lumps.

"Y-Yes, my lord," came Sharmilia's voice from under the light-blocking tent canvas. "We're doing just fine."

"We're going to get rid of the vehicle and cross the border on foot. So what will you two do when the sun rises? I want to help you, but I don't know how."

"If we are in the way, you should simply leave us to our fates. We will gladly burn in the sun to lighten your burden."

"Like. I. Said. I want to help you. You're my subordinates now."

"What a kind heart you have, my lord, even though we're causing you so much trouble! If it pleases you, could we have a little of your blood?"

"My blood?"

"If we learn the scent of your blood, we can come to you no matter where you are."

"I see. Just a minute, then."

I summoned my combat knife and sliced the blade across my hand. Blood dripped slowly from the wound.

Suddenly, the vampires' breathing became heavy and almost violent.

I took a step back. “Hey now! Don’t go losing your sanity on me!”

“If you do anything to Master Raul, I will cut you down,” Gersham said, grabbing his sword.

“I’m fine,” came Sharmilia’s voice.

Maquina added, “I’m fine too, my lord.”

I stuck my hand through the gap in the tent and let the blood drip out.

“Oh... It’s incredible.” Sharmilia’s voice was tinged with ecstasy.

“Haa, haa. Beautiful!” Maquina sounded like she was in a daze.

Wet sounds started to come from under the canvas as they licked up my blood.

“How’s that? Have you memorized the scent?”

“Yes! Oh, and it’s delicious! What a treat to partake in my lord’s blood!”

“And even with a thrall like me!”

“So... What should we do for you?” I asked.

“Keep these tents wrapped around us, and please bury us in the ground,” Sharmilia answered.

“Bury you?! Is that safe?”

“We have a place where we usually sleep, but when there’s no other choice, we sleep under the ground. Please bury us, and do not worry.”

“We’ll do that then. Wait just a little longer for us to dig a hole for you.”

Gersham and I moved to leave the vehicle.

Sharmilia’s drawl followed us out. “Please do err on the deeper side.”

“Got it.”

Outside of the M93 Fox, I summoned five shovels of the kind used by the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force.

“Hey, Maria! Misha! Come over here!”

I handed shovels to them, as well as Gersham and Gazzam. I put them into position, then got into my own place.

“We’re going to dig a deep hole here, so follow my lead. All right, everyone! Let the digging begin!”

The ogres dug as quickly as a backhoe excavator! Before we

knew it, we had a hole three meters deep.

"Okay, stop digging!"

The group answered with a loud affirmative in unison.

"Let's get out of the hole. Gersham, toss the vampires in here! And hurry! We don't want them to burn."

"Yes!"

The ogres threw the vampires, still wrapped in their tents, into the hole.

"All right! Now bury them!"

The five of us proceeded to cover the vampires in dirt.

Huh... This feels like a scene from some crime drama where they get rid of a dead body. I feel like I'm doing something bad.

After making sure the vampires were properly buried, the next step was to get rid of the M93 Fox in the woods.

"Okay, we'll be back soon," I called out to the group.

"Be careful, Raul," said Iona.

"I will."

We drove the M93 Fox for about a kilometer along the red viper trail.

"Okay, Gersham, I think this is far enough."

"Yes, my lord."

We stopped the car and got out.

"But, this trail really is incredible, isn't it?" I said.

I remembered this feeling from my previous life: a trail made through a rotting forest by a large insect.

"Let's get going," I said, turning to head back down the trail.

But suddenly, Gersham turned to look deeper into the forest. "Lord Raul, we need to get out of here now!"

"Huh? What's going on?"

"It's coming."

"What?"

"The red viper. And it seems angry!"

What?! No way! Why? Wasn't it supposed to be nocturnal?!

Gersham and I ran as fast as we could to where everyone was.

"Gazzam, Gog! Get everyone as far away from the woods as possible!" Gersham yelled.

“What happened?”

“The red viper is after us!”

“What?!”

“It’ll be bad if it sprays poison on us! We need to protect everyone!”

“Right!”

Gog came out of the tent and bent over. As he growled, his muscles began to ripple rapidly and he started to shake violently.

With a roar, his body swelled. Claws grew from his digits, his face formed a snout, and his armor came off. His body changed, almost like someone was applying special effects makeup to him. Gog had soon become a giant wolf with a silver mane. He then lay down in front of Iona.

“Please ride him,” said Gersham.

“Okay,” Iona answered.

“You too, Misetta,” I said.

“Y-Yes!”

And so Iona and Misetta rode on Gog’s back.

“Misha, come over here,” said Gazzam.

When she reached him, he bent down to let her ride piggyback.

“Maria, you’re with me!” Gersham said, carrying her on his back.

“Now, run!” I said.

When I gave the signal, everyone began to run towards the main road that crossed through the meadows. The ogres’ speed was a sight to behold.

“I can see the road!” Misetta called out in a loud voice.

“Let’s stop for a moment!”

As I said that, Gersham and Gazzam stopped to look back at the forest. It seemed calm, but then—

Boom!

Deep in the forest, a tree was suddenly launched into the air, and a giant snake lifted its head above the trees.

“Here it comes!” Gersham yelled.

“Maria! Misha! You two run from here! Gersham, Gazzam, and I will try to stop it here! Gog, take everyone and run. Keep them safe!”

Gog barked an affirmative.

"I will not leave you behind!" Maria yelled.

"I'll be fine. Get far enough away that we can fight without having to worry about you guys, okay?"

"O-Okay," she said.

Gog took off running with Maria and Misha on his back as well.

Gersham turned to me. "Lord Raul, you need to get away with them!"

"I'll cover you two from a distance," I said.

"Understood. Stay out of range of its poison as much as possible. Even we are not safe from it."

"Got it."

I moved about a hundred meters back from them. With a bang, the red viper came flying out of the forest, scattering trees from the tree line. I could feel its anger.

"He's huge!"

Its girth was close to that of a jumbo jet. The red-and-black speckled pattern was ominous and exactly what you'd expect of a poisonous snake. It seemed to have found us.

"It's so angry, it's acting against its nocturnal nature..."

But there was no time to worry about that. Gersham and Gazzam had already begun to engage with it. The viper lifted its head into the air to shake them off.

"All right!" I yelled.

I summoned a Barrett M82A1 anti-materiel rifle.

The viper's skin was likely thick, but I summoned this gun because I believed it would get the job done. I lay down on my stomach, summoned and loaded armor-piercing bullets, then looked through the scope. The viper was moving around, but its large body made for an easy target. It looked like the ogres had only managed to give it some small superficial wounds. The purple substance it was spewing was probably its venom.

"Hmm... Where should I aim? It would be hard to get a headshot with it moving around like that. I'll aim at the body for now."

I took aim with my Barrett M82. The viper was about four hundred meters away—an easy shot. I fired three times. The Barrett

M82 had a powerful recoil, but that was good. A powerful recoil meant a powerful shot. The viper let out a terrible scream and began to flail.

"So this *can* penetrate its skin. And it looks like it hurts...but not enough to kill it."

Gersham and Gazzam stood back while the viper thrashed about.

"One more time then."

I let out four shots, each one sending a powerful recoil deep into my body.

The viper let out another horrible scream.

"Yep, looks like it hurts all right."

The viper was writhing in pain. I looked through the scope again. It was raising its head... Was it looking at me?

Our eyes met, and suddenly it was moving towards me at a breakneck speed.

"Shiiit!!!"

I picked up the Barrett and started running.

"It's fast!"

I had summoned smart land mines before the fight and scattered them here and there in case this happened. When the viper passed over them, they exploded...but it shrugged them off like they were firecrackers.

"Uwaaahh!"

That was when Gersham and Gazzam caught up. They jumped onto its back and thrust their swords into it. The viper stopped and tried to shake them off, but they clung to their swords stuck in its body. I dumped the Barrett and summoned a Browning M2 heavy machine gun.

Brrah, brrah!

There was a splatter of blood as the skin around its neck began to fray. It screamed in pain.

He's glaring at me again. He must think I'm the biggest threat of the three of us.

It opened its mouth and turned towards me, then spat! It was spitting venom at me!

Oh...I'm going to die.

Then I was suddenly flying through the air. I realized that I was being carried by Gersham, who had grabbed me and jumped to avoid the attack.

"Lord Raul! Aim for the moment it spits its venom!"

"Got it."

I summoned a rocket launcher. The viper glared at us, then lifted its head and opened its mouth.

"Got you!" I yelled.

I shouldered the AT4 and launched a rocket into its open mouth. There was a large explosion as the projectile burst through the back of the red viper's skull, sending spinal fluid spraying. It stopped moving and fell to the ground with a dull thud. Its head was a bloody mess.



"Lord Raul! Are you okay?"

"Y-Yeah. Is it dead?"

"It is."

Once again, I felt my body getting stronger, brimming with power. The snake's carcass was as thick as a passenger plane. And from what I could see, it was probably somewhere near a hundred meters in length.

I looked at Gersham. "What should we do with the snake?" I asked, bemused.

"We should retrieve its magic stone first."

"Its magic stone? What's that?"

"It is the core of a magical beast. There are many ways to make use of it."

"Really? Do all monsters have a magic stone?"

"If it's a monster, it has a stone."

"Do red bears have them?"

"They should."

Really?! Huh. I didn't know. Well, it was Maria and Misha who skinned and dismembered the corpses.

"What about fang rabbits?"

"Technically, they do, but most smaller monsters are so fragile that theirs shatter too easily to take."

"But, a red viper's stone? That's some high-quality material. I don't know the market price on this continent, but the stronger the monster is, the more valuable its scales, skin, and meat will be."

How in the world are we supposed to transport the meat of such a ridiculously large monster?

"Well, for the time being, let's just recover the magic stone."

"Allow me," Gersham said.

Gersham peeled off the viper's scales and began carving into its flesh. Then, suddenly, he plunged his entire upper body inside.

"Ewww!"

I drew back in disgust as he pushed himself in farther. Then something began to protrude from the snake's split belly, being pushed out little by little. About halfway out, it fell and rolled out with a thud. It was a large rock, a bit smaller than a *kei* car. It

pulsed and glowed like the beating of a heart.

Gersham pulled his body out with a plop. "*This* is a magic stone."

"It's glowing," I said, mesmerized.

"It's a pretty big one. It has magic stored inside."

"It's incredible."

"Yes. That viper was the Master of the forest, after all."

"So this must be pretty rare."

"Indeed."

But there was something else that I was more concerned about. Gresham was slick with blood and greasy with fat from being inside the snake. He smelled. He was standing next to me, covered in gore and pointing at the stone proudly. The women, who had rejoined us after the battle, were looking at him in absolute disgust.

"Uh... Mother, could I ask a favor?" I asked Iona.

"What is it?" she answered.

"Could you wash Gersham off with your water magic?"

"Yes, of course."

"You needn't trouble yourself," Gersham said with a confused expression.

"Yes, we do," I said to him firmly.

"O-Oh. My apologies."

"When you've been washed, change into this."

I summoned a JGSDF Camouflage Combat Uniform Type II.

"Thank you for your kindness! Then..."

Gersham suddenly began to take off his clothes in front of everyone. Iona didn't bat an eye, but Maria and Misha turned away with red faces. Soon, only a loincloth preserved Gersham's dignity.

He was muscular, much more than Gram was.

"Maria and Misha have to see this too!" I said excitedly.

"No, thank you!" they both answered immediately.

Gog, who had transformed back into his more human form at some point, was laughing his ass off, but even he was only wearing a few pieces of armor dangling from around his neck. Well, that wasn't the only thing on him that was dangling.

Misetta let out a small yelp, and her face went tomato red.

"Hey now!" I yelled at Gog.

“When I transformed, my clothes ripped,” he said, looking apologetic.

“Then you put these on too,” I said and handed him a second combat uniform.

Iona poured water onto Gersham, removing the gore he was covered in...but the water pressure was too much, and Gersham’s loincloth slipped down.

Oh, wow.

“Lady Iona, thank you for washing me,” Gersham said.

He dried himself and pulled on his combat uniform. It was surreal seeing an ogre wearing the uniform of a Self-Defense Forces official, but he looked good in it. Gog had also put on his uniform, but...how should I say it...he looked cute. And I had noticed something when I was summoning the uniforms. My database was now divided by item categories, and when viewed as a list, each was marked with a level.

```
Land Weapons: LV3
Air Weapons: LV0
Maritime Weapons: LV0
Space Weapons: LV0
Offensive Weapons: LV4
Defensive Weapons: LV1
Weapons of Mass Destruction: LV1
Nuclear Weapons: LV0
Biological Weapons: LV0
Chemical Weapons: LV0
Optical Weapons: LV0
Acoustic Weapons: LV2
Antipersonnel Weapons: LV4
Anti-materiel weapons: LV3
Nonlethal Weapons: LV1
Military Facilities: LV2
Combat Equipment: LV2
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Ohh! This is amazing! I can see the level now! Is it related to how often I've used different weapons? Actually, what does the level mean in the first place?

"Raul?"

Iona's voice brought me back to reality.

"Wh-What is it, mother?"

"You scared me. You suddenly stopped moving. Are you okay?"

"Ah, I'm sorry. I was just thinking."

"Well, we'd better start getting ready to move," she urged.

Gog ears perked at that. "Then I'll transform."

"Eh?! Wait a minute, Gog!" I hurried to stop him, "Could you come with me into the tent?"

"Yes, Lord Raul?"

Gog and I headed into the tent, which then swelled and fell apart. Standing in the wreckage was Gog in wolf form. I had him take off his uniform first, but summoning it had been pointless.

"Let's go," I said to the group.

Gersham started to walk, but I called out to him.

"Wait a moment! We can't just leave that where it is," I said, pointing at the remains of the red viper. "And it'd be wasteful, so let's take what we can."

He looked at it and replied, "I suppose you're right."

Gersham, Gazzam, and I peeled off the scales, which Gog in wolf form carried to Maria and Misha, who stacked them up. I summoned three load-carrying large backpacks and two patrol bags. They were ridiculously large backpacks used by the US military, as well as their compact version. We filled these to the brim, and I figured it was time to dispose of the snake's corpse. I summoned a wheeled cart used by the SDF to pull the magic stone.

"All right, everything looks good! Please take these and place them around the carcass."

I summoned twenty cardboard boxes of C4 plastic explosives and twenty boxes of TNT.

"I want you to place these at equal intervals around its body."

Gersham, Gazzam and I set out to do that.

"All right!" I said when the job was done. "That looks about right."

I summoned detonators and a remote switch to detonate them, and inserted the fuses into the C4 explosives.

"Now, everyone, grab one of these bags. Maria and Misha, could you take the smaller ones?"

"Yes, Master Raul!" they answered.

"Then, Lady Iona and Misetta, please get on Gog's back," Gersham requested.

About five hundred meters away from the red viper carcass, I gave instructions to everyone.

"Stop!"

They all stopped and looked at me.

"Everybody, get down on the ground where you are."

Everyone got onto their stomachs. Gog covered Iona and Misetta to shield them.

"Three! Two! One!" I shouted.

I pressed the detonation switch.

Boom!

The red viper was blown up in a neat sequence.

Ah, I've seen something like this before. A video where they blew up a big bridge to dispose of it.

We watched the viper explode, then departed again.

We continued our march for two days, but never encountered the enemy. If I had known, I would have been happy to continue using a vehicle, but hindsight is twenty-twenty I suppose. We just had to make do.

"We're approaching the border now," Gersham told us.

"We're almost there," I sighed. This journey had begun to wear us all down.

But suddenly, Gersham stopped us. "Hmm? Stop for a moment. Something is wrong," he said, looking at something in the distance.

"What do you see?" I asked.

The three ogres stared ahead with their eyes fixed on the road. I summoned military binoculars and looked in that direction. Several small cloth tents were set up near what appeared to be the border.

There are men wearing plate mail. And...what are those?! They look like four-legged birds. There's five of them.

I handed the binoculars to Gersham. "Look through these and tell me what you see."

"They have griffins," he said with a huff. "So *that's* what we were sensing. But why are they with humans? And the way they're behaving, it's almost like they've been tamed..."

Gersham handed the binoculars to Gazzam.

"You're right," he said. "Why would notoriously proud beasts like griffins obey humans?"

"Do they happen to be the Gladrom border patrol?" I asked them. But that small sliver of hope was dashed immediately.

"No, their border patrol is usually only one or two guards stationed in that wooden hut there." Gersham pointed out the structure. "And they certainly do not usually have magical beasts in tow. I've never seen anything like this."

"Of course. Then I guess that means those aren't Gladromite soldiers." I sighed. Of course it wouldn't be that easy.

"Indeed not. Gladrom wouldn't use a force like *this* just to watch their border," Gersham confirmed.

Then there was no doubt. I turned to Iona. "Mother, it's an ambush."

"It certainly looks like it."

I called everyone to assemble.

"Do you think it's those birdlike beasts that let them get here ahead of us?" I asked Iona.

"I'm sure of it. They could only have moved so fast by flying through the air."

"What flags are they flying at their camp? Use these to look for them," I said, handing the binoculars to Iona.

"That's the crest of the Bargius Empire," she said.

Well, that figured. But when I looked over the enemy's position again, I noticed something strange. My blood ran cold.

"Gersham? The griffins seem to be looking at us..."

"They've probably noticed your presence," he said calmly.

"My presence?"

The soldiers meanwhile were sitting around drinking and playing cards.

"It doesn't look like the soldiers have noticed anything though."

"We're well out of range for humans to be able to see us," said Gazzam.

"I can't see anything without this," Iona said, gesturing to the binoculars in her hands.

"Okay. Mother and Misetta, you stay with Gog about fifty meters behind us and hide in the meadows. Gersham, Gazzam, and Misha, head into the meadow on the right. Maria and I will attack from here."

This was a perfect opportunity for combat training. So far we'd had to rely on the ogres to protect us, but we needed to learn to fight on our own as well.

"Gersham, protect us if the enemy comes, but I want you to stand down until things get dangerous."

"Yes, Lord Raul."

I summoned a 12.7mm M2 heavy machine gun and held it out to Misha. "Do you know how to shoot this?"

"Yes, I do." She took it in both hands, but looked nervous.

"If they come for us, you have permission to fire. It's all the better if you hit them, but even just shooting should help us by putting pressure on them." I gave her a reassuring smile.

"I-I understand."

I handed her the binoculars as well. "This will help you to see what the enemy is up to."

Iona, Misetta, and Gog then quietly slipped into the meadow.

Finally, I turned to Maria. "What's the enemy's situation?"

"They still haven't noticed us," she said, putting down the other binoculars I had summoned for her.

"Then let's advance to a position we can hit them from. Stay low."

"I'm right behind you."

We crouched down and moved forward, stopping when we were about four kilometers away from the enemy.

I put my hand up to stop her. "Okay, this looks like a good spot."

"But...aren't we still too far away from them?" Maria said.

Her confusion was understandable. At this distance, we still couldn't see the enemy with the naked eye. Though the griffins had sensed us, the soldiers still seemed unaware of our presence.

"Take this," I said, summoning a McMillan TAC-50 sniper rifle.

"We have the advantage of the high ground. You can tell because you can see across the enemy's encampment, right?"

"I suppose so," Maria answered.

"The only thing we *can't* see is what's behind the tents."

"That's right."

"Okay, now look through this," I said, pointing at the rifle's scope.

Maria peeked through it and exclaimed, "They look like they're so close!"

"Right. We'll shoot them from here," I said.

"I see."

"Use your magic. It goes without saying, but with it your aim will be better than mine."

I quickly walked Maria through how to operate the bolt on the rifle and had her put some rounds in her pocket. Then I summoned another McMillan TAC-50 sniper rifle for myself. We both looked through our scopes at the enemy.

"What's the situation now?" I asked.

"One of the soldiers just walked behind a tent. Ah...he's urinating, isn't he?"

"Okay. He stepped away to be out of sight of the group. This is the perfect opportunity to show you how to use this gun. If you want to shoot him in the head from this distance, you'll need to aim a bit higher with the shot. Also, the wind is blowing from right to left, so make a slight adjustment in that direction. Now, take your time to envision using your magic to guide the bullet into his temple."

"Understood." She then took a moment to concentrate and slightly adjust her aim. "I'm ready."

"Fire."

Blam!



One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven seconds later, the urinating man collapsed, blood spurting from his temple.

Holy crap, she's good! She really hit him from this distance!

"On to the next one," I said.

No one had even noticed that the urinating man had fallen.

"You see the one leaning against the tent and napping? Aim for him."

"Understood."

"Do you need instructions?"

"No need," she said coolly.

She took a slow breath, and once again fine-tuned her aim millimeter by millimeter.

Blam!

"A hit," I said.

"Yes."

I looked through my scope to see the sleeping man now gushing blood from the top of his head.

"Next, the one lying down in the tent."

"Yes."

She aimed at the person lying in the tent who was reading something.

Blam!

The book fell out of the soldier's hands and onto their face. Were it not for the blood flowing from their head, they could have been mistaken for someone just sleeping.

"I hit them," she said quietly.

Holy crap! Maria is a deadeye! She took out three people four kilometers away in seconds!

"It doesn't look as if anyone has noticed yet."

"Good."

We quietly watched the enemy.

How many are left? There are four playing cards and laughing. There are two standing guard in the middle of the road, and one coming out of the tent to check on the griffins. How many are in the tents?

"One's moving," said Maria.

"Yes, but the two watchmen near the griffins will notice if you take him out. Wait a little longer."

"Understood."

The silence continued as we carefully observed the remaining soldiers. Eventually, one of the card players got up and started to walk towards where the soldier had been urinating.

"Maria, he's next."

"Yes."

Blam!

The soldier saw the fallen man and began to look around, but a bullet soon slammed right between his eyes.

"A hit," Maria said.

Such technique was only possible by both understanding how to calculate the shot and using magic. Maria again looked through the scope with a tremendous amount of focus.

"The situation?" I asked.

"Nobody has been alerted yet."

"Next, let's take down one of the watchmen in the road."

"Yes."

"Fire."

Blam!

Maria had begun to load the next round before the bullet even hit. The watchman fell over in a sprawling position.

"The other guy noticed," Maria said.

"We'll need to hit multiple targets at once, so I'll shoot too," I said.

"Yes."

I got my rifle ready. The soldiers who had been playing cards had seen the watchman fall and were getting up to rush to him.

"Aim for the card players. At this distance, aiming will mostly be only slight adjustments."

"Yes."

We aimed our rifles at the three soldiers running to the fallen watchmen.

Blam!

Maria was already loading her next shot. Her bullet pierced a

soldier's temple, while mine hit one in the shoulder, knocking him down.

"I missed," I said.

Maria, having finished loading, delicately used her finger to move the barrel of the gun to aim at the fleeing one.

Is she trying to hit a moving target?

Blam!

He fell, blood spurting from his temple.

Incredible...

"One's coming out of a tent," Maria said. "Getting ready to shoot."

She didn't need instructions from me anymore.

Blam!

The soldier, not knowing where they were being attacked from, turned around only to be hit in the back of the head and sent falling forward. Three more came out of the tents.

"I didn't realize there were so many of them," I said.

"Preparing to fire," Maria answered.

Blam!

One of the soldiers who had left their tent had approached the fallen soldier at the entrance and crouched down to check on him, but he immediately went limp, collapsing face-first onto his fallen comrade. The bullet must have passed through his brain.

"The one who was checking on the griffins is gone," Maria said while scanning the enemy camp.

I quickly looked at the griffins and noticed one was indeed missing. I grabbed Maria's binoculars and looked to the sky to see a griffin flying towards us with a knight on its back.

"Well, let's focus on the soldiers still on the groun—"

Blam!

Maria was already reloading her next shot after taking down one of the men in the camp. The two remaining soldiers in the camp had been trying to escape on griffins, but one fell, blood spurting from his temple, just when he'd put his hand on the beast.

"One left," Maria said.

The remaining soldier had jumped onto a griffin and was trying to take off in a panic. Even Maria wouldn't be able to hit a flying target.

“They’ve escaped,” she said.

“They’ll come to us. Let’s get to Gersham and the others quickly.”

“Then we’re off.”

We ran to where Misha was waiting with her 12.7mm M2 machine gun.

“They’re following us,” I informed her. “Two soldiers riding griffins.”

“But Lord Raul,” Gersham began, looking uncomfortable, “could I ask that we wait before firing?”

“Why?”

“I don’t feel any anger coming from the griffins. Rather, what I sense from them is more like affection.”

“Affection? What are you talking about?”

“I don’t think they wish to fight us.”

But...why? Are these not terrifying beasts?

“If they do want to fight, we’ll handle it. How about we just wait and see?” Gersham asked.

“All right. Misha, get ready just in case.”

“Understood.” Misha held her gun to the sky.

I saw the griffin coming down towards us.

“A-Are we sure it isn’t going to attack?” I asked Gersham nervously.

“It won’t...probably.”

With the loud beating of its wings, the griffin landed in front of us.

“Hey! Listen to me! Hey!”

The soldier riding the griffin was shouting at it in a panic. In the meantime, the other griffin descended with its own rider.

“Damn it! Hey, I’m telling you to fly *that* way! Do you hear me?!”

This second soldier was panicking too. Suddenly, the first griffin took its rider’s head in its mouth and tossed him aside. There was a snapping sound, and the soldier fell to the ground lifeless.

“H-Hey! What the hell are you—”

The other soldier was cut off when his griffin bit his head. It shook him hard before tossing him aside.

“Wha...?!” I was taken aback.

The soldier hit the ground with a thud, and the two griffins walked towards me.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa!" I tried to take a step back.

But before I could, the first griffin rubbed its cheek against me, while the other playfully nipped at my head.

Uh...you just snapped a soldier's neck with this mouth. Am I going to be okay?

"They seem to be very fond of you," Gersham said with a chuckle.

"F-Fond of me?" I asked, staying as still as I could.

"That's right. Griffins are proud and noble creatures with a grand lineage. I am sure that they instinctively know that you are their better."

"How is that possible?" I asked.

"It's encoded into their blood. They recognize you as the Demon of Origin," he answered.

Whatever the case, I wished that they would stop licking my face. I was getting sticky with griffin saliva.

Suddenly, there was groaning coming from where the soldiers had been tossed. It looked like one of them was still alive. His right leg and left wrist were bent at unnatural angles, and he looked like he was unable to move. I went over to the soldier and started questioning him.

"Why did you set up an ambush here?"

"I'm just here on orders! I don't know why we're here. We were only told that if a beautiful noblewoman passed through, we were to capture her."

"Who gave the orders?!"

The soldier was silent. It seemed like he was unwilling to betray his superiors.

"Tell me!"

Still no answer came.

"Maria!" I called out.

Maria walked over and fired two shots into his broken right leg with a silenced P320 handgun.

The soldier screamed in pain. "I'll talk! I'll talk!"

"Who was it?" I asked him again slowly.

"C-Commander Gruis Peintos of the Fourth Imperial Battalion."

"Where is this commander now?"

He gave no answer.

"Maria?"

This time she shot him twice in his left thigh.

He screamed. "I'll talk! I'll talk!" he said between deep breaths. "Please, no more!"

"Where is he?!"

"In Gladrom! He's setting up camp in Gladrom!"

"I see. How many soldiers does he have?"

"One thousand. There are one thousand soldiers in each battalion."

Gersham was agitated. "A thousand! If you're lying, I'll cut out your tongue!"

"I'm telling the truth! We just got here a few days ago!"

"How did a thousand men get here that quickly?"

"Dragons! We flew here on dragons. And for some reason, our numbers kept growing!"

Gersham had a puzzled look on his face. "Why would dragons allow humans to ride them?"

"I don't know..."

"Maria."

She fired two shots into his upper left arm.

"G-Gahhhhh! How can you call yourselves human?!" the soldier screamed.

Maria said nothing and shot him once in the right arm.

The soldier screamed through his tears. "O-Okay...I'll talk! I'll talk! It's because of High Priest Abdul! He was given power by God!"

"A priest named Abdul? Is he the ruler of Bargius?"

"N-No! He is a high priest from the Holy Land of Fattoria. He quelled the magical beasts in the West, then invaded the Kingdom of Eucrit."

Is he saying that it wasn't Bargius that invaded Eucrit, but Fattoria?

"What else do you know?"

"That's it! I swear to God!"

“One more question... Did your Fourth Battalion invade Eucrit?”

“Yes. We’re a part of the Empire’s vanguard. I had no choice but to follow orders!”

After hearing that, I stood up. “Maria?”

Maria put her gun right between the soldier’s eyes.

“W-Wait! Please! Please don’t! I have a family!” the soldier cried.

“So did I,” Maria answered.

She pulled the trigger.

Chapter Four: The Conquest of Gladrom

We were flying. A boy, a pregnant woman, some maids, a little girl, and three ogres were all flying through the sky on the backs of griffins. This could only be called an adventure. The soldier we'd interrogated said that there were a thousand imperial soldiers in the city of Gladrom, but we decided to scout out the situation ourselves before making any further plans.

"Gersham said that the enemy hadn't been in Gladrom when he left, right?" I asked Maria, who was riding the same griffin as me.

"Yes. He seemed to be surprised by what the soldier said."

"I guess *this* is how the enemy was able to move so fast..."

"It's very likely," she said after some thought. "These griffins are fast, indeed. They could probably travel from here to Bargius in only a few days."

I had been taken aback by just how fast the griffins were. The force of the wind was nearly suffocating if I didn't bend down.

Maria looked towards the horizon. "Oh! You can see the city up ahead."

I looked towards the city. Gladrom's topography was rather peculiar; the city was surrounded by steep cliffs, almost as if it had been built in a hollow carved out of a mountain.

"A city enclosed in rock," said Maria in awe.

"Yeah, it's a real sight to behold. We'll need to get off the griffins before we enter," I said.

We and the ogres had decided to disembark in the forest just outside of Gladrom. Almost as if they had sensed my thoughts, the five griffins landed gently in the forest and knelt to let us off. Gersham jumped off his griffin and came to my side.

"What do we do now?" I asked him.

“First, I think we should do some reconnaissance.”

“Right.”

“Then I can head to the city and sneak in,” said Gazzam, walking up behind him.

“Well, until we’re sure what’s going on, we won’t be able to make a concrete plan,” I said, rubbing my chin in thought. “But we should wait until night falls. It’s harder to sneak around in daylight.”

“It would be dangerous for you to stay in the forest until nightfall. If you think we should wait until night to move, then there is a safer place where we can wait,” Gersham said, pointing to one of the cliffs surrounding the city. “When the sun sets, I suggest we ride the griffins and fly to it.”

It turned out there were spots on the cliffs that people could occupy. As expected of a local, Gersham knew his way around the place.

I looked back at him and said, “When you sneak into the city, I want you to wear this.”

I gave the ogres Enhanced Night Vision Goggle-Binoculars—better known as ENVG-Bs—and some walkie-talkies.

“I know the three of you can sense the presence of the enemy, but this should make night combat much easier.”

I explained to them how outline mode worked on night vision goggles: the outlines of people and objects were projected onto the goggles even in the dark. It was almost like looking at a game screen.

“Understood.”

I then proceeded to explain how to use the walkie-talkies.

“So, how about it? Do you think you guys can use these?”

“Yes, I think we have the hang of it.”

“Show me.”

The ogres showed me how they could operate the equipment without a single mistake.

“Good. Now we can communicate no matter how far away we are from each other.”

“Leave the rest to us,” Gersham said.

Before me stood three ogres wearing night vision goggles and

walkie-talkies in their pockets. They looked like they were going to a military simulation tournament. As the sun set and night fell, we climbed onto the griffins and soared into the sky.

I said to Maria, "It's a perfect night full of clouds. It'll be too dark for them to see us."

"These goggles are interesting," she said. "Even though it is so dark, I can still see the others clearly."

"The ogres are wearing them too, so they should be able to see as well. Well...maybe *they* don't need it, but I guess they still put them on just to humor me," I said with a laugh.

"You may be right," Maria said, smiling.

Looking out, I could clearly see everyone's outlines through the goggles. This was the first time I had actually used them, but they worked very well. Just as Gersham had said, there was a flat area on the cliff face that was big enough for five griffins to land. It was almost like an observation deck that looked out over the city.

When we landed, I asked Gersham, "Does anyone else know about this place?"

"No, only me."

"I didn't know about this place either," Gazzam said.

"First time I've heard of it," Gog added, shrugging.

"Well then, we'll build a base here," I said, summoning a small tent.

Maria, the three ogres, and I began to assemble the tent, wearing our night vision goggles to see in the dark. It was a camouflaged tent that could fit four or so people.

"Mother, could I have you go in the tent?" I asked Iona.

She smiled. "Of course." Misha and Misetta followed her in.

After that was done, the rest of us approached the edge of the cliff and got on our stomachs to peer down. We could see across the entire city from here, but...something was off. The entire city was completely devoid of light, except for one area near the center.

"What's happening?" I asked the ogres.

Gersham looked on thoughtfully. "The people seem to be gathering at the eastern plaza in the inner city. I only see fifty soldiers, though, not a thousand."

"What do you think that means? The soldier from before claimed there were a thousand soldiers here."

"I can't see Lord Galdzin or his allies among those gathered in the light."

"Is Galdzin one of the city leaders?"

"No, it is the humans who govern. The king of Gladrom is named Paul Dickinson."

"I see. Just what is Galdzin's standing here?"

"Well, some might call him a bodyguard for the city. Security for the government, if you will."

"Well, either way, we need to search the city. But first, let's set up some weapons at the base."

We unloaded our luggage from the griffins. We installed the 12.7mm M2 machine gun and placed down two TAC-50 sniper rifles. The sights for the rifles had been replaced with ones with night vision.

"Maria, here's a belt for you to use," I said, handing her the belt.

I gave Iona and Misha each a VP9 handgun with silencer.

"I don't think the enemy will make it up here, but just in case, I want Misha to man the M2 machine gun. Misetta, here's a pair of night vision goggles. Use them to keep an eye out for the enemy."

Having reinforced the base, I turned to the ogres. "Gersham, if the enemy finds out about this place, would they be able to climb up here?"

Gersham thought about it for a moment. "It would be difficult for a human to make it up here. At night, there are beasts called bloody bats that may fly over."

"Wait, what? Doesn't that mean this place is dangerous?"

"No. We'll be fine because we have griffins, natural predators of the bloody bat. Those creatures will avoid us."

Ah, so griffins are carnivores. Thank you for not eating me. Although, they were *biting me pretty hard earlier...*

"Okay then. Gazzam, you said that you would infiltrate the city?"

"Yes. I'll head out now."

With that, Gazzam suddenly jumped off the cliff.

"Wait! What?!"

I ran over and looked down the side of the cliff, but I could no longer see Gazzam anywhere.

He'll be okay, right? Right?!

While I was worrying if I should be mourning his death, a message came through on my walkie-talkie.

"Lord Raul, can you hear me?" It was none other than Gazzam.

I pressed the button down and replied, "Loud and clear. What's the situation?"

"Enemy soldiers are hiding here and there in dark alleys and houses across the city. They have weapons. It looks like they're setting up an ambush."

So, they knew we were coming... Their plan was to gather people in one place to lure us out and surround us.

"All right, you wait there. Wait for us to come to you."

"Understood."

"Maria, stay up here and use the night vision goggles to aim. When I give you the signal, start shooting."

"I will not fail you," she said, clutching her rifle.

"Don't shoot us by mistake."

"Don't worr— Wait, what? You're going down too?"

"That's right."

"You can't!" She looked panicked. "It's too dangerous!"

"I'll be okay. Urban warfare has always been my specialty," I said to reassure her.

"'Always'? Have you done this before?"

"Huh? Uh...no, no. I didn't say that." I tried to cover for myself, but she continued to look at me suspiciously.

Crap! Crap! I said that without thinking!

I quickly turned to Gog. "Since you have a good sense of smell, I have a favor to ask of you: find Galdzin and his people."

"Understood."

"Don't get into any fights alone. Just come back and tell us if you find them."

"I'll let you know as soon as I do."

They might have already been killed, but there was still a chance.

And finally, I turned back to Gersham. "Do you think you can

descend with me on your back?"

"That won't be an issue. However...are you really going to fight?"

"Yes."

"Do you not think that will be dangerous?"

"We're facing a thousand knights, and we have no idea how tough they are. We need to have as many hands on deck as we can."

"You're right."

"I'll be fine. Maria will protect me from up here. And I love urban warfare— I mean, I want to *try*— Ugh, never mind. Let's just go!"

"Understood."

In any case, this was the phase of the game where I needed to make a move to get out of the deadlock.

Gersham bent down. "Get on and hold on tightly."

"Got it," I said as I climbed onto him.

"Then let's go."

Gersham stood facing the cliff before jumping off into the abyss, like a commando rappelling down the cliff face. Of course, unlike when rappelling, there was no rope. For a moment a chill ran up my spine, but it wasn't as scary as I had feared.

"We've made it," Gersham said.

We had made it to the bottom in a matter of seconds. Then suddenly, Gazzam was standing next to us.

I turned to Gog. "All right, go find Galdzin."

"On it," he said before disappearing into the darkness.

I looked at Gazzam and asked, "So, we're looking at close to nine hundred people lurking in the dark corners of the city, right?"

"Right."

"Then let's start picking off the soldiers one by one. We'll work as a team, silently, and try to cover as much ground as we can. Let's be as quick as possible while still maintaining stealth, sneak up behind them, and aim for their chest."

I summoned my combat knife. It was a double-edged tungsten knife with a long blade.

"Gersham, your sword's too big to be of any use inside a building. And Gazzam, your knives are a little too long. *This* is the best size if

you're looking to stab them. It should be possible to take them out without making a sound. With your strength, their armor is meaningless. Use as much strength as you like; if the knives break, I'll summon more of them."

"Yes, my lord," they answered.

"This knife's made for stabbing. If something happens and you get into a fight, use your own weapons."

"Yes," they said.

I then summoned the weapon I would use for the surprise night attack.

The Soviet VSS Vintorez rifle: a special silenced sniper rifle that offered a high degree of concealment. It had a built-in suppressor longer than the barrel. The barrel itself was also perforated to reduce the amount of gas emitted from the muzzle, making it even quieter than a gun with a standard silencer. The use of special 9x39mm bullets further reduced its sound, at the cost of less initial velocity. The gun was light and easy to handle, weighing only 3.4 kilograms even with the scope.

"Okay, let's start at the entrance to the city and make our way towards the eastern plaza where they've set the trap. We'll try to keep to the cliffside where that light won't reach."

Gersham and I followed Gazzam into the darkness. I had trained myself to be able to run fast even with my equipment on. Gazzam seemed like he was slower than usual, but was still much faster than a human running at full speed. We arrived at the building furthest away from where the people had been gathered.

"Open it," I commanded Gazzam when we reached the door.

Gazzam nodded silently and reached out to the door handle. However, the door wouldn't budge. It was locked. Gersham waved him aside, unsheathing his sword and raising it above his head. He swung down through the gap between the door and the frame, with surprising speed and precision. Without a word, Gersham sheathed his sword again. Apparently he didn't need a key to open locked doors.

It was pitch-black inside the building, but even my human eyes were able to see using the night vision goggles. The ogres did not

need to check door-to-door like a SWAT team, as they were able to sense the presence of human souls.

We advanced quickly through the darkness. In a back room, two soldiers were silently watching out the window. They were tense, waiting for any signs of an enemy presence in the streets. But the next moment was their last as knives pierced their hearts from behind. Gersham and Gazzam stood behind them, holding them up by their necks to prevent them from falling over. I gave them the signal to put them on the floor.

After laying the two corpses down quietly, Gazzam looked at me and raised three fingers on his right hand, pointing upwards.

Three people on the second floor.

We headed up the stairs in the dark. The ogres knew exactly where the humans were.

Gazzam pointed at a doorway and again raised three fingers. I held up my hand to give them the signal. *Three. Two. One.* The ogres opened the door and jumped into the room with the same movement, their daggers instantly finding their targets. I fired my rifle at the third soldier. A hole opened between his eyes, and as he began to fall, I quickly ran to him and supported his body. I slowly laid him down on the floor.

"No more humans are in this house," Gersham told me.

Every time I killed a human, something pulsated in my blood and made my body feel lighter. The two ogres had noticed this, and were watching how I reacted.

"Now, we go door-to-door and eliminate each target. Be vigilant while moving through the alleys."

They answered with a firm "Understood."

As we moved to the next house, we found two soldiers waiting in ambush in the alleyway. Without hesitation, the ogres sneaked in behind them and stabbed them through the hearts. The entrance wounds were so small that there was no blood spilled.

"You were right," Gersham said. "They're all watching the street."

"They think that we'll fall for their trap, so they're only watching the routes to the eastern plaza. The fools."

At the building, Gazzam held me from behind and carefully

jumped up to the rooftop; Gersham followed, silent as a cat. We opened a window on the second floor and slipped inside, and went straight to a room farther in. We formed a straight line with me in the back. Gazzam held up three fingers. I nodded and he opened the door. We killed all three in seconds and held their bodies to make sure they wouldn't make a sound when they fell. Then Gersham pointed two fingers downwards. Each building seemed to house a group of five.

When we got downstairs, Gazzam pointed in two directions. We split, with Gersham and me going together. As soon as Gersham had opened the door, his knife was already in the soldier's heart. Gazzam took position next to the entrance to the bathroom. When a soldier strolled out, Gazzam grabbed him and put his hand over his mouth before stabbing him through the heart.

"There is no one else in the house," Gersham reported.

"Well, now we know how they've deployed their men. Five-person groups in each house, and two per alley."

"Do you think the next one will be the same?"

"There's no reason for them to have a complex deployment strategy. I'd guess all the houses around here will have the same organization. It seems like overkill, but considering they're preparing for demons, it makes sense."

They had likely spread their forces like this so that they could surround us when they heard the sound of fighting.

"Lord Raul...the marks on your face are glowing."

"Oh, that's not good."

It seemed that I grew stronger as people were killed by my weapons, and these marks were a sign of it. I summoned a military balaclava to cover them. Regardless, our assassination routine had been set.

We went from house to house, carrying out the same procedure until we had killed 208 enemy soldiers. After all that, I had gained a lot of magical energy. My body was getting faster, and the bodies of the enemy felt lighter as I held them in their death throes. My ability to sense the flow of combat was improving, and it even felt like time

would stop as we entered battle.

"There wasn't a single citizen, and the soldiers that were lying in ambush didn't seem like regular soldiers either."

"So there might be some powerful enemies mixed in somewhere?"

"Right. Going forward, we need to be even more on guard."

I was beginning to realize that the three of us might not be enough for this fight. There were still nearly eight hundred enemy soldiers left in the city; the deeper we delved into enemy territory, the more likely we were to run into someone strong.

"Even so, your plan was a good one," Gersham said. "It would have been a difficult fight if we had been surrounded by all these soldiers at once."

"Maybe. But this is where the real fight starts."

As I said that, rain began to fall.

I looked at the night sky. "Rain. That works in our favor."

"It does?"

"The rain will reduce visibility and muffle sound, which should make it easier for us to infiltrate the buildings," I said.

The rain only fell harder as we continued, like it was intentionally trying to give us an advantage. With the rain on our side, we were able to operate even faster. But the situation was beginning to change. There were no longer soldiers keeping watch in the alleyways, as if they were thinking we weren't going to come. The groups of five in each building were each congregated in one room on the first floor of the building. Finally, at one house, I gave the ogres the symbol to stop. I listened in on the enemy's conversation through the door.

"It's really starting to rain. Do you think they'll call off the ambush?" one soldier asked the others.

"I'll bet they're sending out the order right now," answered another soldier.

"Right? Well, we can't just call it off ourselves, so I guess we'll just have to wait and see."

"Yeah. If they call it off, they'll have to let the citizens return home."

"I guess so. It doesn't look like the target is coming anyway, so may as well take a breather."

They thought the operation was going to be suspended. But if messengers were sent with the order, they'd find out what we'd been doing. We decided to abort our plan for now, returning through rain and darkness to where we began.

"I thought the rain was a blessing...but with their ambush canceled, they'll be sending the citizens back home," I lamented.

Gersham frowned. "And they said that a messenger would be going around."

"Meaning it's only a matter of time before they find our handiwork."

It was then that I received a message from Gog. "Lord Raul, I found Lord Galdzin and his people."

I took my walkie-talkie in hand to reply. "Where were they?"

"They're trapped in a cave. An enemy mage set up a barrier to keep them in."

A second trap to lure us out. The enemy was clever and didn't put all of their eggs in one basket.

"It's likely a trap. Pull back for now."

"I can't just leave Lord Galdzin—"

"You might get yourself and everyone there killed. Pull back for now."

There was a pause. "I understand."

I put down the walkie-talkie. I couldn't afford to lose anyone at this point.

Suddenly Gersham spun around and yelled, "Who's there?!"

I jumped in surprise.

"Please forgive my intrusion, Lord Raul," came a familiar voice from behind me.

I turned to find a charming, aristocratic woman kneeling before me. She wore refined, high-class attire, and her blonde hair framed her beautiful, pale face. And next to her was another beautiful woman, this one with long black hair, almond eyes, and a chilling beauty.

"Sharmilia! Maquina!" I said with a smile.

"It humbles me that you remembered our names. There is no greater reward."

I beamed. "I'm glad you came. You'll be a huge help!"

"Do forgive us. We came as fast as we could, but we couldn't catch up with you."

"Don't worry about it. We flew," I said, pointing up. "You're actually just in time."

"Are we?"

The plan was beginning to come together. I had something urgent to ask of them. We could use *that*.

"You can turn people into zombies, right?"

"Of course. It truly is nothing to brag about, but I can raise a zombie from a dead body."

Is raising zombies really nothing to brag about?

I pointed down the road, into the darkness. "Along this street, there are about forty houses with dead bodies in them. Go turn them all into zombies and then come back here."

"Easily done. Your wish is my command."

"Please go as quickly as you can."

"Yes!" she said, and the two of them faded into the rain.

In their place, Gog came running to us.

"How was getting into the cave?" I asked him.

"There was a guard at the entrance, but I was able to enter unnoticed. But about twenty enemy soldiers were in the place Galdzin was being held, and one looked particularly dangerous. On top of that, there were several mages maintaining the wards, so I wouldn't have been able to free them alone."

"So it *was* an ambush," I said, rubbing my chin in deep thought.

But before hardly any time had passed, Sharmilia and Maquina returned.

"We have done as you command."

"How?!" I couldn't help but feel like the straight man in some comedy act here.

"My apologies. Some of the corpses were unusable because their heads were destroyed."

"Ah, those were my kills," I said.

"Is that so? Impressive, my lord."

She was able to raise over two hundred zombies...in a matter of minutes? When times are tough, it's sure good to have a vampire like her.

"Are the zombies able to move under their own will?"

"No, they will not move without my order."

Perfect! This should make up for our lack of manpower.

"Okay then. Sharmilia, could you hold me and take me up to the cliff over there?"

"Hold you? I-It would be my pleasure. Please, allow me! I will protect you with my life."

Her eyes looked down, and her bloodless cheeks somehow turned red even though she was a vampire. It was a charming look on her.



And so, we returned to our base of operations and started a strategy meeting. The zombies would buy us some time.

"Our forces consist of those of us here, the hundred or so zombies, and five griffins. That excludes mother, who is in no condition to fight," I said to start things off.

"I'm sorry for slowing everyone down," Iona said apologetically. Everyone shook their heads, reassuring her.

"Lady Iona, I am here to protect you. I never had any intention of seeing you fight," Maria followed up.

Gersham nodded. "It's our duty to protect you."

"That's right," said Sharmilia, bowing. "It would be our pleasure to give our lives for you, my lady."

Demons are pretty considerate, aren't they? I wonder why they can't get along with humans.

"There must be some reason that the enemy is after you, mother. We can't risk them getting to you."

"Raul..."

"Leave it to us for now."

That said, we needed to get the meeting underway. Every moment was precious.

"What's the situation in the city?"

"The people are still gathered in the plaza. But it looks like there's movement among the troops," Maria reported.

She had a good grasp of the situation since she had been watching over the city while we carried out our mission.

"What kind of movement?"

"Several of the soldiers who were in the plaza left, going somewhere into the darkness."

"So they *did* send out the order to stop the operation..."

"If so, they'll soon find the zombies and corpses," Gersham added.

"Then we'll need to move before that happens. Reuniting with Sharmilia and Maquina has given us an advantage. Now we can spread our forces out. Ogres, you go and free the other demons"

"Wouldn't that leave you unprotected?"

"Don't worry about us. We have Sharmilia and Maquina here with

us.”

“O Ogres, leave our lord’s protection to us,” Sharmilia said.

“But...”

“It will be okay, Gersham,” I said.

“I will trust you in this,” Gersham said uneasily.

His concern was understandable, but I was able to refute it without any doubt. That was because I had become able to see things from Sharmilia’s perspective, and I could tell she was feeling how much I was relying on her. I was sure this came from the power of the genealogy of souls.

“Maria, use the griffins to get everyone out of town for now. And then...”

I told everyone the plan. I explained everything slowly, going over important details twice and answering questions along the way.

“That’s the plan. Now, it’s time to take the war to them!”

“Yeah!” everyone shouted together.

With everyone on board, it was time for the operation to begin.

A light approached the western gate of Gladrom, too bright to be mistaken for lamplight. The imperial soldiers stationed at the gate felt there was something strange about the light, so they sent two messengers into the city.

“Have the messengers left?” the guard captain asked while keeping watch over the approaching light.

“Yes.”

The guardroom the guardsmen were in was lit brightly with lanterns, so they couldn’t see what was carrying the approaching light on the road. There was no one stupid enough to ride a carriage into an outlying city like Gladrom on a night like this. Ordinary humans would never travel through a frontier region infested with beasts at night.

“Let’s stop them at the gate,” the captain ordered.

“Yes, sir!”

Ten soldiers left the guardroom and exited through the gate. The captain stood in the middle of the gate, his elite soldiers lined up behind him. The men were sharp-eyed and clearly a cut above your

average soldier. They were all confident in their skills, and each wore a smug look on their face. They clearly had no fear.

"Stop!" yelled the captain, holding out a hand.

There was a shuttering sound as the approaching light stopped.

The captain put a hand above his eyes to see through the light. "Is that a horse-drawn carriage? No, that's no horse... Is it some sort of beast?"

There was a limit to what the soldiers could understand of what they were seeing, for what had stopped was not something of this world. It was a US Army M1126 Stryker, an eight-wheeled armored fighting vehicle. Still, the guard captain could intuit that this carried people within it.

"Hey!" he shouted. "Whoever is inside of that, step out now!"

There was no response from the vehicle.

"Very well then." He turned to his men and stepped to the side. "Light them on fire."

The archers applied flames to their arrowheads. In response, a reply came from the vehicle.

"I am Iona Forrest from Sanaria in the Kingdom of Eucrit. Please, stand aside."

Her voice was incredibly loud, but the captain didn't mind. In fact, he smiled. After all, the person they were all looking for had just ridden to his door without a care in the world!

"Show me your face! How do I know whether you're lying or not?"

"Silence. Stand aside now!" the voice responded.

What a voice this woman has on her, he thought. His ears were ringing. Of course, he didn't know that the voice was coming through an LRAD acoustic weapons system. Inside the vehicle, Iona was talking normally.

"Keep it down! I can hear you! Just step out of that *thing*!"

"I'll ask you one more time to stand down! We will not hold back!" Now, Iona yelled with a loud voice.

"Shut up! Stop making that horrible sound!"

"Just step down!"

The captain was fed up. He turned to his men. "Hey, I said to

light them on fire!”

“Yes, sir!”

The archers fired flaming arrows at the vehicle. But they bounced right off with a clang.

“What?!” the captain shouted in surprise. “How?”

The arrowheads lay burning on the ground.

“Hey! Hand me a torch!”

The captain took the torch from one of his men and approached the vehicle, when suddenly the hatch opened. The soldiers took a step forward, their hands now on their swords. Then, without warning, the light went out and the entire vehicle became visible. It was like nothing they had ever seen: a large steel box with eight strange wheels. There was a person who had put the upper half of their body through the roof looking down at them.

“I am Iona Forrest, wife of Gram Forrest of Sanaria in the Kingdom of Eucrit,” the woman called out in an elegant voice. The soldiers held out their torches to better see her. At some point, the light rain had stopped, and the moon shone down on the woman from between the clouds, appearing like a halo behind her.

“Is she a goddess?” muttered the captain without thinking.

Then a woman wearing an aristocratic dress appeared. She was so beautiful she could be easily mistaken for divinity. It was almost like some divine host had come down from the moon above.

“I would like to thank everyone for their efforts in guarding the gate at this time of night. I apologize for my rudeness earlier. In return for your forgiveness, I offer you a gift and only ask that you let us pass quickly.”

Her refined voice was bewitching. The soldiers held on to every word, enraptured.

“A bribe,” laughed the captain. “Or are you begging for your life? Well, our orders are to take you alive, so we’ll treat you real good.”

The captain wore a vile grin, and the moonlight exposed some drool that had escaped his mouth.

“That’s wonderful to hear. Take this gift from me. Do be careful with it, it’s quite rare.”

When the woman smiled, vulgar sounds and laughter rippled

through the soldiers' ranks. The woman threw something over the vehicle and towards the men, landing with several things bouncing on the ground. There were only a few of these round objects, so the soldiers began to fight among themselves to see who could get one.

"Hey! That's mine! I picked it up first!"

"Hey, why do you get two?"

"Because I got here first, you idiot!"

"Shut up! I'm the captain! I get two of them!"

The captain examined one of the objects. It was something he'd never seen before. Was it made of steel? It was small and darkly colored, shaped like a fruit with some strange part extending from the top. What in the world could it be? It did look rare, but he had no idea what it actually was. Looking closely, he saw that each one of the objects had a small ring at the top of it that was attached to a little string. He followed the path of the strings; they all led up to the woman.

"Now, what do we have here?" he asked, unable to hide his own fantasies about this exotic gift.

"Think of it as a small gift that will let me through the gate. It's very valuable, and will keep you tied together with me. You will keep it, won't you?"

The divinely beautiful woman wanted to be tied to us, the soldiers thought.

"O-Of course! I won't put it down for a second!" cried one of the soldiers.

"Wait, she was talking to me!" said another.

"You idiot, just hand it to me!" yelled yet another.

The soldiers started to fight each other again, but were snapped back to attention by the slamming noise of the vehicle's door when the woman disappeared back into it. The vehicle began to pull away in the direction it had come from. The strings on the soldiers' gifts pulled taut, until the iron rings came off with a twang. Some of the soldiers were surprised and dropped theirs. Some managed to hold on to them, bobbling them in their hands. Others who didn't get one dived upon the dropped gifts, hoping to claim one for themselves.

"H-Hey, are they running away?" asked the captain, but the

vehicle stopped just a little farther down the road. “Ah, they gave me a scare—”

The object in his hand exploded in a flash of light as it shattered into countless pieces, along with those who held them or stood close. Their little gifts had been M67 hand grenades.

An explosion that shredded ten men at once echoed in my ears where I stood on the cliff overlooking the city. The soldiers in the city had definitely heard it too. Misha contacted me from the Stryker armored vehicle over a walkie-talkie.

“Master Raul, the guards stationed at the gate have been taken care of.”

“Got it. Stay where you are for now.”

“Understood.”

I then gave instructions to the vampires. “Sharmilia, Maquina, what’s your position?”

“We are on top of the gate, as you instructed,” Sharmilia answered.

“Could you check to see if there is anyone on the other side?”

“There is no one.”

I see... So they won’t even come out for an explosion.

“Can the two of you open the gate by yourselves?”

“It won’t be a problem.”

I once again connected to Misha in the Stryker. “Misha, the vampires are opening the main gate now. Have the rocket launcher ready for immediate use.”

“Will do.”

“Maria, as soon as the gates are open, drive into the city.”

“Understood.”

The gate opened, and the Stryker entered the streets of Gladrom.

“Sharmilia, do you detect any movement?”

“One of our zombies caught a messenger. What shall I do with him?”

“Kill him.”

“Yes, my lord.”

So the messengers had been sent.

“Misha, we’re watching over the city. Nothing so far. We need to

smoke them out. Shoot a rocket into the second floor of the first house you come across."

"Got it."

Misha emerged from the roof of the Stryker and balanced the rocket launcher. The rocket soared right through the second floor window and exploded violently.

"Sharmilia, any changes on your end?"

"None."

Hmm. I don't want to destroy too much of the citizens' property... What should we do?

"Misha, shoot a rocket into the first floor."

The resulting explosion knocked out all of the windows in the house, and glass scattered everywhere. I could even see the explosion from where I was at the main camp.

"Anything now, Sharmilia?"

"A few people have stumbled out of the building we destroyed. Ah. The building fell."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. Soldiers are starting to come out of the surrounding houses."

"Good. Stay put."

"As you command," she said.

"Maria, what does it look like from there?"

"We also see soldiers coming out," Maria said.

"Move the vehicle farther into the city."

The Stryker made its way through to the center of town and stopped in front of the soldiers coming into the streets. A whistle sounded from the enemy side, and soldiers began to rush out of the houses.

"Sharmilia, unleash the zombies on them and hit them from behind. Then you and Maquina can come and pick up your weapons."

"Understood, my lord."

Clattering and banging could be heard from the darkness as the zombies began to creep out of the houses. But they sure were slow.

Sharmilia and Maquina arrived at the camp.

“Here, equip these,” I said. “Use them just like I explained earlier.”

“As you command,” Sharmilia said as she lowered her head in deference.

I had given the two vampires M240 medium machine guns attached to ammo pouches they wore on their backs. Each pouch contained 500 rounds of ammunition. The gun could fire them at a rate of 950 rounds per minute.

“Are you sure these won’t get in the way of your wings?”

“We can control the shape of our wings, so that will not be an issue. Besides, we don’t actually need our wings to fly.”

“Oh? Well, that’s convenient.”

“Please, praise me more,” she purred.

“When you run out of ammo, come back to me and I’ll summon more.”

“Understood.”

“Then, let Operation Extermination begin.”

The two vampires flew away and disappeared into the darkness of the night. I picked up the radio receiver again.

“Mother, could you talk to the soldiers like you did before?”

“Of course. What should I say?”

“I’ll tell you exactly what to say.”

“I’m listening.”

The soldiers seemed wary of the Stryker vehicle and stood at a distance.

Iona’s voice then rang out clearly. “I am Iona Forrest. Your army is unlawfully occupying this city. Surrender immediately.”

“Can’t you see how many of us there are?” someone yelled out.

“I never thought they’d come right to us.”

“I suppose it is to be expected. She’s from a noble house. She’s been sheltered her whole life.”

“I’d love to see her beautiful face up close, just once.”

After hearing Iona’s elegant and refined voice, the soldiers began jeering and gathered around the Stryker while throwing torches at it.

“You scoundrels!” Maria yelled over the loudspeakers, causing feedback and harsh noise. “Mind your tongues! My lady is not

someone to be spoken to like that!”

“Who’s that? There’s another woman on board?”

“Oh, another woman?”

“We were only told to capture and bring back this Iona lady, right?”

The soldiers became even more excited when they heard Maria’s voice. They talked among themselves with crass looks on their faces.

“Sharmilia, Maquina, can you hear me?” I asked.

“Yes, master.”

“Mast—? Oh, whatever. Are you where you’re supposed to be?”

“Yes. We are in the sky across from where the zombies are coming from, just as instructed. We are above the building on the north side of the vehicle.”

“Good! You should have a clear view of everything.”

I concentrated on Sharmilia and was able to see through her eyes. This ability wasn’t consuming any of my magical power, so it seemed to be something other than magic. Using the vampire’s sight, I could see clearly in the darkness. Several knights holding large axes were approaching the Stryker.

“One...two...three!” In unison, the knights slammed their axes into the vehicle.

Hey, now! You’ll scratch the paint! I just summoned that!

“This thing is tough!” yelled one of the knights. “But, look! We scratched it!”

“You’re right! It looks like it *can* be broken, boys! Keep at it!”

More knights approached with swords and axes.

“R-Raul! Are we going to be okay?!” Iona called over the radio.

“It’s fine, mother. They won’t be able to break into that car using an axe.”

They had finally taken the bait.

Uh-oh! Some of them are climbing on top of the vehicle!

“Sharmilia, Maquina! Get rid of the insects that are crawling on the vehicle.”

“Will that not put your mother in danger?”

“Don’t worry, the Stryker can withstand machine-gun fire.”

From their position flying in the sky, the two vampires aimed their

M240 machine guns at the soldiers climbing the Stryker and fired. It was a gruesome scene. Those crawling on the car exploded into chunks of meat, while the soldiers around the car were reduced to a bloody mess of limbs. The vampires made sure that they shot across the lines of soldiers from one end to the other.

Unlike in my previous life, people in this world don't immediately run away at the sound of a gun.

"Aaagh! What the hell?!" yelled a soldier.

"He suddenly fell down!"

"He's dead!"

"R-Run!"

The soldiers were confused for a moment, but soon realized they were under attack. They called for a retreat away from the square.

They finally noticed there was something unusual. Not the brightest bunch, are they?

Their ranks were broken, and now the vampires were shooting into their retreat at random. The soldiers screamed at each other in a blind panic.

"Pull back! Gah—"

"Get away from the square!"

"Get behind the build— Guah!"

"What's going on?!"

After the remaining soldiers escaped, the torches that had been left on the ground around the Stryker illuminated over a hundred corpses littering the square.

"They got away pretty quick," I observed.

Yet there were still those in the carnage still living, if only barely. Some were trying to crawl away using their arms, while others lay there moaning.

"My leg! My Leg!"

"It hurts..."

"Damn it..."

"There's a hole in my stomach!"

The ones coughing blood probably wouldn't last long.

"Master, some are still alive. Should I put them out of their misery?"

"Finish those who are trying to get away. Leave the rest to save bullets."

"Yes, master."

If anyone comes to rescue them, we can take them out. If not, they won't survive like this anyway.

"Okay. Sharmilia, let the zombies loose and drive the fleeing soldiers into the southern square."

The zombies drove into the soldiers from the north, attacking them from behind in one fell swoop.

"Good," I said as I watched the zombies attacking the rear of the retreating troops.

The zombies weren't using bites to attack, instead wielding swords and axes like they had in life. The zombies moved as Sharmilia directed them and attacked with abandon, not showing any sign of fear or pain.

"It's total chaos, just as I imagined it would be."

The imperial soldiers appeared to have lost track of friend and foe, due to the darkness and the zombies wearing imperial uniforms. The soldiers were fighting each other in the confusion.

"Misha, point the speakers at the knights! Sharmilia and Maquina, protect the Stryker from any rear attacks."

"Right away," Sharmilia answered.

The top hatch of the Stryker opened and Misha popped her upper body out. She pointed the LRAD I had placed on top of the vehicle towards the melee between the knights and the zombies.

I signaled Misha. "Get back in the car, close the hatch, and turn the volume up to max."

The LRAD let out a loud wailing sound, and the knights began to shout and cover their ears in visible pain. Some were deafened by the noise, while others who had been distracted were cut down by the zombies. The sound seemed to have no effect on the zombies.

"That must have been painful when we used it on you before," I said to Sharmilia, remembering the fight with vampires.

"Yes, but this time I can hardly hear it at all. I can move without a problem."

"That's because the sound only goes in the direction you point it."

"A wonderful weapon, master. Your works are truly divine."

"I had nothing to do with it. It's all in the machine's performance. If the soldiers try to escape to your side, gun them down."

"Yes, master."

I summoned a night vision scope onto my Barrett M82 anti-materiel rifle and observed the commotion. The zombies and the soldiers looked a little different, so I was able to aim at the knights. From here, they were less than a kilometer away as the crow flies.

"Now then, let's take our time and crush them."

I prepared my rifle, lined up my target, and pulled the trigger. The knight fell, his head exploding and spurting spinal fluid.

"Next."

I took aim at a knight who had surrounded a zombie with his comrades.

He fell, and the others looked around in surprise.

"H-Hey, get up!"

"What the hell is going on?!"

Seconds later, another one collapsed with only half his head remaining. I continued picking off enemy soldiers without any hesitation. Since none of these soldiers had ever encountered a sniper before, they were driven into that much more of a panic by the sight of their comrade's heads bursting open and bodies collapsing. At this point, the knights were in hysteria. The soldiers ran out into the main street, not thinking of taking cover.

"Master, the enemy is being pushed towards us."

"Yes, just as I expected. Take them down one by one."

The knights who were driven towards the vampires were once again met by M240 machine-gun fire.

The knights began to panic once again. Their screams to stop pushing and turn back were answered with a hail of gunfire. Their wounded bodies and corpses piled up at the alley exits and doorways.

"Master, my deepest apologies. The carcasses piling up at the exits are blocking the other soldiers' escape," Sharmilia said with sincere regret in her voice.

"Try to shoot them once they're a little farther out."

"Understood."

Hmm? Some more men are coming from deeper in the city. They have hoods, wands, and are cloaked in light. That can't be good...

There were a handful of the glowing people surrounded by about thirty knights. The mages came to where the zombies were and invoked their spells. Light engulfed a section of the battlefield, destroying several zombies at once.

"Sharmilia? I don't think you can see it from your side, but some zombies were just taken down."

"Was it magic?"

"Yes. All the zombies the light touched fell."

"It must be holy magic that turns evil creatures. It seems my spell was undone."

"Got it. I'll eliminate the mages."

"If there's more than one, I recommend taking them out all at once."

"Why?"

"Mages could divine where your attacks are coming from."

"Got it."

That could be a big problem. If they figure out where I am, the rest of the plan will be more difficult.

I focused my magic on my sniper rifle and looked closely at the group of mages. There were four of them. The night vision scope on my Barrett M82 allowed me to track their movement, but they were still small targets. Hitting each in succession with a sniper rifle would have been an impossible feat in my previous life...but now I had magic. Could I do it?

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

"Yes!" I gave a shout of triumph.

All four had died before realizing what had happened. The knights around them began to panic.

"The mages are down!"

"Why did they just die all of a sudden?!"

"D-Don't give up! Push back!"

They began to disperse quickly. It seemed my magical abilities had grown drastically from all the people I had killed. The recoil of

my rifle no longer affected me, and my accuracy while firing multiple times in a row had improved.

The glowing marks on my hands drew my attention. "Does taking the souls of mages give me more magic than usual?"

As I had killed them, I felt a significant amount of magical energy flow into me. Mages seemed to be quite the feast.

I heard the sound of machine guns start up again. I stopped my shooting and synced my vision with Sharmilia's. Soldiers being driven away from the zombies were in the process of falling into heaps.

"Looks like things are going well," I said to her.

"We're being careful to make sure that the bodies don't pile up inconveniently. The knights are falling in funny ways."

It seemed that killing the knights had lifted Sharmilia's spirits. Sharmilia might have been getting some of the effects of my powers by using my weapons to kill the knights.

"It would be a pain if more mages with that holy magic showed up," I said.

"True. Holy magic is a problem for myself as well," Sharmilia answered.

"I see. Then leave that position to Maquina and come back to me."

"As you command."

I gave Misha new instructions as I waited for Sharmilia to arrive.

"Misha, I'm going to have Sharmilia do something. Turn off the LRAD."

"Done."

"Maria, take the Stryker back to the city gate."

"Yes, Master Raul."

The Stryker began to back up and head to the gate. As it traveled, I heard crunching and screaming as it ran over bodies both dead and alive.

I heard a light step as Sharmilia touched down next to me. Vampires who could fly this fast were truly useful.

"Sharmilia, get into the Stryker near the entrance to the city. I'll give you further instructions then."

"As you wish." Sharmilia gave me a bow and melted into the

night.

"Maria, Sharmilia is on her way. Once you have her in the car, you can head back into the city center."

"I will wait for her," Maria replied.

The Stryker armored vehicle once again made its way down the main road.

"Sharmilia, the rest is up to you," I said, giving her some last-minute encouragement.

"As you command."

The top hatch of the Stryker opened with a *thunk*, and a beautiful, regal-looking woman emerged.

"Soldiers of Bargius! Put down your arms! I am Iona Forrest!"

The woman who identified herself as Iona Forrest raised her hand towards the sky, which suddenly lit up with an unnaturally bright light that illuminated the horrors of the surrounding battlefield. Misha had launched a flare from inside the Stryker.

"O soldiers of Bargius, do not throw away your lives in vain! Lay down your weapons and kneel before me, Iona Forrest, and show that you have no intention of fighting. If you do so, I will put an end to this tragedy."

The soldiers that were fleeing down the surrounding roads and alleys turned to look at the source of the voice.

"I was once known as the Goddess of Eucrit. And today, you have borne witness to the power of a goddess. The only thing that you can do now is to lay down your arms and surrender."

One of the skilled soldiers threw his short sword at her...but she caught it by the blade, inches from her beautiful face. She clenched her fist, shattering the sword with ease. The woman slowly raised her hand towards the soldier who threw the weapon. And with a loud pop, the top of the soldier's head exploded, splattering gray matter everywhere as he fell.

Of course, his true cause of death was my sniping.

"Do not defy me, for I have the power of the gods on my side. There is nothing you can do."

Silence fell over the battlefield as the soldiers looked at each

other, confused. Before long, they began to murmur among themselves.

"A goddess? Are you kidding me?"

"But she wasn't using magic," someone else timidly said.

"You saw it, didn't you? That wasn't something any human could do."

"And look at her beauty. She *must* have been sent by the gods."

"What did we get ourselves into?"

"O zombies, calm your rage. In the name of Iona Forrest, cease your slaughter!"

All at once, the zombies that had been attacking the knights stopped moving and stood where they were. Which was, of course, because Sharmilia herself had commanded them to stop. The person talking over the loudspeaker was Iona herself, but the woman standing on the Stryker was Sharmilia.

Once again there was silence.

And then someone said, "It's an act of God."

"We were wrong to fight her," someone else muttered.

"They don't call her 'The Goddess of Eucrit' for nothing..." said another soldier, deceived by our display.

"You're right! I knew something felt off about this whole thing," said another soldier. He knelt before Sharmilia and clasped his hands to his chest. "Please forgive me."

The soldiers had had enough of this frightful battle, dying in terror in the dark. They would have done anything to end this nightmare, and looked to this goddess for salvation. They could no longer stomach the possibility of dying in such a cruel manner.

"Now, soldiers, kneel before me and show me that you will no longer defy me. There is no reason anyone else should die."

Sharmilia matched Iona's words and spread her arms towards the mass of soldiers. The streets were soon filled with the clashing sound of metal weapons hitting the road, as soldiers threw down their weapons and knelt before Sharmilia, clutching their hands to their chest in a sign of fealty.

"H-Hey! Who said you could surrender? Come back!" someone yelled.

I looked through Sharmilia's eyes to search the surroundings and found the one who had yelled that hiding in the shadows of a building.

"Maquina, there's a man hiding in an alley between the third and fourth houses north of the Stryker," I radioed her. "Fire on his position."

"As you command."

Maquina moved silently to him with her M240 medium machine gun.

"Hey! Don't stop fighting! You are *my* men! You won't get away with abandoning battle in front of the enemy!"

The sound of machine gun fire came down from the sky like thunder.

"Master, I've eliminated the target," Maquina said.

"Well done."

"Thank you."

The streets were once again silent. The man who had been yelling, and those around him, were dead.

"Hey! How dare you ignore my orders!" another captain yelled, stabbing one of the kneeling knights.

I could see everything that was happening through Sharmilia's eyes.

"Maquina," I radioed again, "someone stabbed one of his men two buildings south of your position."

"Yes, I can smell the freshly spilled blood."

"Fire on that position."

"As you command."

Machine gun bullets rained down on a group of soldiers. Once again, several people fell in the gunfire.

"This is bad! We've provoked the wrath of God!" yelled a soldier.

"I surrender!"

"M-Me too!"

More and more knights dropped their weapons and gathered by the Stryker to kneel. With the first two hundred soldiers the ogres and I killed, the three hundred or so the vampires killed, and now the one hundred kneeling before Sharmilia, that was six hundred

soldiers accounted for. Subtracting fifty soldiers guarding the people in the eastern plaza from the original count of one thousand, that meant there were approximately three hundred and fifty left who hadn't surrendered.

"I take it that the rest of the soldiers will fight to the bitter end," Iona's voice asked.

"W-Wait! We surrender too!"

About fifty soldiers rushed to join those already kneeling. I gave commands to Sharmilia through the earpiece she was wearing.

"Sharmilia, could you turn the new corpses into zombies?"

"Of course, master. If you're talking about the ones I can see, I can turn all of them."

"Excellent. Do it now."

A dark breeze passed through the streets of the city. As the corpses began to rise again, there were shouts of surprise among the soldiers who had yet to surrender.

"Wha—"

"O-Oh!"

"They're rising!"

A horde of zombies had risen in their midst.

"Sharmilia, have them attack the soldiers who haven't surrendered," I commanded.

"Soldiers who have joined me, fight with your newly risen brethren. I hereby pass judgment on those of you who have not recognized me," Iona's voice rang out.

"W-Wait! You want us to fight our own?"

"But if that's the only way to survive..."

"What should I do?"

While the soldiers who had surrendered were in a state of confusion, the zombies attacked those who had been hiding in the alleys. Now that the zombies' numbers had doubled and the soldiers were being attacked from both sides, they could no longer hide.

"Maquina, shoot them in the back as they come out of the north side."

"As you command."

Soon the sound of machine-gun fire joined the moans of the

zombies and the screams of the soldiers. The soldiers who had rushed in to help fell in droves. The zombies were hit by the gunfire too, but they kept fighting unless they were hit in the head.

"Maquina, stop the attack."

"Yes, master."

Once more, Iona's voice rang out, "I will ask you again: join the newly risen and fight those who will not recognize me! If you continue to refuse, you, too, will die here."

Sharmilia gestured to them as if she were speaking. Those who had been kneeling, having been unable to make a decision due to confusion and fear, jumped up and let out terrible screams as they made their way to fight those who had been their allies until now.

"I see that you understand now," said Iona. "You alone shall find salvation."

A truly benevolent goddess. Should I go to help the ogres while the soldiers fight each other?

I gave out the command. "Everyone, retreat out of the city and away from the front lines."

The city of Gladrom was now the site of bloody mayhem; knight fought against knight, and knight fought against the dead.

Operation Civil War had been a success and bought me time to join the ogres.

"I don't know how long this state of chaos will last, but it's likely a race against time. While they fight, we'll take the northern route and get to the cave."

Everyone jumped into the Stryker and rode towards the inner part of the city.

"So, how are we going to go about this?" Iona asked.

"We rescue the townspeople first," I answered.

The northern route was free of soldiers, and we didn't run into any trouble. Because we were driving at full speed, it didn't take long to reach the northeast corner of the city. We parked a few dozen meters from the building on the far corner.

"Sharmilia, take me to the roof of the house on the northeast corner."

"As you command."

I grabbed my Barrett M82 anti-materiel rifle and exited from the rear hatch with Sharmilia. From there, we flew and landed on the roof of a building on the northeast corner that looked like an office. Because this building had three floors, it was slightly taller than the others.

I took out my binoculars and looked out to the south. There, the townspeople were made to sit in the eastern plaza, which was well-lit by torchlight. Around the perimeter were roughly twenty knights and a few mages.

"The wind is blowing. I can smell the tide," I observed.

"There is a cove where the northeast cliffs drop off," Sharmilia said. "It's a part of the North Sea."

"Is there a port?"

"A ship goes between the Land of Demons and here."

"The Land of Demons?"

"Yes, the land ruled by King Lusemia, whom we served. Of course, I only serve *you* now."

"Yeah, yeah, I know."

Sharmilia looked away, embarrassed. Was she always so bashful?

"Okay, I want to get rid of the people who are holding the Gladrom citizens captive."

"How should we do that?"

"They might have skilled swordsmen, so I'm going to snipe them from here."

I set up my rifle and looked through the night vision scope. It looked like the soldiers keeping the townspeople under guard were distracted by the chaotic fighting in the streets.

"I'll start with the mages."

"Then I recommend you take each of them out quickly, like before."

"Got it."

I shot three bullets in quick succession, and three mages instantly crumpled to the ground. Suddenly, Sharmilia grabbed me and propelled us backwards into the sky. I just managed to keep a hold of my gun, but it scared me.

"Wh-What's wrong?"

"We were seen! Have the others evacuate quickly!"

"Maria," I called over the radio, "back the Stryker up! Step on the pedal as hard as you can!"

While Sharmilia held me in the air, I looked over her shoulder with my night vision scope on my rifle. A knight had landed on the roof of the three-floor building we had just been on and looked at us.

"He's one of the knights who was standing in the plaza! How is he already on that roof?! Is he even human?!"

"He must be quite skilled," Sharmilia answered.

"What would happen if he caught up to us?"

"I do not know if I can protect you, master, but I will give my life to do so. In that case, please escape by yourself!"

"It's that bad, huh?"

It was a mistake to leave the griffins behind. We could have all fled by flying away.

The knight seemed to have noticed the Stryker, as he was running at full speed towards it.

"Damn, he's fast! What is he, an android?!"

I fired a shot at him while balancing the rifle on Sharmilia's shoulder. But I only managed to kick up some dust from the ground in front of him. I didn't have a good chance of hitting him while I was moving backwards like this.

Sharmilia let out a growl of frustration and said through gritted teeth, "Master, they will catch up with us at this rate!"

"Could you get me onto the roof of the Stryker?"

"As you wish."

She dropped me onto the roof of the Stryker. I turned the LRAD we had mounted there to the front of the car and cranked its volume to the max, focusing all of that sound towards the sprinting knight.

That didn't even slow him down! They use this to suppress demonstrations, you know?! He must have even more physical ability than Gram if he can keep up with us!

"All right, then. How about this?!"

I summoned a flash grenade.

"Everyone, don't look out the front window!"

I pulled the pin from the grenade and tossed it. It hit directly in front of him, producing a flash of a million candelas and a blast of 180 decibels. Even he seemed to stumble at this and his speed slowed down somewhat. I immediately began to fire on him with the 12.7mm M2 heavy machine gun. The night was filled with the sound of rapid gunfire, followed by two quick clangs, and finally the thud of the bullets hitting his body. He fell.

What were those clangs? Did he block two bullets with his sword? That's impossible...

"Whoa! Stop the car!"

Maria hit the brakes suddenly, causing me to tumble backwards off the roof. Right as I was about to hit the ground, Sharmilia caught me.

"Sorry about that," I said. "What's the status of the enemy?"

"He's down but still alive."

"Still alive?!" When I looked back, sure enough, he was trying to prop himself up with his sword despite his left arm having been torn off. "Is he a vampire?"

"No, he's not one of us. He is a human being."

The knight shakily tried to hide behind a building, but I shot him in the leg with my sniper rifle. Almost to my surprise, he actually fell when shot in his current condition. That sword in his hand seemed like it could be a big problem, so I shot him in his right arm to make him drop it.

"Sharmilia, can you and Maquina hold him down?"

"In his condition, I could probably do it myself."

"No. Just in case, take Maquina with you."

Maquina came out of the Stryker and flew to the knight with Sharmilia.

"We have him," they said.

When I approached them, the knight glared at me from his place in the vampires' clutches.

"Who the hell are you?!" I asked him.

He continued to glare silently.

Sharmilia growled, "You! Answer the master's question!"

But instead of answering, he just smirked.

This isn't getting us anywhere. I thought that he might be the captain, but I'm starting to think he isn't.

"So you won't talk? Fine."

I summoned my combat knife and stabbed the knight in the heart. More power than usual flowed into me.

"We could probably use a body this strong. Sharmilia, raise him as a zombie."

"As you command."

I had no way of knowing at the time, but I would come to learn that this man had been Varius Lang, captain of the First Division of the Northeastern Army. He was a powerful warrior on par with the commander, Gruis Peintos. In truth, it was nothing less than a miracle that I had managed to kill this level of warrior with such ease.

I had Maquina carry the corpse, newly risen. After all, I didn't want bloodstains in my Stryker.

I'd like to avoid a situation like that in the future. It was kind of scary.

"Sharmilia, fly me to the cliffs on the east side."

With my Barrett M82 anti-materiel rifle at the ready, I looked over the knights in the eastern plaza again.

"It looks like their morale has dropped after losing a knight of that caliber."

The knights were now anxiously looking at the infighting raging on the other side of the city, and the darkness into which the skilled knight had disappeared to.

"I should start culling some of their numbers."

I pulled the trigger and one of the knights fell, causing four of the surrounding knights to rush to him in surprise. The four of them fell to my rifle one by one.

"What is happening?!" yelled another knight.

The knights, startled, began to back away from the four fallen men.

“Maquina, drop our new zombie friend into the middle of the knights.”

“Yes, master.”

Maquina flew over the knights with the zombie and then let him go.

Thud!

“What was that?!”

“It can’t be...”

“C-Captain Lang, he...!”

The knights were deeply shaken by the appearance of their captain’s corpse.

“Make him move, Sharmilia.”

“As you command.”

Once again, a dark breeze passed through the night, and the zombie knight suddenly began to move. It drove its sword into the ground and leaned on it to remain standing. After having been dropped from such a high altitude, its body was falling apart.

The soldiers began to yell.

“Th-The captain!”

“Run!”

Seeing their captain rise in that state sent the knights scattering in all directions. We had finally succeeded in liberating the people of the city.

We stopped the Stryker in front of the civilians. Iona climbed out of the top hatch and began to give our story to the newly liberated people.

“So that’s what was happening,” King Paul of Gladrom said.

Having been held in the plaza with his people, he now stood speechless.

“O king of Gladrom, they were trying to do to your kingdom as they did to our Eucrit.”

“You are right. They invaded our nation and killed our people without cause or provocation. I will not let this go unpunished,” King Paul said with clenched fists and a face tinged with anger.

“Where is Galdzin now?” Iona asked.

"He fell into a trap, and was captured by Commander Gruis and a vile man named Curius," answered Chancellor David, who stood next to his king.

"I see. Then we will go and try to rescue him," Iona answered.

The chancellor nodded. Iona got back into the car and closed the hatch.

"Mother, please stay in the Stryker with the maids," I said.

"I will."

"The enemy shouldn't be able to reach you as long as you keep the doors shut. I think I'll be gone for a while, so you might have to make decisions on what to do without me."

"Of course. I will remember what you've told me."

I was still worried about her though. She was at a stage of pregnancy that wouldn't allow her to move around freely.

"Sharmilia, do a round of the city to raise any dead as zombies! Keep to the sky, no matter what. We don't know how powerful the enemies are."

"Please do not worry about me, Master Raul," she said, disappearing into the night in the direction of the fighting.

I handed Maria the Barrett M82 I'd been using.

"Maria, I want you to take this weapon and kill any enemy soldiers who come for you."

"Yes, Lord Raul."

"If you see any mages, use this to kill them. If the enemy approaches the Stryker, use the LRAD to direct sound at them and have Misha fire at them with the 12.7mm machine gun. But, if they get close, retreat into the Stryker immediately."

"I understand."

Misha nodded along with her, eyes wide. She wore a stiff expression on her face, but she no longer shook with fear after her experiences across multiple battles.

"And finally, Maquina. You will act as the cornerstone of our defense."

"Yes, master."

Maquina alone would defend everybody left behind. If the enemy used holy magic, there was nothing we could do, but we would try

to snipe them all before that could happen. If there were any mages left, I trusted Maria to take care of them.

"Maquina, make sure to hold the enemy back by firing on them from the air."

The expression on Maquina's aloof, beautiful face radiated confidence, as if she were trying to assure me that everything would be okay. As long as no enemies could use holy magic, she was practically invincible at night—a reliable guard indeed.

"Lord Raul, is there anything we could do to help you?" asked King Paul.

He had a potbelly and a face framed by blond hair and a blond beard. It seemed that it hurt his kingly pride to be left behind with nothing to do.

"No. The best thing everyone can do is just try and stay together in one place."

It would be a meaningless death if a stray bullet hit one of the townspeople.

"I'll see to it." He turned to the chancellor. "Let's get the word around to everyone."

As we wrapped up the conversation, Sharmilia returned. "Master, I finished the task."

"All right! Then let's go and rescue my father. Sharmilia, you're with me!"

"Yes, master!"

"I'm going to check on the situation in the city. Maria, turn on the searchlight!"

"Yes, my lord."

The Stryker's searchlight flicked on with a click, illuminating the city. It looked like a scene from Hell. People who had lost their legs were crawling on the ground. Someone was stabbed in the back. Another person drifted around with a blank look, holding their own severed arm. Someone's head was hacked off with an axe. A soldier tried to help his legless friend up, only to be attacked by a zombie.

The sound of splashing permeated the scene, but it was no longer from the rain. It was the sound of people walking through puddles and streams of blood. Arms, heads, and feet were strewn

around the streets. The cries and screams of the soldiers rang out clearly.

They had been fighting in the pitch-black darkness, but the bright light of the searchlight had lit up their surroundings. They could now see the situation that surrounded them. It would be a miracle if any of them could hold on to their sanity after seeing it.

A gasp came from the women except for Sharmilia and Maquina, who both wore faint smiles.

"Wh-What's going on?" asked the king. He tried to look around the car to see what was happening, but I stepped in front of him to draw his view away.

"My apologies, but the battlefield is looking rather gruesome," I told him. "Could you please make sure that the women and children are unable to see it? Try to have everyone move to the back of the plaza."

What lay before us was something that couldn't be caused by anyone who considered themselves a human being.

"O-Okay. Everyone, don't look at the battlefield! Pay special care to not let children see," the king called out to his people.

The adults, looking pale themselves, covered their children's eyes.

"Earlier, Lady Iona told the soldiers that if they fought those who wouldn't surrender, we would let them live. How should we handle that?" Maria asked me.

"That's a good question. In the heat of battle, it's hard to tell the difference between friend and foe. I mean, they're all wearing the same uniform."

"Then what should we do?"

"The soldiers of Bargius are renowned for their might. I don't think they'd retreat before the battle is over. So any that come here will likely be the enemy...I think."

"Wait, but...surely some are going to come back here to ask for help. Is this really okay?"

"We don't have a choice. It's too dangerous. We just can't know which side they're on."

Misha gave us a tired look and sighed. "I... I understand."

"Misha, I'm sorry," I said.

"No, no, please. We're doing this to make sure all of us survive."

"Okay. Then...I'm off."

"Come back safely," Iona called to me.

"I will."

I was worried about leaving everyone behind, but there were still enemies lurking in the cave. The ogres had yet to return, so we needed to go, no matter what. I attached my night vision goggles to my helmet, equipped an APC9 submachine gun, and loaded it with 9mm hollow-point bullets. Hollow-point bullets were bullets that would not penetrate through the body, but instead expand and cause massive damage to the flesh and internal organs. It seemed I'd need it to stop the more powerful knights in this world.

We cautiously advanced and arrived in front of the cave.

"The entrance is bigger than I imagined. Do you sense anyone inside?" I asked Sharmilia.

"I do not sense anyone near the entrance."

"Okay then, let's go. Keep your eyes open."

"As you command."

It was pitch-black inside the cave with zero visibility. The only thing I could see was Sharmilia's glowing red eyes floating in the darkness. Having a vampire next to me sure was reassuring. After walking in the darkness for a while, Sharmilia suddenly lifted her hand to make me stop.

"Master, I suspect that there is poisonous gas."

"Poisonous gas?"

"Yes. How should we proceed? It won't affect me, but..."

"I see."

I summoned the Type 85 Protective Mask Model 4, a gas mask used by the Self-Defense Forces Chemical Division.

"All right, let's go."

We proceeded farther into the cave, trying not to make a sound, before Sharmilia once again raised her beautiful fingers and pointed farther into the cave. I looked through my night vision goggles and saw six knights stationed at the cave wall, waiting for any hostile intruders. There was no doubt this was a trap. Suddenly, Sharmilia disappeared from my side. When I looked at the enemies again, she

was already next to them. The six soldiers fell without a sound before any of them knew what was happening. Sharmilia raised her hand to give the signal that all was clear.

"They really thought this trap out, didn't they? I wonder if Gersham and the ogres made it all the way to the other demons," I said.

"I hear movement coming from the back, probably the sound of battle."

"So they made it past this point."

"Or perhaps they were let through."

"I see..."

The back of the cave opened into a huge, open space. We moved along the wall at the entrance to scout out the situation.

"Ha ha ha ha! Ogres don't amount to much, do they?"

"Indeed. These brutes truly don't understand their place."

Gersham, Gazzam, and Gog were all kneeling, covered in wounds. In the spacious cavern, we could see a number of people being held captive, surrounded by wards that illuminated the space around them. Among the knights was a giant of a man who stood before the ogres, looking down on them.

Did he defeat the ogres three-to-one?!

The bodies of some knights were strewn about the cavern. It seemed that ten were already dead.

"How dare you kill my men," the giant said. But unlike his words, he wore a smile on his face. This was the commander of the Northeastern Army, Gruis Peintos. He was a mass of muscles with wild eyebrows, limbs like logs, and pectoral muscles bulging from beneath his armor.

He's definitely the type of guy who would be sitting on a throne at the end of the world.



“Truly. You have caused us no small amount of trouble,” said a well-shaped man with a feminine face.

This was Curius Leier, the captain of the Second Division. A fashionable type who would stab you in the back at the end of the world.

“Guh... You and your dirty tricks!” yelled Gersham.

“Now, now. Don’t you know that all is fair in love and war? We only took the necessary precautions,” Curius said.

He’s right. There are no rules in war.

“You may be dumb, but at least you’re sturdy. Do you have any interest in becoming my subordinates?” Gruis asked the three ogres.

“Who would ever want to follow *you*?! Just you wait... I’m going to strangle you!” Gersham growled, but his ragged breaths made it clear he had little chance of winning that fight.

“And just what do you expect to do in that condition?” Gruis laughed.

“What indeed! You’ve inhaled a poison gas that only affects demons. Unless you too are among those undead, I’m sure it’s quite painful. Well, you are our enemy, but I do commend you for your will to continue fighting,” Curius said with a hint of contempt.

“I’ll kill you,” Gog mumbled, but there was no life in his voice. It was safe to assume that the poison was taking a heavy toll on the ogres.

“Put these in your ears,” I said, handing Sharmilia a pair of TCAPS smart earplugs used by the American military that I had summoned. I put a pair in my ears too.

“As you command.”

“And equip this,” I said, summoning an M240 machine gun and a backpack for her to use.

“Yes, master.”

“The wards are made with holy magic, right?”

“Yes.”

“If they used a spell that works against evil, would you be paralyzed?”

“It’s pathetic, but yes. In the worst case, I could be destroyed outright.”

That is *bad.*

I put my APC9 onto my back and summoned a new Barrett M82 rifle.

"Gersham, Gazzam, Gog, can you hear me?" I asked through a radio signal. "You don't have to answer."

The three of them perked up but remained silent. My voice was coming through their headphones, so it was unlikely that the enemy would notice.

"I'm going to kill the mages now. As soon as the wards are lifted, start freeing the captives."

The three listened without responding.

"Sharmilia, how high is the ceiling of this cave?"

"I'd guess a hundred meters or so."

"Then go out into the middle of the cave but stay in the air."

"The knight will likely notice me."

"You're a decoy. I'll kill the mages while he's distracted. Then you join the demons and kill the knights."

"As you command."

"Don't get yourself killed."

"I'll do my best."

Sharmilia disappeared into the dark. It seemed the massive knight scared even her.

"Hmm?" said the massive knight. "What's this? It seems that a rat has gotten in somehow."

He noticed faster than I expected. His skill was on a different level. But as he turned his attention to Sharmilia, I pulled the trigger on my sniper rifle*. Blam! Blam! Blam!* The mages fell in a rain of their own blood. The light of the wards disappeared and darkness once again reigned supreme.

Suddenly, I felt a tremendous mass of wild energy moving in my direction. It appeared that the enemy general was heading towards me at a speed that belied his great size and bulk.

"Of course he'd find me."

Instead of retreating, I ran directly at him. I summoned four M84 flash grenades and threw them in one fluid motion. Four 180-decibel explosions of one million candelas illuminated the surroundings at

once.

This even stunned that knight in the city! I'm sure it will—

He was still heading towards me like nothing had happened! He kept running until he was right in front of me, then swung his sword in a horizontal stroke! I tried to dodge the blow by blocking it with my Barrett M82 and jumping to the side, but my anti-materiel rifle was cut in two. The sword followed through and cut deeply into my side. The momentum knocked me away, and I flew back in a spray of blood.

Ahhh! Th-That hurts! I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die!

I grabbed my APC9 submachine gun and pointed it at the knight as I lay on my back. The submachine gun flashed in the darkness as I fired a barrage of bullets into him.

That slowed him down! He roared and stopped after being hit with multiple 9mm M1153 hollow-point bullets at point-blank range.

"Gah!" The massive man spat out blood as he started to come after me again.

He swung his greatsword down in an arc.

It's over...

But then there was the clang of metal on metal, and the sword hovered ten centimeters from my face.

"Lord Raul, are you okay?!" Gersham yelled. His own sword had stopped the onslaught.

He had arrived just in the nick of time. I could hear the sound of Sharmilia's M240 machine gun in the distance.

"I-I don't think I am," I answered.

"How dare you touch Lord Raul?!" Gersham yelled.

He swung his sword at the massive knight, but he leaped back just in time to escape the blow.

"That hurt a lot, boy! It felt like my body was coming apart! What the hell did you do to me?!" the knight shouted.

Being hit by a submachine gun barrage seemed to have been effective.

That being said, shouldn't he have died instantly?

I coughed.

"What's with that weird mask?" he muttered.

It was hard to breathe through my gas mask, and I was bleeding out from my stomach. Suddenly the knight leaped quickly to the side to evade a set of large claws that cut through the place he was just standing.

"Well, well, if it isn't the lycan who refuses to die. You can still move, you bastard?"

Two daggers slashed at his back, but he evaded those as well. This man was on a different level if he could sense Gazzam's presence. No doubt this guy was the final boss.

"Come on," he groaned, "I already told you I can read your attacks. Take this!"

Suddenly the knight's greatsword disappeared! Gazzam blocked it with his daggers and jumped back to evade the attack, but the power of the knight's swing was too great, and he was knocked down, spitting blood.

I felt a pull on the back of my collar. Gog was trying to drag me to the entrance of the cave.

"W-Wait, wait a minute!"

Gog stopped after dragging me a short distance.

"Lord Raul, we need to get you out of here."

"No, take me to where Galdzin is."

"But... I-I understand."

Gog took me to where the demons were sitting. The mages were gone, so the wards had been lifted. There were about ten demons, but one sat unmoving, covering his eyes. Was he dead?

"Are you okay?" I asked one that was still alive, a man with a bull's face.

"We can't move yet," he answered.

"Wh-Where's my father? Where's Galdzin?"

At the mention of Galdzin, there was a commotion among the demons.

"Y-You're Master Algarde?!" one said.

Suddenly, the man who I thought was dead opened his eyes. But they were cloudy and seemed like they couldn't find me. He held his hand out towards the empty space in front of him. "Al? Algarde, is that you?"

I reached out to grab his hand. “Father? Yes, it’s me, Algarde!”

“Is Iona safe?”

“Yes.”

Tears began to flow from Galdzin’s lightless eyes.

“I’m sorry you have to see me like this,” he said weakly before he coughed out a large amount of blood.

“It’s okay, father. You don’t need to talk.”

“No, don’t worry about me,” he said while breathing heavily. “Are you hurt?”

“Yeah, they got me too.”

“D-Damn it!” he coughed.

He was badly injured. I wanted to help him. I wasn’t the weak child I was when we lost Gram in Sanaria.

“Now, now, don’t tell me you’re having an emotional father-son reunion without me?” said the massive knight walking towards us.

He was headed in the exact right direction, even in the complete darkness.

“Those ogres are some tough bastards,” he added, laughing.

Behind him, Gersham and Gazzam lay unmoving.

Did he kill them?

The massive man, nearly two and a half meters tall, carried his greatsword as he looked down upon us. So this was the work of Gruis Peintos, the commander of the Fourth Battalion of the Frontier of the Bargius Empire.

“So you’re Algarde? I’ve been looking for you. I didn’t expect you to come all the way *to* me!”

Gruis approached us with blood trickling from the corner of his mouth.

The submachine gun burst must have really hurt. He definitely looks angry.

“Al!” Galdzin yelled. “Run!”

The man with the bull head stood in front of us. “Master Algarde, I’ll do what I can to hold him off!”

A lizard man rose beside him. “We’ll buy you time, even if it kills us.”

A woman with the body of a bird stood as well. “Please escape,

no matter what!”

And last, a fairy with wings joined them. “As long as you live, our deaths will have meaning.”

“There’s no way in hell I’m letting him escape!” Gruis yelled, the force of his will almost palpable. That alone would scare any normal person senseless.

“Algarde, run,” said Galdzin. “You must survive!”

The demons had staggered to their feet, but it didn’t seem like they would be able to do anything.

“Father Galdzin, I’m hurt pretty badly. I don’t think I can move.”

I saw Gersham and Gazzam slowly crawling towards me. They were in so much pain that they were unable to stand. Was Gruis really keeping them alive because he wanted them to join him?

Gog growled, and his body began to bulge. He was trying to transform into a wolf. But his body started gushing blood from his wounds, and his transformation reverted.

“Whoa, whoa! You’ll die if you transform in that condition. Idiot,” Gruis said disdainfully.

And sure enough, Gog collapsed from the effort.

“Ha ha ha ha! I warned you, didn’t I? Well then, I guess I should start the killing!” He turned and pointed his sword at us with a glare.

“If only we hadn’t breathed in that poison,” muttered one of the demons.

Gruis came to me and swung his sword down.

What am I supposed to do?!

Just as the sword came down, someone pulled my body out of the way.

The woman with the body of a bird had saved me. Then another demon, this one with the horns of a ram, stepped between us and let out a roar.

“D-Dhama!” the bird lady shouted.

“Come on, now, don’t get in the way of my killing,” came Gruis’s voice.

It was followed by the sound of his sword slashing through the air, and the ram-horned demon named Dhama lost his head. Blood splattered onto me and the bird woman.

"I said get out of my way!" Gruis yelled, carving from top to bottom a hairy demon who had covered me from the side.

Were we just waiting to be killed one by one?

Just then, a dark breeze passed through the cave.

"Hm?" He turned to look behind him and saw his men walking towards him. "What's wrong? Curius, is that you?" A deathly pale Curius was rushing Gruis with his sword held high. "You're a zombie, aren't you?"

Ten more undead knights were also readying their swords to charge Gruis, and dozens more were coming from the darkness behind the ogres.

"Well, I guess it can't be helped," Gruis said to the knights. "I thank you for your service, men."

He began lopping off the heads of the zombies that were attacking him. This was our chance.

Sharmilia created an opening for me! I have to use it. Come on, body... Move!

I spoke to the one person I didn't need a radio for.

Sharmilia? You're not going to die, are you?

Not unless they use holy magic, the sun, or stab me through the heart with silver.

Got it. I'm going to use a weapon that uses light. When I do, stop Gruis's movement. Just make sure you avoid his sword.

I'll try.

Gruis moved with a speed that was entirely unbefitting his massive frame. My chance would only last for a moment. If he were to dodge it and kill me, the rest would likely soon follow after. And after that, there'd be no hope for Iona, Maria, Misha, and Misetta who were waiting for us in the city. Maquina certainly wouldn't be able to stop him by herself.

I summoned three more flash grenades and threw them at Gruis. He casually sliced at them, causing them to blow up in his face.

"Ugh! What the hell *are* these things?!"

The flash grenades stopped him momentarily. He soon continued making his way towards me, now watching me carefully. Sharmilia, who had thrown away her weapon, grabbed him from behind and

hung on with all her might.

"What the hell?!"

I summoned another 12.7mm M2 machine gun and fired a burst of armor piercing bullets at him. Sharmilia was able to slow his movement just enough to let me hit him with the full barrage at point-blank range.

"Gahhh!" Gruis roared in pain as several bullets pierced his and Sharmilia's bodies, knocking them both back.

Gruis lay on the ground with several large holes in his abdomen.

He coughed up blood and soon stopped moving.

I'm so sorry, Sharmilia! But you saved us!

Suddenly, I noticed Gruis's body moving.

Are you kidding me?! That didn't work?! What is it gonna take to kill you?!

But then Gruis slumped over, and Sharmilia crawled out from under him.

"That was incredible!" she cried.

Apparently the movement I'd seen was just her trying to get up.

Sharmilia stood and wiped the dust off her dress before closing the holes that riddled her body.

"What about the big guy?"

"He's dead."

"Oh, okay," she said.

After all that, I collapsed.

"Master!"

Sharmilia took me into her arms. My stomach was in bad shape, and I was losing blood quickly. I looked down and saw that my small intestine was hanging out. I nearly passed out as I pushed my intestines back in and held them there, but I could feel myself shaking.

I'm going to die. There's no way I can survive in this condition.

As I thought that, a demon with a bird's beak came to me and put her beak close to my stomach wound. As white light emanated from her beak, my wound began to throb. Then the bleeding stopped and the wound closed. But the beaked woman collapsed on the ground.

“Hello?” I called out to her.

“She’s dead,” Sharmilia said.

“Dead?”

Galdzin walked over to me. “She saved you.”

“But...why?”

“Because you saved us. She used the last of her strength to make sure you would live.”

I grabbed the beaked woman’s hand without thinking.

“Thank you.”

Having defeated the enemies, Sharmilia and I left the cave. I rode on her back, but with the night sky beginning to brighten, she could only be out for a little while longer.

“Master Raul!” Maria ran up to me, seeing the state I was in. “You... You’re wounded!”

“Yeah, but I’ve already received treatment, so there’s nothing to worry about. I just lost too much blood so I’m having trouble walking.”

“Still, let’s get you into the Stryker!”

Maria carried me into where Iona was waiting. The townspeople looked at me, concerned. Inside the vehicle, Iona and the others all gathered around me.

“Raul! You’ve overdone it again, haven’t you?!” Iona said, tears welling up in her eyes.

“I’ll be okay, mother. I’m not going to die...I think.”

Misetta looked at me and cried too.

The priority now was to get information. I was so tired that I felt like I was going to pass out, but I kept going.

“Maria, what’s the situation?”

“I don’t know. There’s still fighting going on inside the city.”

“Then it’s not safe to return yet. Sharmilia, could you bring Maquina back here?”

“As you command.”

Maquina soon returned.

“Oh, master, what a pitiable state you are in!”

“I’m fine. What do things look like in the city?”

“Most of the living have been dealt with, but there are still

enemies hiding in the houses."

"I see."

It wasn't a good idea to have the vampires moving around when dawn was about to break.

"It's almost morning. The two of you need to go rest in the cave."

"But, master!" Sharmilia exclaimed.

"That's an order."

She sighed. "As you command."

King Paul was among those gathered around me. "Galdzin and his people are in the cave," I told him. "Could you please help them get out?"

"Of course!"

By the time the sun had risen and was directly overhead, King Paul and the townspeople had brought the demons to the surface and given them medical treatment. As I awaited news about the battle in the city, Misha came rushing in with a report.

"Master Raul, a ship has arrived."

"A ship?"

"Yes, one from the Land of Demons."

"The Land of Demons? Have they come to attack Galdzin?"

I unsteadily made my way to the demons as quickly as I could. I felt that I needed to protect Galdzin.

"How is father doing?" I asked one of his attendants.

"He's sleeping."

"Al, is that you?" Galdzin called out from his bed.

"It is. How are you feeling?"

Galdzin looked into empty space with cloudy eyes. I grabbed his hand.

"Has something happened?" he asked me.

"It looks like a ship from the Land of Demons has arrived."

"Finally..."

"Huh? You knew they were coming?"

"I sent a message by bird, requesting help from them. I sent it directly to Lusemia."

"I see..."

It fell to me to go and welcome the demon reinforcements.

Wow. It's like a parade of legendary creatures! There's so many of them! Oh! There's a vampire with bat wings. Now that I look more closely at it, they're kind of grotesque, aren't they...

The demons disembarked from the ship in a line, then split to the left and right. Someone walked out from the back...

"Where is Galdzin?! Where is he?!" she asked, visibly upset.

A small, slender girl. She's not a child, is she? She certainly is flat though... Well, there's something childlike yet mature about her. She looks like she could hop on a flying broom like a stereotypical witch from my last life. But the suggestive clothes and her language don't fit her at all!

"What's going on?!" she said.

She made a beeline for Galdzin and me. Then she suddenly flew to us in a burst of flame.

O-Oh, crap!

"Gald! What happened? Who did this to you?"

"Lusemia?"

Galdzin held out his hand in the wrong direction, but Lusemia gently reached out to take it.

"Who was it?! Who would do something like this? I'll have you healed right away."

Galdzin shook his head sadly. "It's no use. I'm in pretty bad shape, Lusemia. I don't think I'll be able to heal anytime soon."

"That can't..." Lusemia looked closer at Galdzin and went silent. It must have been really bad.

"I will not stand by and do nothing!" she cried. Light emanated from her hand and Galdzin's wounds began to heal...but they soon reopened.

"The damage runs too deep..." Galdzin said.

Suddenly, Lusemia's whole body began to glow. It was so bright that I had to cover my eyes. There was a cracking sound, and then the light subsided, leaving Galdzin holding Lusemia's wrist.

"What are you doing?! That would kill you!"

"I don't care! My life doesn't matter without you!"

"You have a responsibility to your people!" he said.

Lusemia was trying to hold her emotions in, leaving her trembling.

"And look," he said. "Algarde has come back to me."

"What? I... I see. So you're Algarde, then? You look like a human, just as the rumors said."

Lusemia looked me over with a kind look on her face.

"Y-Yes. I was raised as a human, Your Majesty."

"Is that so? You know, I sent a vampire to come and get you."

"Yes, they found me. It's daytime, so they're sleeping right now."

"I was worried when we lost communication with them."

Oh crap, that's right! Them following me means that they betrayed Lusemia. If she finds out, what will she do?! What am I supposed to say...?

"Let me get a good look at your face. Hmm. So you've become attached to Sharmilia?"

"She's been very kind."

"I can see why. You have a face that's just her type. She has good taste, just like me of course!"

"Ha ha ha...ha."

Should I tell her that she's my companion now? I have a feeling that would go very badly.

"Well, that's that," Lusemia said. "And what of the Bargian humans?"

"We've cleared most of them out," I answered.

"Really? Was it not an army of a thousand soldiers? And what army defeated them? It must be a large one."

"My army consisted of four women and children, two ogres, and the two vampires you sent us."

Lusemia was dumbfounded. "That's all? Even with Sharmilia's help, that sounds impossible. Who were you fighting? Was there not a thousand soldiers, after all? Were they all incompetent?"

"No, there *were* a thousand of them, and some were quite skilled," I answered. "There are still some hiding in the houses."

"What did you say?!" Lusemia yelled. Flames flickered from her mouth and her eyes were ablaze.

"Eek!" I was so scared I made a weird noise.

Why is there fire coming from her eyes?! What is this fear I'm feeling? It's like I'm staring into the gates of Hell.

"Why?! Why would you let those who did this to your father live?!"

"Aaah!"

She was scary!

"W-Wait, Lusemia! Algarde has a plan!" Galdzin said, trying to placate her.

"Quiet!" she yelled.

She raised her hand into the air. A group of beings dressed in rags floated to her. I could see nothing in their hoods besides a pair of glowing eyes. Moments later, they flew into the city.

"Kill them all," Lusemia ordered, and the rest of her demons followed them in.

Soon the air was full of screams as the soldiers who had been hiding in the houses ran out into the streets, as if they had seen something unspeakably terrifying. The demons attacked them there. There was a boom as a giant flattened soldiers with a mighty swing of its club. A large were-boar took a soldier in his hands and tore him in two. A bird woman dropped a screaming soldier to the ground from a great height. And then there was silence. Having finished the job, the demons came back to Lusemia.

"They've been taken care of," a massive man with bull horns reported to Lusemia.

"Well done," Lusemia said before dismissing him with a wave.

"Galdzin!" she turned to him, beaming. "I took care of *all* of them!"

Did she always act like this when she was angry? That was a chilling thought.

"Looks like you're just as naive as Gald," Lusemia said to me. "Remember that there's a proper time and place for kindness."

She patted me on the head, smiling.

"R-Right."

Y-Yeah, she terrifies me.

And so, the last of the Bargian troops in the city of Gladrom were wiped out.

"Come back with me, Gald. I will find a way to heal you, no matter how long it takes."

"I accept...but only under one condition," Galdzin said. "You must take all of us."

"All of you?"

"Yes, including my men and Algarde's people."

"An easy request."

"U-Uh, is it okay for humans to come?" I asked.

"You only look human. You'll be fine."

"No, it's my people I'm worried about. They're human."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. Everyone, could you come here for a moment?" I yelled behind me.

The door to the Stryker opened and Iona came out with Misha and Misetta. Maria dropped down from the roof.

"These are your people?" Lusemia asked.

"Yes. This is my mother who raised me, and her servants."

"I am Algarde's adoptive mother, Iona Forrest," Iona said.

"Are you not pregnant? You did well to escape this far. You will have no worries from here on out!" Lusemia proclaimed.

"Thank you," Iona said, bowing as low as her stomach would let her.

"I accept these terms. If this is all it takes for Galdzin to return to me, I have no problem bringing all of you. I welcome you as guests from the Kingdom of Eucrit."

"Thank you," I answered.

"Then let's board the ship."

Whoa, whoa, whoa. Wait just a moment!

"With all due respect, we can't just leave the city in this state," I hurriedly advised Lusemia. "The people will suffer."

"Oh, I see. Then I'll have my men help clean up."

Lusemia's men started to make their way to the city.

"W-Wait! Just a moment!" I stopped Lusemia once again.

"What is it? I want to leave as soon as I can."

"I also want to bury the enemy's dead."

"Are you saying you wish to hold a funeral for them?"

“Yes.”

“And that’s important to you?”

“It is.”

“All right then, it shall be done.”

It turned out that Lusemia was a very understanding person. I had imagined her to be an out-of-control tyrant, but she listened closely to everything I asked for. It was hard to believe this was the same woman who had been literally on fire with anger moments ago.

I turned to the townspeople who had gathered. “Everyone, listen! The enemy has been wiped out! But I can’t just leave them out in the open like this. I want to give them a proper burial! We will, of course, prioritize the dead within the city. Does anyone object?”

“It’s wonderful to have an ally who shows respect even for his enemies!” King Paul said. “Everyone, this is a request from the hero who saved us! I know that many of you hold grudges against the invaders, but let us put that aside and give them a dignified burial!”

“Everyone,” I yelled, “the battle is over!”

The people of the city shouted with joy.

Though in truth, I really only wanted to bury the enemy dead to destroy any evidence if the Bargius Empire came looking.

Chapter Five: The Making of a Demon

A lot happened in the five days after the battle. First, I had accompanied Sharmilia to see Demon King Lusemia on the first night.

"O Demon King, forgive me for my betrayal. I have decided to follow Lord Algarde as his follower. If that is displeasing to you, you may send me to my final rest."

"Why would I do that? Do what you wish."

"But would that not stir discontent among your ranks?"

"I do not care about such things. Do what you believe is right for you."

"I-I thank you."

"Take good care of her, Al."

"I will."

Sharmilia turned to me, her eyes shining. "I am in your care."

Hmm? Just then...it almost seemed like Sharmilia's eyes had hearts in them.

And so, Lusemia let Sharmilia leave her service and become my follower.

"I do not need the Land of Demons or the Demon Army. I only need Galdzin," she said. "As long as I have him, Algarde, you can have it all!"

Nope! Absolutely not! I don't want that kind responsibility!

"No, that is too big of a task for me. The only thing I ask is that you consider letting me work freely."

"Yes, of course you are free. I'm free too. There's nothing that should hold you back."

"I hate those who did this to my father, Galdzin, and to the man who raised me and my countrymen."

"That is understandable. I can't forgive them either. But what do you plan to do about it?"

"I wish to go to war with them. If you could assist me in this, I would greatly appreciate it."

"I suppose I will. I cannot refuse a request from Gald's son. Use my army however you see fit."

"Then I hope to discuss this with you more at another time."

"Come anytime you wish."

After receiving the promise of the Demon King, I renewed my vow to take back everything that the enemy had stolen from me.

And thus, the day of the battle's conclusion came to an end.

The next day, Sharmilia proposed a plan.

"Master, I think we could use the knight that we defeated in the cave. His body was very strong, and his soul was able to manipulate energy so easily."

She was referring to Gruis Peintos, commander of the Fourth Army of the Frontier.

"Ah, that monster."

"Yes, and...I am unable to keep watch over you during the day."

"That can't be helped. You're a vampire."

"Exactly. And so, if it were possible, I would like to give you some form of protection during that time."

"So you want to turn Gruis into a zombie."

"Not exactly... I wish to create something called a high ghoul."

"A high ghoul?" I asked.

That's not the same as a highball, is it?

"I am what they call a Vampire of Origin, one of the pure-blooded vampires. I've lived for thousands of years..."

Calling her a grandma would be underselling it! How is she this charmingly beautiful? Oh, right, it's because she's an immortal who doesn't age.

Sharmilia continued, "For thousands of years, I built my brood, gaining thralls one by one. Yet now, only Maquina remains."

"Oh...that was our fault, wasn't it? Sorry about all that."

"Don't worry about the little things. In all the time I've been alive,

I've never had such an ideal home and so many offerings...as in, the many corpses left by the soldiers. Hence, I now have something I would very much like to do."

"And that would be to make a high ghoul?"

"Yes. I think it would be the perfect guardian for you, master..."

"I think I get it. Well, you're free to do it."

"In that case, please give me all of the fallen enemy soldiers."

"Done."

"It is a pleasure to serve you! I will do my best."

Sharmilia and Maquina then whisked the bodies of the enemy knights away in the night.

"Please stand at the entrance and make sure that no one enters the cave."

"Me?"

"I do apologize. But, if it's possible..."

"I understand. I'll let everyone know."

"Thank you."

This is starting to remind me of the story of Tsuru no Ongaeshi*. But I guess in this case it's a vampire returning the favor...*

The two vampires had yet to come out of the cave. I was worried that, just like in the story, they'd fly off somewhere if I went in to see what was going on, so I decided to just leave it be for now.

Meanwhile, in the cave...

"Come on, you're almost there. Hurry and finish eating!" Sharmilia told someone in the darkness.

Maquina was beside them, cutting up the soldiers' carcasses to make it easier to eat. Before them was a sharklike creature whose great toothy mouth split open down to just above its chest. Maquina was tossing in pieces of flesh one after another into its vertically cut mouth. The sound it was making was closer to a juicer.

"You're a slow learner, aren't you? You won't be of any use to master like this. Come now, quickly!"

Sharmilia was beginning to apply the finishing touches. Failure would not be allowed.

On a quiet, moonlit night, I was sleeping in a room in King Paul's castle. However, it was nothing like the royal castles in the Kingdom of Eucrit. It was only slightly larger than the manor I'd known in Sanaria.

When I felt a breeze in my room, I knew right away who had come.

"Sharmilia? What's up?"

"Master, the preparations are finally complete. Would you come with me?"

"Sure, let's go."

Sharmilia picked me up and flew into the moonlit night. She brought me to the spacious part of the cave, where someone was standing.

"Master, it's almost ready!" Sharmilia said gleefully.

What stood before me was the result of transforming the muscular, monstrous knight. But something was off. The face did remind me of Gruis Peintos, but there were parts of it that more closely resembled the sly-looking man who had been with him, as well as the handsome knight we had killed even before that.

"Then, shall we?" Sharmilia said.

She thrust her hand into the thing's back without warning, and winced in pain.

"H-Hey, are you okay?"

"All is going to plan," she said before wincing again.

"Hey!" I said. I began to reach out but stopped myself. It was hard seeing her clearly in pain.

Just when she looked like she was going to collapse, Maquina came over and supported her. With a squelch, Sharmilia pulled her arm out. She looked unsteady.

"I put a great deal of my blood into it. All that remains is to have it commit your scent to memory."

"How do we do that?"

"Give him some of your own blood, just as you did for us."

I summoned my combat knife and cut across my palm. Blood began to drop onto the ground in thick drops, I brought my hand to its mouth. A long, snakelike tongue slithered out and began to lick

my hand.

"How long are you going to keep licking him?!" Sharmilia yelled and kicked the creature's head. Its neck snapped back at a ninety-degree angle.

It made a gurgling sound as its head snapped back into place.

"My apologies, master," Sharmilia apologized to me.

I looked at Sharmilia, who was still unsteady on her feet.

"Uh, you can have some too," I said, holding my hand towards her.

"But... That... Oh, thank you."

Sharmilia took my hand and began to lap up the blood from my palm. She looked like she was in ecstasy.

"Ahh, haaa...haaa..." she moaned and began to breathe heavily.

Maquina hunched over, clutching herself as she watched us. She seemed to be pained with desire.

"Come here, Maquina. I'll give you some too."

"Y-Yes, master."

Maquina began to lick my palm as well. The two vampires finished and backed away, blood coated around their mouths. Sharmilia then took Maquina's face in her hands and began to lick the blood from around her lips. Obscene wet sounds echoed through the dark cavern.

"I beg your pardon, master. I showed you something unseemly," Sharmilia said, looking ashamed.

"Don't worry about it. You needed blood after losing so much of it."

"Th-Thank you for your concern."

"So, what about this guy?" I asked, pointing at the high ghoul.

"He is complete. This is a construct that is only possible with a thousand sacrifices. It is immortal, and can even operate in sunlight. It can regenerate from any damage by eating the flesh of a human corpse. And it will not attack without permission," Sharmilia said. She was hyping it up like this was a presentation of a new car.

"Is it powerful?" I asked.

"Yes. It is much more powerful than a demon."

I-It's almost like a killer cyborg sent from the future!

And so, Sharmilia’s handmade high ghoul guardian entered my service.

Epilogue

We were on a ship heading to the Land of Demons. The Northern Sea was quiet and calm. Normally, a trip like this would be full of sea serpents and giant tentacles, but even they wouldn't dare attack Demon King Lusemia. From what I'd heard, human ships were unable to cross this stretch of sea.

"But man! This fish is good!" I exclaimed.

We were eating fish in the ship's large mess hall.

"It's so fresh! It tastes much better than the fish in Sanaria," Iona agreed.

There was nothing better than spending a peaceful slice of everyday life with my family and my people.

"I am glad you are fully recovered, Lord Raul," said Gersham.

The ogres were with everyone at the same table. Gog was wolfing the whole thing down, head and all. Despite his cute face, he really acted like a beast. Unlike him, Gazzam ate quietly and politely.

"I'm glad that the three of you are fully recovered too," I said, earning a smile from Gersham.

Sharmilia and Maquina were sleeping in coffins at the bottom of the ship.

"And *you* don't need to eat, do you?" I turned and asked the high ghoul wearing tattered clothing and a hood who was standing behind me.

He didn't answer, simply staring straight ahead blankly.

I need to figure out a name for him...

Galdzin's men were also sitting with us. The man with a bull head was named Minos, a member of a race called minotaurs who were known for their height and physical prowess. The man with the head of a boar was Lars; he was built like ten sumo wrestlers combined. The one with a lizard face was named Doran, a human with dragon

blood. The woman with scales on her lower body and webbed feet was Seira. Her upper body looked human; you could see her gills if you looked close enough, but they were usually hidden by her clothes. Slaga was a short, stocky man who could turn into a giant when he was fighting. And the fairy woman with wings and horns was Anamis.

I addressed the table. "I spoke to King Lusemia and...it sounds like father's eyes will never heal. She's doing what she can to restore his health, but it isn't going as well as she wants it to."

Everyone went silent.

"They hurt my father, Galdzin, and killed the man who raised me, Gram. I will *never* forgive them. I will not rest until the Bargius Empire pays for taking the ones we love. But that is only *my* wish. None of you are required to follow me. You can go into the Land of Demons and live in peace."

"Though I am powerless, I feel the same way as you," Iona said forcefully. "I will follow you until Gram is avenged."

"Master Raul, I promised that I would protect you no matter what," Maria said, giving me a big smile. "Please don't leave me behind now."

There was fire in Misha's eyes. "I, too, will never forget the sorrow of losing my loved ones. Let me follow you until I die."

"I may slow you down, but I want to help you!" Misetta said desperately, clenching her fists. "So I'll follow you too!"

"Um, Lord Raul," Gersham began, more calmly than the others, "Galdzin asked the nine demons gathered here to protect you with all of our strength. We have already decided to serve you."

"Wait... Shouldn't you be with my father?" I asked.

"We have been told to follow *you* from now on."

"Even though Galdzin is in that condition?"

"King Lusemia has vowed to devote herself to healing him. The truth is, we'd only get in the way."

"Ah...I see."

"Yes..."

So, Lusemia wants my father all to herself.

"Well then. Gersham, what kind of place is the Land of Demons?"

"It is far to the north, so the winters are cold and not many trees grow there. In the summer, you can see the land when the snow melts. It is a very beautiful country, especially when the frigid sky is full of lights."

That sounds like the northern lights in my previous world. In terms of geography, it sounds like Greenland, maybe? Actually, I've never seen a globe of this world. I wonder if it's a planet at all...

Suddenly, Iona started to moan in pain.

"Mother, what's wrong?! Are you okay?"

"I-I think I've gone into labor..."

"The baby's coming! Wh-Wh-What should we do?!"

"Lord Raul, don't panic!" Maria said, walking over to Iona.

What else could *I do?! I never had any experience with this in my previous life! What should I do? What should I do?*

Maria began to calmly give everyone instructions.

"First, Gersham, carry Lady Iona to her room!"

"Y-Yes, ma'am!"

Gersham picked up Iona in a bridal carry.

"Misha, start boiling water! Gog, bring a wash basin."

"Yes!"

"Got it!"

"Seira, could you get me some clean cloths?"

"Right away."

Ahhhh! Maria is moving too quickly. What do I do?

"Master Raul, please calm down. Go and tell King Lusemia."

"G-Got it!"

All right. Tell King Lusemia... Where is she again?

"This way." Anamis gestured for me to follow her.

She stopped and knocked on a door.

"What is it?" Lusemia answered from the other side.

"Lady Lusemia, my mother— Iona has gone into labor."

"Ohh! I see. I'll be right there."

"Lusemia, take good care of Iona," Galdzin said, clearly worried.

"Leave it to me. I've done this thousands of times."

When Lusemia and I arrived at Iona's room, the male demons were all wandering aimlessly in the hallway.

“What is this?! What are you all doing standing here?! You’re in my way! Leave!”

“F-Forgive us!” they cried as they quickly moved away from the door. Oh, maybe I was supposed to leave too...

“Algarde, where are you going? You wait here!”

“Eh? But—”

“She’s your mother!”

“R-Right!”

King Lusemia entered the room. I spent a long time waiting in front of the door. Meanwhile, the girls were coming and going. I could see into the room for a moment each time the door opened. Lusemia was standing between Iona’s pale, open legs. It looked like she was saying something to Iona but...how much longer would this take?

Then suddenly, I heard a baby crying.

“Sh-She gave birth!”

The door opened and Misha motioned for me to come inside.

“Mother! Are you okay?” I asked.

“Yes...I’m fine.”

“Come on, come closer!” Lusemia said, urging me to sit by Iona’s side. The baby was bright red and wet all over.

“It’s a girl,” Lusemia announced.

“A girl?”

“Lady Iona, you did so well,” Maria said in tears, gently putting her hand on Iona’s shoulder.

“This is...my sister?” I asked.

“That’s right,” Iona said softly, “your little sister.”

I began to cry.

She made it through this hard journey with us, hanging on inside Iona as hard as she could. And she’s Gram’s daughter! The child of a father who died such a terrible death! How could I not cry?

“King Lusemia, would you do me the honor of naming this child?” Iona asked.

“Hmm, why not? I’ll give her a good name.”

“You honor us. Give her a name that will help her grow strong and healthy.”

“Yes, but you must be tired. Let me leave you to be with your family.”

“Thank you.”

Maria ushered Misha and Misetta out of the room. “We’ll be next door if you need us.”

I sat there sniffling as I looked at the baby. I thought I could see a hint of Gram in her face, but it was hard to tell at this point.

“It’s all thanks to you that she’s alive, Raul.”

“No... She... She was the one who made it through it all.”

“I suppose so. She is Gram’s daughter, after all.”

“I know how tough it was. But you did so well,” I said to the baby. I smiled through my tears and gently touched her face.

She gripped my finger with her little hand.

“She grabbed on to me!”

“Ah, you’re right.”

“She’s so strong!”

“Maybe she really has taken after her father,” Iona said. I couldn’t help but wonder if my mother really was a goddess. The smile that passed over her beautiful face was divine.



“The birth wasn’t as hard as I thought, thanks to King Lusemia’s help.”

“Really?”

“Yes. She used magic to make it painless.”

“She can use magic?” I asked.

“I’ve heard that no demon can use magic, but maybe it’s different when it’s the Demon King.”

“Maybe.”

“Raul, take good care of your sister.”

“Of course.”

“Thank you...”

“You must be tired. I’ll stay here with you, so sleep.”

Before long, Iona’s breathing became soft and rhythmic. She was asleep.

It was snowing outside.

In the warmth of the ship, I quietly cried as I looked at my sister’s face.

Afterword

Thank you for picking up this book. I am MIDORIMAMESORA. It's nice to meet you!

About a year after I'd started writing web novels, I suddenly received a message from Shueisha telling me that *Bullet Hellion* had won their grand prize. I thought, "This must be a prank." But I looked at their announcement page, and there it was. My heart leaped when I realized that it was the truth and not some kind of scam. However...in order to publish it in book form, we had to make a lot of revisions and improvements. Just as I was ready to cry and beg for help, I put on a brave face, hunkered down, and finished it. The effort must have paid off, because it was decided that Akamine Naoki-sensei would do the illustrations! I was delighted!

It was a truly unbelievable series of events that led to this book being in your hands.

Now, I would like to talk a little more about the novel.

This novel is a rather classic "a demon prince travels a medieval-style *isekai* world" reincarnation story. What isn't normal is that the demon prince can summon pistols, machine guns, and other weapons from the modern world. On top of that, it's not just the main character who fights with modern weapons, but also ogres, orcs, and other fantasy races. This might make you wonder, "Is this really an *isekai*?"

And finally...

To the readers of the web novel who have supported this work! Without your support, this book could not have been made. To my editor, Matsuhashi-san, thank you for taking the time to kindly help me through each step of the process. To Naoki Akamine-sensei who drew the illustrations, thank you for drawing such cool and cute characters. To everyone at DASH X Bunko, and to everyone who has worked so hard to promote this novel, thank you so much! I will

continue to devote myself to writing interesting stories.

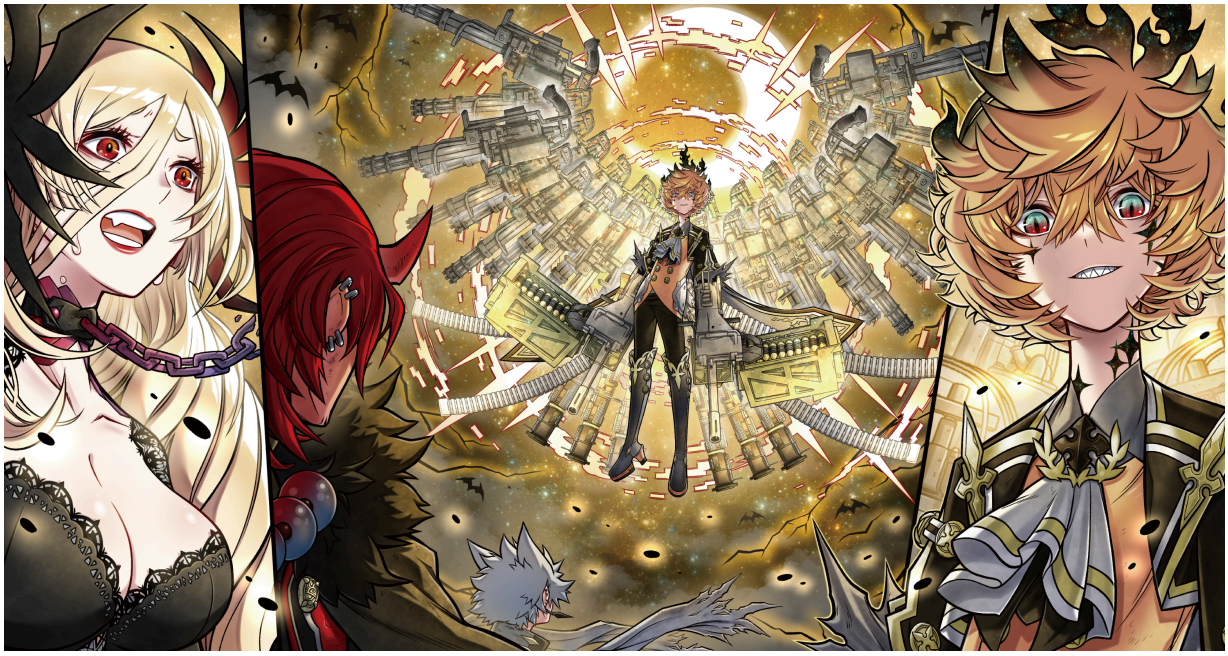
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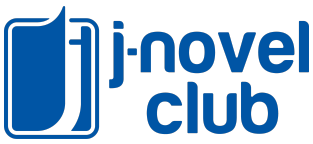
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MIDORIMAMESORA











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Bullet Hellion: The Gunslinging Demon Prince Crushes Another World with Modern Arms Volume 1
by MIDORIMAMESORA

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Edited by Austin Conrad

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