**A returners magic should be special**

**Chapter 1 - Prologue**

It had once been a lively city." Yet, its ruins were now strewn before him,
shattered to the point of no return." Prehenople, which had once been known as
“the most beautiful city” for three generations, was now nothing more than a
dismal shell of its former self."
Desir took a deep breath and shifted his gaze towards the gargantuan figure in
front of him."

Meteor Rank, the Dragon of Destruction - Boromir Napolitan."

4

5
The massive Hellfire magic above Desir blazed like the sun." The dragon,
Boromir Napolitan, glared menacingly at the 100 humans gathered before him."
"Mere humans would DARE to stand against ME?” The dragon’s deep voice
bellowed toward them, capable of overwhelming others through its sheer
power."
Even then, not a single one of the people present lost their resolve."
Desir spoke, his voice determined, “This is the end, Napolitan." ”
This place was the end of Hell, the end of his suffering within the Shadow
Labyrinth." The Shadow World had presented humanity with this final
labyrinth." Inside the labyrinth, Desir Arman had witnessed countless deaths,
losing friends and loved ones, all in the hope of reaching this point."
Friends with whom he had spent his school days, a classmate he’d had a crush
on, and juniors who had tried their very best to follow him."
While Desir was not familiar with every person in the Shadow Labyrinth, he
was at the very least acquainted with them."
The battlefield had claimed each and every one of their lives." Night after night,
the Shadow Army poured forth endlessly." Day after day, untold scores of
people died."
Amidst the neverending slaughter, those lucky enough to survive would recite
the names of the dead, and continue their struggle for survival." After 10 years
of repeating this cycle of carnage, there were only 100 survivors remaining."
A single cry echoed from the group, renewing the fighting spirit of these few
survivors." “We will slay you, here and now!” the lone voice roared." “Finally, we
will put an end to this Hell!”

6
Boromir Napolitan’s [Fire Breath], which had once annihilated an entire
civilization, marked the beginning of their final tribulation."
It was a battle of epic proportions; truly an event which rivaled any previous
legends of old." Hundreds of Draconic spells rained down upon them as the
survivors fought back desperately." Prehenople was once the jewel of this
desert." Now, its remnants were ravaged further by the dragon’s ceaseless
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7
One of the frontliners let out a hope-filled cry, “The bone armor is completely
destroyed! Focus on attacking its back!”
“You maggots!” The dragon used its strongest spell, a spell powerful enough to
be considered its final trump card."
With the release of its spell, an enormous explosion blasted the surroundings."
The burst of magic crashed down upon the ground, waves of energy billowing
out like a tsunami." However, the force of the attack was significantly weaker
than before."
Finally, the once impregnable dragon had slowly been weakened." It was time—
Desir knew it was now or never."
“The analysis of the thirteenth spell is complete,” Desir’s voice rang out." “[Solar
Storm] is completely sealed!”
“Incoming breath attack from the front! Mages!” Zod commanded, “Try your
best to disperse it! Frontliners, retreat to a blind spot or to the side!”
Like that, the dragon’s attacks were effectively blocked." At the same time, Desir
analyzed the Dragonic magic patterns by the tens of thousands."
One by one, all of the dragon’s powerful spells were sealed as the mages
devised a defensive formula to stop any remaining attacks."
Slowly but surely, the dragon’s offensive abilities declined." Horrified, the
dragon gave an anguished wail, “H-How could I lose to mere humans!?”
“The analysis of the final magic pattern is complete!” Desir yelled hastily." “All
of the Draconic spells are now sealed!”

8

With a triumphant shout, Raphaello gave the command they’d all been
yearning for." “Attackers to the front, slay the dragon!”
“No!” Napolitan cried." “This can’t be happening!” He had looked down on the
humans." Compared to him, they were dust to be blown away by a mere flap of
his wings." Yet, against all odds, their spells had brought him to this helpless
state."
Finally— after so much sacrifice and loss, after a world’s worth of blood had
been spilled— humanity stood on the cusp of victory."
It took but a few moments longer."
And then there it was: miserably, the Dragon of Destruction collapsed to the
ground, defeated at last."
With that, everything was over."
Or so they thought."."."

\*\*\*

As they realized they had won, relief washed over the survivors." Though they

had emerged victorious, only six of them had survived the battle." With glee-
filled expressions, they gawked at the dragon’s corpse sprawled out in front of

them." They could barely believe it."
Memories of the past decade flashed through their minds." They had lived, day
to day, with one foot in the grave at all times." They had overcome thousands of
life-or-death situations and watched their close friends die one by one."
Yet, through it all, they had managed to stay alive."

9
Indeed, disbelief and shock tainted them all." “Are we finally able to leave this
godforsaken place?” one of them asked in a daze."
Around them, the landscape lay decimated with debris strewn about." Everyone
collapsed (like puppets whose strings had been cut), their bodies landing on the
wreckage at their feet." Exhaustion overwhelmed them."
“Good work, everyone,” The Knight of Light, Raphaello, praised." “We actually
did it; we’ve saved the world." ”
Donaif, a warrior of the northern savages, was covered from head to toe in gold
jewelry." With halting speech, as he wasn’t familiar with the official language,
he spoke, “But why isn’t there a pop-up?."."."." The clear message."."."." Was it not?."."."."
This Shadow World’s objective."."."."." to slay the dragon." ”
“Hm, I'm not sure either,” Raphaello said." “It’s usually the case that once the
mission is cleared, we’re able to return to our own world immediately." But this
place doesn’t seem to follow the normal rules of the Shadow World, so it’s
difficult to say what could happen." ” He considered for a moment." “ I think it’s
best that we wait a bit." ”
The Great Sage Zod, wearing a blue hood and holding a staff, contemplated
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10
Desir Arman, who had been watching the Sage and the Saint bicker, decided to
make it end." Interrupting the two, he said, “In any case, it doesn’t change the
fact that we saved the world." ”
Just then, the reality of the situation slowly dawned on them." The survivors felt
the muscles in their bodies loosen, their hearts relax." With that, they started to
discuss the battle with each other."
Amongst the discussion, the Spellsword of the Dawn, Ajest, sat away from the
rest." She didn’t say a word but simply listened to their stories."
“It would have been really hard if you weren’t here for us, Raphaello,” Priscilla
said."
Raphaello waved his hands in modesty." “No, no." As a Paladin, I just fulfilled my
duty to protect everyone." Sir Desir played a bigger role than me." ”
Desir, who had been staring at the ground this entire time, looked up." As their
eyes met, Raphaello smiled."
“Right."."." ” Donaif said." “This would have been impossible to clear."."." Without you,
Desir." ”
Naturally, Donaif agreed; he had received help from Desir twice during their
time in the Shadow World."
Zod, ever gloomy, spoke." “To be honest, I thought you would have been long
dead by now." ” He cast his gaze onto Desir, “Even if you had received help from
artifacts, it’s difficult for me to believe that a 3rd circle mage could analyze
Draconic magic and seal it." Even I, as a 7th circle mage, cannot succeed in the
reverse analysis of Draconic magic like that." How come you’re only a 3rd circle

11
mage with so much talent?” He narrowed his eyes." “ Is there any special
reason?”
Everyone stared at Desir, silence expanded between them."
Finally, Desir spoke." “As a commoner, I never received a proper education." The
Academy drew a line between nobles and commoners." Because of that, it
became impossible for any of us to become stronger." We could have saved
countless." Without such plain bigotry, we could have won long ago." With a lot
less sacrifice." ”
“."."." That's too bad,” Zod said." “If only we’d had more people like you in the
Tower of Magic, then your talent wouldn’t have been wasted for so long." ”
“Let’s stop talking about the boring past,” Raphaello said." With one hand, he
covered his face from the sunlight and surveyed the survivors." “We’re the
heroes who saved the world." When we return, we’ll certainly receive a grand
welcome home." But after all of that, what will everyone do after we get back?”
Donaif, who was now sitting across from Raphaello, spoke first." “I’m going to
stop by."."." The homes of my fallen comrades."."." And return."."." Their belongings."."."
To remember their honorable deaths."."." Forever." ”
The barbarian had hundreds of pieces of jewelry." Each piece had a different
initial engraved on it, in remembrance of his fallen brethren from the North."
While Desir was lost in thought, Priscilla spoke up."."I'll be returning to the
Western Kingdom to comfort the families of the deceased soldiers." I must take
responsibility for their livelihood." For everyone that lost their lives here, I'll
build a memorial tower or a shrine in their honor." I'm sure it'll make them
happy." ”

12
“I’ll just continue my research, but I’ll shift my field of study to the Shadow
World,” Zod said." “If another Shadow Labyrinth of this scale were to appear
again, it would definitely be the end of the world." We don’t have the troops, the
resources, nor the time to prepare again, so I’ll do my best to prevent
recurrence of a Shadow Labyrinth." ”
As soon as Zod finished speaking, Raphaello looked at Ajest, who still hadn’t
said a single word."
“What will you be doing Lady Ajest?” He asked."
Silence followed Raphaello’s question."
With a blank expression, Ajest stared at Raphaello for some time and turned
away."
With an awkward smile, Raphaello’s gaze landed on Desir." “What about you, Sir
Desir? I’m certain that you’ll be welcomed anywhere you go! You can go to the
Western Kingdom, or our Kingdom, or even Sir Zod’s Tower of Magic." Or
maybe you’re planning to return to Hebrion Academy?”
Taking a moment to mull over the question, Desir began to speak." “I—”
Without warning, a powerful surge of mana roared forth, setting the previously
carefree survivors on edge."
“Did we miss something!?” Zod exclaimed."
“W-Wait a minute!” Priscilla screamed." “Didn’t we clear this Shadow
Labyrinth? I thought the objective was to slay the dragon!”
Shocked, Donaif said, “Did we not."."." Completely kill."."." The dragon?”

13

“That’s not possible!” Zod yelled." “I definitely confirmed its death!”
Their cries of disbelief melded together into a swirling storm of confusion."
While everyone continued to panic, Zod spoke up again in an unexpectedly low
voice."

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**Chapter 2 - The Returner’s Entrance Exam (1)**

“The heart."." ?” Zod mumbled to himself."
Confused by his ramblings, someone asked, “What do you mean by the heart?”
“I read about it in a book many many years ago,” Zod said." “A dragon’s heart
acts like an engine for magic—just like our mana circles." It’s an enormous
magic engine that sucks in the surrounding mana." ”
Mana circles." Mana was absorbed into mana circles so that it could be
controlled and used." This was elementary knowledge for a mage."
Zod continued, “The dragon’s dead, which means there’s nothing controlling
the mana accumulated inside its heart now." Since mana is very fluid, it’s
continued to flow around, which has resulted in this ‘engine’ overheating." If
this continues—”
“I don’t understand what you’re saying!” Priscilla interrupted." “Say it in
simpler terms!”
Desir spoke up, reaching the conclusion quickly." “The overheating engine is
about to explode." ”
“WHAAAT?!?!?” Priscilla shrieked in a shrill voice."
A terrible rumbling arose from the body, punctuating Desir’s words." The
uncontrollable mana overflowed, overwhelming everyone present, and causing
their faces to turn deathly pale."
“Why didn’t we know about this before we killed it?”
Zod’s usual empty eyes gleamed with despair." He spoke in a dead and

15
monotonous voice, “."."." Because."."." this is the first time humanity has ever defeated
a dragon."
“An explosion caused by the pressure of the mana contained within the mana
circle."."." This kind of phenomenon would be equivalent to 7th circle magic."."."
“No, even that’s too low of an estimate." This amount of mana is beyond the
reckoning of mortals." Also, if it’s pure mana rather than magic, it’s not
something we can ‘hijack." ’
“."."." I think it’s time we prepared."."." ”
The looming inevitability cast a pall over the survivors, like a bitter, black
cloud." It was as Zod said." A mana explosion of this scale was impossible to
dodge, impossible to block."
“I."."." I can’t believe it." The world is really."."." right now."."." ” Raphaello turned to face
the gathering mana-storm with a thousand-yard stare."
“Our Father who art in heaven."."." ” Priscilla’s quiet prayer was drowned out by
the coming storm."
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Desir Arman opened his eyes, staring at his outstretched hand."

16

‘Wait." ’
Something was amiss."
‘Where am I?’
Voices, chattering in excitement, filled the air." He lowered his hand and
surveyed his surroundings." A massive chandelier, gilded with tens of sapphires,
lit the room." Hundreds of students dressed in black uniforms sat at dozens of
oak tables surrounding an antique stone shrine."
As Desir glanced around in confusion, he realized, ‘."."." this looks familiar."."." ’
Looking down, there was a glass cup in front of him." A young boy, eerily
familiar, stared back in confusion." He had deep black eyes and bright red lips."
His face wasn’t quite handsome, but he had a bit of a childish charm to him."
‘Wait, this is."."." ’ Gone were the scar-covered cheeks and rugged skin." A fair,
somewhat effeminate school-aged child greeted him." He was his adolescent self
again."
‘What’s going on."."." ? I definitely died back there."."." ’
He sat, confusion and doubt racing through his mind, until a sudden ringing
disrupted his thoughts."
The ringing of a bell attracted everyone’s attention back to the front." A
beautiful young woman dressed in a professor’s black uniform smiled as she
ascended the stage." As the music ceased and chatter died down, the woman
began speaking."
“Pleased to meet you, applicants of Hebrion Academy." I am Professor Brigitte." ”
Desir stared at the woman intensely." It should have been the first time Desir
was seeing her face, but instead, she seemed strangely familiar."

17
“I know that many of you have come to Hebrion Academy from many different
countries." I sincerely thank every one of you for having made this long journey
to attend our school." ”
She paused and drew a deep breath before continuing."
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18

Yet, now, somehow, he was again at the precipice of entering Hebrion
Academy." His mind swirled with confusion." ‘If it’s 3613."."." ’
Then he had been flung 13 years into the past." The Shadow Labyrinth had
appeared in the year Lowellius 3616, and he had lived in the hellish nightmare
for 10 years, from 3616 to 3626."
Desir closed his eyes as felt the enormity of it all." Conflicting emotions raced
through his heart: pangs of guilt pierced through the happiness he felt for
coming back to this point."
An eternity of suffering and torture." The blood of his friends who died and the
tears he shed." All of it was for nothing." They failed to save the world."
10 years of suffering and 150 million dead— all for nothing." It was unavoidable,
undeniably a disaster."
And yet, somehow."."."
Desir Arman had returned 13 years into the past from that doomed future." It
was like a joke—a cruel, twisted joke."

At first, Desir had simply thought that, perhaps, it had all been a dream; a
particularly horrid nightmare that he had just awoken from." But the vivid
memories were all too real." He couldn’t have called it a dream, with all the
desperate fights and the vast array of magic knowledge he had gained buried in
his mind." All these memories flowing through his head were far too realistic for
a dream."
"You're Desir Arman, aren't you?"
A young girl appeared in front of Desir, snapping him from his contemplation."
She wore her red hair in a short bob, and, despite her short stature, her steely
eyes gave off an aura of great confidence and will."

19
“Nice to meet you!” she said cheerfully." “I’m Radoria Von Dorich, but you can
call me Radoria." I’m a second-year student of Hebrion Academy, and I’ll be
your mentor for the entrance examination today." I look forward to working
with you!”
“Ah, please look after me." ” Even though his voice came out naturally, Desir felt
an unnatural discomfort as he stared at Radoria."
This was the same Radoria Von Dorich he had met in his past life." Radoria Von
Dorich was a genius, a fire mage capable of 6th circle magic." She held the
number 1 rank of her year for her entire time at Hebrion."
“What are you thinking so much about?” she asked."
“Oh, I’m feeling pretty nervous,” he answered."
Radoria giggled." “There’s no need to get scared over the entrance exam." The
Shadow World they use is specially made; it’s incomparable to a real Shadow
World in difficulty." ”
“Is that so?”
“It’s still an exam, though." Like, ‘can you really go fight against the Shadow
Worlds?’ kinda thing." ”
Introductions more or less complete, Radoria started her preparations for the
entrance exam." She flicked through her documents on Desir, and then paused
and looked up." “Huh? You’re a commoner?”
Desir replied in a lackadaisical manner as if the question was irrelevant." “Is
there a problem?”
“Well, if you’re a commoner, you’re probably going to experience some
hardship, I guess? Even if you pass, they’ll put you into the Beta class." They
don’t really care for commoner half of Hebrion; they won’t give you a proper

20

education there." ”
This unexpected return to the past made a crucial fact slip his mind." Despite
being the foremost magic academy on the continent, Hebrion was harshly
segregated into two halves: the nobles of Alpha class, and the commoners of
Beta class."
“Well, it’ll only matter if you pass your exam." ” Radoria then lead Desir down a
long corridor."
After 10 minutes, as if the long silence had bothered her, Radoria spoke again."
“Oh, I forgot to ask before." Do you know what a Shadow World is?”
“More or less”
Radoria furrowed her brows in suspicion." “Do you really know though? To join
the effort against the Shadow Worlds, you need to have perfect knowledge of
what they are." Even if this is just an examination-specific Shadow World,
Shadow Worlds are still inherently dangerous you know." ”
Desir simply nodded at Radoria’s explanation."
She let out a small huff." “Alright, if you’re so confident then, why don’t I test
you with a few questions?”
“Okay." ”
“First question,” Radoria’s voice held a clear note of mockery." “What is a
Shadow World?”
Desir cleared his throat and began speaking:
“Shadow Worlds."

21
“They occur each year, and they are the most dangerous phenomenon mankind
has ever seen." Like an infinitely long corridor with countless rooms on each
side; there are countless worlds, each with their own bizarre set of rules."
“These worlds are a glimpse into the past, and each world has its own risks."
While some Shadow Worlds are weak, others can be extremely dangerous." The
Magic Society determines the power (and implicitly, the danger) of a Shadow
World, and assigns it one of 10 classes." It’s usually possible to estimate the
number of deaths likely to occur by knowing the class of a Shadow World."
“Without a doubt, however, the most dangerous characteristic of a Shadow
World is its potential for an ‘Encroachment’ event to occur." Encroached land is
smothered in a thick, black fog, and it becomes impossible to know what’s
happening inside." Only one thing is certain: no living being has ever entered
encroached land and returned alive." It is simply a place where life cannot exist."
“This is why humanity must fight against the Shadow Worlds." ”

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**Chapter 3 - The Returner’s Entrance Exam (2)**

Desir had given a flawless explanation—his description sounded like it was
straight from a textbook."
Not to be outdone, Radoria held up two fingers." “There are two organizations
that manage the Shadow World." The first is the Western Kingdom, and the
second is our Hebrion Academy." The two are at odds—after all, both parties
want the magic cores that come from the Shadow World." And, as students of
Hebrion Academy, we naturally participate in the two-party race for magic
cores."."." well, there are other factions, like the “outsiders,” but you don’t need to
know about that." ”
Radoria continued, “And you know about ‘clearing’ the Shadow World, right?”
“Of course—that’s common knowledge." ” To Desir, describing the Shadow
World was second nature, and so he went on to explain:
“In a sense, the Shadow World was a universe that ran parallel to our own—the
events that occured in the real world’s past would also eventually occur in the
Shadow World." And during that process, the Shadow World would continually
threaten to erode our world." There is only one way to stop that from
happening:
“The ‘Clearing." ’
“To put it simply, ‘clearing’ the Shadow World prevents it from encroaching
upon our reality." If the event of a given Shadow World is based off of a past war
in our world—the ‘background’—and the victory of that war consisted in
demoralizing the enemy, then the ‘clearing’ would involve defeating the enemy
in the exact same manner—this would be the Shadow World’s ‘objective." ’ Every
Shadow World has its own background and objective, and completing that
objective ‘clears’ the Shadow World."

23
“The goal, then, is to clear all the Shadow Worlds that appear." And the two rival
organizations, Western Kingdoms and Hebrion Academy, stand at the forefront
of this movement." ”
Radoria wore an amused expression, “Not bad." I guess I don’t have to worry
about explaining things to you." ”

As the pair talked, they arrived at their destination: an extravagant, awe-
inducing structure shining under the sunlight, the main building of Hebrion

Academy." Radoria flashed her ID at the entrance."
| Student Identity Pass Confirmed." Welcome, 4th Circle Mage, Radoria Von
Dorich."
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24
Suddenly, a tall, handsome man and a girl who looked about the same age as
Desir approached the pair." When Radoria saw them, she halted in her tracks."
“Do you know them?” Desir asked."
“Yeah." Elheim." He’s a real scumbag." ”
Desir remembered that name." Elheim." He was the polar opposite of Radoria."
Elheim was a water-attribute mage, and Radoria was a fire-attribute mage." And
like their magical elements, their personalities clashed violently." Obviously,
they did not get along."
Feigning ignorance, Desir commented, “You must really dislike that man." ”
“Oh, yeah." He’s one of those water-attribute mages,” Radoria said." “He’s real
arrogant, too." And I hate the way he speaks." He’s like a damn cockroach." ”
After Desir and Radoria’s brief exchange, Elheim—a young man with blue,
bobbed hair, with arrogant eyes and a stuck-up nose—walked up to Radoria."
His voice laced with derision, Elheim commented, “Oi, Radoria." You just got
here? I guess having short legs makes you walk slower, huh?”
Without losing her composure, the young fire-attribute mage retorted, “Grow
up, Elheim." Do you kiss your mother with that mouth?”

Elheim scoffed in response, “Such crude speech." As expected of a crude fire-
attribute mage." ”

“I’m surprised you have the balls to mouth off less than a month after getting
trounced by this ‘crude fire-attribute mage." ’” Radoria jeered."
Elheim rolled his eyes." “You still can’t tell the difference between defeating
someone, and them going easy on you? No wonder you have such a long way to
go." ”

25
Radoria sneered." “I sure hope you weren’t trying—if that was all you got, then
you really should consider dropping out." ”
The tension in the air was potent." Desir could almost feel the sparks flying
between the two bantering mages—he unconsciously took a step back." As
Radoria and Elheim got more and more in each other’s faces, the mood
gradually turned heavier and more strained."
Finally, realizing that he wouldn’t win just through a contest of words, Elheim
shifted his attention to Desir." “Are you this vulgar girl’s mentee?”
“Yes, that is correct." ” Desir answered respectfully."
Surprised, Elheim said, “Well, you certainly have better manners than Radoria."
What’s your name?”
“Desir Arman." ”
“Hmm, Desir Arman." Let’s see."."." ” Elheim took out his tablet and entered Desir’s
name."
In just a few seconds, all of Desir’s information appeared on the screen." As
Elheim read the data, the corners of his mouth rising ever so slightly."
“What’s this? He’s just a commoner?” Elheim smirked." “Well, I guess it fits that
you’re mentoring a pathetic commoner." ”
Radoria scrunched her face."
Elheim looked up to the ceiling with amusement." “Honestly." This contest won’t
even be close." ”
“."."." Contest? What do you mean, ‘contest?’” Radoria asked."
As if he had waited for the question, Elheim responded, “What? Did you not
even check the group lists?”

26
He indifferently flipped his tablet toward Radoria." “We’re in the same group." ”
Desir and Radoria quickly read through the list of names:
[D Group Members]
Treveurie Tigus
Romantica Eru
Ajest Kingscrown
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Elheim stared at Desir with a condescending gaze—it was like he was looking at
a rotten fish." “There’s no way your mentee will survive with this lineup." ”
Radoria spoke up, seemingly unperturbed." “I wonder about that." Even if you’re
in our group, that doesn’t mean that we’ll fail." In fact, we just might win." ”
“Don’t make me laugh." You don’t even have a chance." ” Then Elheim raised his
voice, and declared with confidence: “MY mentee is a spellsword." ”
Radoria’s eyes widened in shock." “S-spellsword? You’re lying." ”
Spellsword."
Those who were innately talented in both magic and swordsmanship." This title
was reserved for geniuses blessed by the heavens." They were on a whole
different level than the mages who simply used magic—it didn’t matter if
combat occured at close or long-range." These specialists could fight on all
fronts." And as to be expected, these exceptional talents only numbered in the
single digits worldwide."
And Elheim just said that his mentee was one of those single digits—an
unrivalled genius." Radoria could not believe it."
With a conceited facial expression, Elheim taunted his stunned rival." “You can
check it if you don’t believe me." ”

27
After a brief moment of hesitation, Radoria took out her tablet." She addressed
Elheim’s mentee who had remained silent the entire time, “What’s your name?”
“Ajest Kingscrown." ” The girl spoke with a dour and ice-cold voice."
Radoria entered the name into the tablet." When the information popped up,
Radoria quickly scanned the results."

<Ajest Kingscrown>

| Twin-attribute spellsword." Shows excellent talent with both ice—and
lightning—attribute magic." 3rd circle mage." Swordsmanship exceeds the
level of a pawn-rank swordsman."
“My god."."." ”
Radoria’s jaw dropped." She thought Elheim had been bluffing—but here was
the truth right in front of her eyes."
With smug assurance, Elheim piped up, “Where did that fire from earlier go,
Radoria?”
Radoria, for once, was at a loss for words."
The victorious water-attribute mage strolled past the dumbfounded woman."
When he reached Desir, Elheim stopped for a brief moment."
“Oh, and you." This is a warning." ” He leaned in close to Desir’s face, glaring at
the young man with an attitude of pompous superiority." It was a perfect
example of a noble looking down upon a commoner." “Even if you’re lucky,
you’ll just end up in Beta." Just give up on the entrance exams—that’s your best
bet." ”

28
| The D Group’s Entrance Exam will soon begin! D Group’s Shadow World is
currently being selected." Please wait."
An electronic voice rang out." Desir stood in the middle of the waiting room—a
Shadow Gate, boasting one of the most advanced designs, loomed in front of
him." The steel outline of the gate was inscribed with hundreds of runes." With a
magic core in its center, thousands of synthesized magic circles decorated the
face of the gate." It could almost pass as a work of art."
‘Is this what it looked like?’ Desir leaned left and right while inspecting the gate."
An annoyed voice spoke to him, “Could you just stand still? You’re
embarrassing us." ”
Desir turned towards the voice." There were three other students with him, all
of whom would also be taking the test." Two of them were giving off an
unmistakable air of hostility toward Desir—Ajest, on the other hand, was
silently cleaning her sword."
The girl who had lectured Desir was named Romantica." She didn’t know Desir
at all—but Desir knew all about her."
Romantica Eru."
She had been a 4th circle wind-attribute mage, known for defeating her
enemies with her specialty: chantless magic." Hers was one of the more brilliant
minds among all wind-attribute mages." With her talent, she could have risen
much higher—had she not died an untimely death."
‘But as of right now, she’s a 2nd circle, right?’ Not wanting to antagonize the
competitors so early on, Desir decided to just apologize graciously, “Sorry,
guys." It’s my first time seeing something amazing like this." ”

29
Romantica had hoped to get a rise out of Desir, but when he didn’t react the
way she had hoped, she just sighed and said, “Now that I think about it, they
did say there was a commoner hick in our group." ”
“What? We’re going to test with someone like that?” The swordsman, Treveurie
Tigus, stared at Desir with disgust."
But Desir had already stopped paying attention to them."

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**Chapter 4 - The Returner’s Entrance Exam (3)
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Romantica and Treveurie were relieved by Desir’s presence; a commoner
couldn’t even be considered competition."
“Since he’s a commoner, I doubt he’s even received a proper education." ”
Romantica remarked." “I won’t complain though, it just means one less
opponent for me." I was a bit worried about the spellsword in our group, but
him being here makes everything easier." ”
Treveurie chuckled in response, “Seeing what we’re up against, I think the real
struggle will be between you and me." What do you think Romantica?”
Romantica nodded." “You’re probably right; let’s have a good competition." ”
Both of them enthusiastically shook hands, treating the test as if it was a game
between two friends." While Romantica and Treveurie continued to talk with
one another, Desir and Ajest silently observed their surroundings."
Besides their group, the loud waiting room was filled with the chattering of
fellow students, all anticipating the start of their own exams." After some time,
an announcement resounded."

| The group entrance examination event has been decided." The following
information present the event’s details."
| Class 10 Shadow World: Ernste Plains Race

31
| The condition for clearing this Shadow World is to be the first person to cross
the finish line." The position of the finish line is 8 kilometers away from the
starting point." The use of magic is permitted; therefore, attacks between
participants are also permitted." The Student Safety System has been activated
for this exam, and pain will be suppressed by 80%." If a student wishes to forfeit
at any time during the exam, they must simply verbally announce their
resignation." Upon said verbal resignation, they will be expelled from the
Shadow World." In the event of a fatal injury or attack, the receiving student
will likewise be expelled from the Shadow World." Rankings from first to fourth
place will be assessed at the end of the exam."
Romantica and Treveurie perused the information regarding the Shadow
World they would soon enter."
“Man, I’m glad it’s just running,” Treveurie said." “I heard that Group 8 has to
deal with trolls." ”

“It’s basically just a race isn’t it? Do we even have to fight each other?”
Romantica asked."

Desir and Ajest still waited in silence as they had been before the
announcement, a bubble of empty space around them." Ajest sat down and
swept down the length of her scabbard with her finger while Desir stood a
away from the boisterous crowd, leisurely leaning against the wall." Soon, the
dull mechanical voice of the announcement returned:

| The gate will soon open." Participants, please line up in front of the gate in an
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32

gate, they were completely engulfed within the light, and their figures
disappeared without a trace."
| Entering the Shadow World Ernste Plains Race."
Soon after entering the gate, Desir was transported into the artificial Shadow
World." Checking his surroundings, he and the other three students stood in the
middle of a large plain." The green grass and vibrant blue sky stretched before
him." The flowers bloomed all around him, and an an enormous river ran
through the middle of the field, giving this Shadow World the feeling of an
idealistic Spring day." The warm air blew at his hair, and the sun kissed his skin
with warmth." This place was the embodiment of serenity."
| The race will start in three minutes." Participants, please stand behind the
starting line."
Hearing the announcement, Desir looked down at his feet, and sure enough,
there was a starting line on the ground." The four of them got into their
positions behind the starting line in the order of Group 0’s participant list."
By pure chance, Desir and Ajest stood beside each other." Compared to his
previously cool attitude, Desir felt extremely awkward standing so close to her."
He was staring at Ajest with an inquisitive look, when her head suddenly
snapped towards him, her eyes meeting his gaze."
He greeted her with an awkward expression, unsure of what to say." “H-hi?” He
mumbled nervously."
Ajest didn’t react in the slightest." Her face remained expressionless, as if she
was wearing a mask." Her gaze quickly swept over Desir with a dull look, and
she turned away just as quickly as she’d turned towards him."

33
As Desir lowered his eyes in embarrassment, he noticed an unusual, yet all too
familiar, weapon at Ajest’s waist." It was a one-handed sword that seemed to be
a mix between a broadsword and a two-handed longsword." As his gaze moved
back up, a hundred shimmering golden hairs waved in the breeze before his
eyes." Seeing her face was as cold as it had been before, Desir thought that
rather than coming off as bashful, she was more like the personification of a
frigid blade."
‘Come to think of it, was she like this back then, too?’
6th circle ice attribute spellsword and holder of one of the strongest
spellswords, the Queen-rank swordwoman— Ajest Zedga F." Kingscrown." She
led the front line ahead of everyone." The Goddess of the Battlefield." And part of
The Shadow Labyrinth expedition team and one of the last six people to die."
Undoubtedly, she was a callous woman at that time."
“You,” Ajest proclaimed."
Desir’s heart jolted, and he needlessly cowered." Judging from the way
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34

He already knew all of this." So, of course, she’d have to point it all out."
Their eyes met."
An odd current ran between Desir and Ajest, making the air around them
extremely tense." Desir knew this atmosphere very well." It was a situation he
had experienced several times in his previous life." It was like the calm before
the storm." The twitching of gunpowder just before it burst."
Desir tensed." ‘You want to fight me here right now?’
“You can relax,” Ajest said." “I’m not thinking of attacking you like what the
mentor said." ”

Desir raised his eyebrows, taken aback." “Why is that?” he asked."
Ajest’s long eyelashes fluttered slightly in the wind." She shifted her attention
and looked straight ahead, clearly stating that her business with him was over."
Imperiously, she said, “I don’t have a hobby of attacking people as weak as
you." ”
Desir smiled bitterly." That, too, was also very much like her."
The sound of an alarm rang out."
| The race starts in ten seconds." Participants, please prepare."
Desir took a deep, steadying breath and then let it out slowly."

35

| Race, start!
The participants listed during the announcement surged forward at once." In
this race, physical ability was paramount." So, it came as no surprise when Ajest
Kingscrown and Treveurie Tigus immediately took the lead."
Of course, mages didn’t excel at such physical pursuits." As such, it also came as
no surprise that Desir and Romantica were eating the dust from Ajest and
Treveurie’s feet."

With their physical prowess and swiftness, it didn’t even take five minutes for
the difference between the two courses to emerge." Desir and Romantica lagged
far behind." So far behind, the dust had already settled in front of them."
Coincidentally, when it came to speed, there was hardly any difference between
Desir and Romantica."

“With all that pretending to be good,” Desir panted for breath." “This is what
you are in the end." ”
Romantica scowled." “Why don’t you focus on the event?” She refused to let it
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36

“Please,” he wheezed." “Just."."." shut up." Please." ”
Romantica glared at Desir like he was some sort of bad-luck charm, hoping he’d
somehow magically disappear." But every time she looked back at him, he was
still staring at her—and it made her more and more anxious."
She couldn’t take it." “Ugh!” ‘This whole thing is annoying’ she thought." So she
yelled at Desir." “Why the hell are you making that kind of annoying face?”
“Well,” Desir quipped." “I just thought this wouldn’t be a big deal for a 2nd circle
mage." ”
Romantica’s eyebrow twitched." He had just dismissed her skills."."." this
commoner had just insulted her!
‘THIS bastard has the nerve!?!?’ Romantica’s chest burst with fury."
“FINE,” she exclaimed." “You asked for it." I was waiting for just the right
moment." ” Romantica thrust her arms in front of her, and the wind’s current
began to subtly shift." “Open your eyes and take a good look." A commoner like
you will never reach the level of a 2nd circle mage." ”
Romantica released her magic power, and concentrated on the forest far ahead
of them."

A high-speed incantation rushed from her mouth:
[Sweep the Air!]

37
Her spell manifested itself and shot in the direction of the forest—towards
where Treveurie Tigus and Ajest Kingscrown competed against each other."

\*\*\*

‘At this rate, isn’t this an easy victory?’ The Pawn-rank swordsman, Treveurie
Tigus, had already convinced himself that he had won." After all, the figures of
Romantica and Desir had long since disappeared behind them, and the gap
wouldn’t diminish unless he decided to take a nap."
The corners of his mouth curled upwards." ‘Those guys back there are mages." We’re
clearly superior when it comes to physical ability." This exam favored us, swordsmen,
from the start." ’
Treveurie looked towards Ajest, who was keeping pace with him." Her ability
surprised him—he had risen to join the elite group of Pawn-rank swordsmen,
who his peers called “geniuses." ” He was confident that, among those of his age,
there were only a few other people faster than him."
‘I didn’t think I would find someone on my level." ’ Treveurie chastised himself for
slightly underestimating his opponent."
Treveurie looked back, wondering where the rest of the participants were
located."

Right at that moment, the wind’s direction changed and whooshed passed his
face, the sound roaring in his ears."
An extremely powerful gale tore through the azure sky." The trees in the forest
buckled and shrieked under the force of the wind."

38

“Wa-wait!” Treveurie yelled."
The wind’s overwhelming force pressured him back." He quickly drew his sword
and stabbed it into the ground before he could be blown away—the sheer force
of the wind felt like it would tear Treveurie’s limbs from his body."
‘It can’t be."."." magic? But with this power—it has to be Romantica!’ It took all of
Treveurie’s strength to hang on for dear life."
‘My armor weighs nearly 100 kilograms." You can’t send me flying." If I just keep a firm
grip on my sword, I’m not going anywhere!’ [1]
But he still had to use all of his strength to struggle against the wind." He used
every trick he knew in order to endure for even a bit longer." And then, finally,
while straining against the never-ending wind, the swordsman found his
footing." He shook off the initial embarrassment and started to think through
the current predicament."
Treveurie had been correct." It would be impossible to send him flying." If
Romantica had intended on sending him flying with wind pressure alone, she
would definitely have failed."
‘What were you hoping to do to me with this pathetic level of magic?’ Treveurie
smirked." ‘This lousy spell is unbecoming of a 2nd circle mage." ’ He lifted his head
and looked ahead with renewed determination."
But what he saw made his eyes widen."
“Wha—what is that!”

39
Ajest, the lead runner, had advanced even further." She had drawn her sword
from its scabbard and pressed on, slashing the gale in front of her as she
moved." Her movements—swift but almost desperate—made it seem like she was
trying to blast through that area as quickly as possible."
The sight of Ajest piercing through the typhoon-like wind amazed Treveurie."
The swordswoman sliced through the wind as if it was cloth." She certainly
deserved his respect."
But the swordsman couldn’t figure out why Ajest was trying so hard." “Why?
You’re just gonna get tired."."." it would be much better to go after the wind—”
His attention was forced towards the massive trees in front of him, swaying
precariously in the wind—the roots of the trees didn’t seem particularly deep,
and as the fierce wind blew, they quivered ominously."

“Wa-wait!”
With a deafening roar, a tree was ripped out at its roots."

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**Chapter 5 - The Returner’s Entrance Exam (4)**

“They were aiming for this from the start."."." !” Treveurie looked around,
desperately searching, to no avail, for a solution." Ajest was already long gone."
A terrible sound of wood twisting and tearing filled his ears as the trees in the
forest were ripped out by their roots." Clumps of dirt flew about in every
direction as the massive trees began swirling about in the wind." To his rage and
horror, Treveurie was right in their path."
“Fuck!”
A terrifying, flying forest filled Treveurie’s eyes." Worse, he had no doubt that
the moment he let go of his sword to dodge them, he would get swept up by the
magic currents as well."
He cursed at the top of his lungs." “Damn you! ROMANTICAAAA-!”
His voice was abruptly cut off and a heavy slam echoed through the forest."
| Treveurie Tigus has been struck with lethal force and has been eliminated
from the Shadow World." There are three participants remaining."
The announcement rang out across the once-forested wasteland." Romantica
looked across the space with a smug expression." “Hmm, seems like the
spellsword survived." How unfortunate." ”
She turned to Desir, her every word bursting with pride." “Now, this is the
power of a 2nd circle mage." Feeling honored yet?”
Desir smiled back at Romantica, and said, “It was definitely quite creative, that
the true attack wasn’t the wind itself, but the flying trees." The accuracy left
something to be desired, but the power was quite high." ”

4
Romantica smiled, seemingly pleased with the compliment." She spoke with
pride in her voice." “Now it’s your turn." ”
“My turn?” Desir asked, his voice tinged with confusion."
Hands on her hips, Romantica explained, “Your turn to be eliminated." It is a
competition after all." It’s always better to take out the other competitors." But
since I’m so nice, I’ll bestow some mercy upon you, Mr." Commoner."."." I’ll give
you the chance to resign." There’s no need for you to suffer, is there?”
As she spoke, Romantica snuck a gleeful glance at Desir’s face." Any normal
human would’ve shown a response; but, strangely, it appeared as if Desir
wasn’t at all intimidated by the overwhelming difference in power."
“Sorry, but I refuse." ” he said calmly." His voice was strangely relaxed."
Romantica’s mood soured." There was no mistaking it: he was looking down on
her."
“Hmpf." Have it your way." ” She responded, her tone filled with contempt." “Don’t
blame me if this hurts: remember, I gave you a chance." ”
Romantica held out her hands towards Desir as her magic filled the air." Dozens
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5
Dirt flew into the air, clouding his vision as the bullet raced towards him."
Romantica’s hair billowed behind her as the shockwave reached back to her."
Romantica felt a smile tugging at her lips." She’d won, clearly." “This is a 2nd
circle spell at point blank range." Even if you were an entire level higher than
me, you wouldn’t be able to block this." ”
Her satisfaction quickly turned to shock as she heard the unmistakable sound
of footsteps behind her." She whipped around and her jaw fell in astonishment."
Desir had somehow emerged, nearly unscathed, out of that thick cloud of dust,
and was running straight at her." “Wa, wait."." !”
She could hardly find the words to speak in her shock." Meanwhile, as if totally
oblivious, Desir was calmly speaking under his breath, to nobody in particular,
“Shooting straight after the compression."."." seems like you sacrificed finer
control over the magic bullet for more overall power." Well, this, and the one
from before both aren’t too shabby for a 2nd circle mage." ”
‘For a 2nd circle? Did I mishear this guy? What in the world is he muttering about?’
Confusion coursed through Romantica’s mind."
Desir continued, “But because you prioritized speed so much, you lost too much
control over the air currents." The accuracy falls far too much if you do that." I
only altered the trajectory a tiny bit, and it missed me completely." ”
As Desir continued mumbling, Romantica finally came to her senses." She asked,
with a deflated expression on her face, “You, you, what did you just do?”
Her head was completely blank." She couldn’t, for the life of her, comprehend
what had just happened."
“Magic Hijack." ”
“What?”
“I hijacked your spell." ”

6
‘My spell was hijacked? By a commoner, at that?’ Romantica narrowed her eyes in
fury and screamed, “Don’t screw with me!”
As Romantica ground her pace down to a halt, she spun around, arranging
bright, shining magic formulas in front of herself." “I can’t lose to the likes of
you! You can’t be anything more than a 1st circle!” she screamed."
Magic formulas formed again." That terrifyingly powerful magic was beginning
to assemble itself once more." The wind proceeded to pick up and soon enough
it was raging around all of them." As the spell formed, the noise that was
brought forth resembled a swirling wind."
[Wind Venom!]
Wind Venom, a 2nd circle attack spell." It was the strongest single-target attack
spell Romantica could cast." A long and chain-shaped wind which was
recognizably sharper than an edge of a blade had shot out of her hands."
Almost languidly, Desir spoke." “Watch and learn closely this time." ” He waved
his hands around lazily as he saw the spell flying towards him."
At that moment, Romantica felt the air currents slipping out of her control." She
was surprised, but that was it." The few currents she’d lost control over were
nothing compared to the whole." “I’ll admit, it’s incredible that you can disrupt
my mana considering you’re nothing but a 1st circle mage." But isn’t that still
pointless?” she asked."
“Watch closely." If I take these points in these air currents you’ve formed and
give them a slight push."."."."."." ”
The currents had only slightly twisted yet it had created devastating after
effects."
A terrible shockwave was discharged in the wind."

7
The air twisted and the winds’ trajectory was torn apart." Her magic wasn’t even
able to touch Desir instead plunging into the ground harmlessly."
“Impossible!” Romantica paled as she saw her magic get canceled out right in
front of her eyes." Her magic had contained several hundred times more mana
than the small amount he had to pay to analyze it."
This was the difference in skill." Desir had outclassed Romantica purely in
magic skill." She’d pretty much lost already."
Desir spoke again." “I’d like to end things here and now." I have someone I
absolutely want to defeat even more than you." ” Desir started picking up speed
as he ran towards Romantica."
Romantica came to her senses as she saw him rapidly approaching." “You."."." you
still can’t win against me!” she desperately shouted as she shuddered." “You
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8
It simply removed friction and was one of the simplest, most basic spells." The
mana cost implicated with activating such a spell was so insignificant that even
a 1st circle mage like Desir could easily use it without worrying about his mana
count."
“Damn it!” Romantica cursed." This was his plan all along! If she fell down here,
she would definitely fall behind." Romantica instantly lowered her center of
gravity in a desperate attempt to avoid slipping."
‘It’s."."."."."." not slippery?’ To her surprise, nothing happened."
Desir lowered the third finger." “Third, it seems you forgot, but this Shadow
World isn’t a magic competition, but a race." ”
At that moment, he cast another spell."
[Fireball." ]
1st circle attack spell."
A simple, basic spell that created a ball of flame in front of the caster."
‘No way! He’s capable of multi-casting?” Romantica was in shock." Multi-casting
was only supposed to be possible for top-class mages." Casting two spells at the
same time required acute concentration and calculation ability." “Incredible." But
that’s all there is to it." You won’t be able to take me down with the likes of a
Fireball, you do know that right?”
As Romantica looked at him with a bewildered expression, Desir asked her,
“Here’s a question, Romantica." Where did I use my first spell, ‘Grease’?”
“."."."."."." ”
Desir answered rhetorically, “The answer is: myself and as a result, my body is
completely frictionless now." ”
Romantica didn’t get it." She asked, dumbfounded, “So what?”

9
Desir shook his head." “Romantica, you learned about the law of action and
reaction, right?”
“Of course!”
Romantica exclaimed." It was a very simple law, at that." If you push something,
you get pushed back." A simple concept."
“If someone pushed me from behind, what would happen to me?” Desir asked."
“You’d get pushed forward, of course." ”
“Then what if someone shoves me with significant force from behind? For
example, an impact as strong as a bomb?”
Romantica turned her gaze towards Desir." She noticed a Fireball as big as a
basketball flaming next to him." “You, you gotta be kidding me."."."."."." ”
As she stammered in disbelief, Desir nodded and said calmly, “I’m going to use
the force generated by the Fireball." ”
“You’re insane!” Romantica swore despite herself." What sort of idiotic and
unreasonable idea was this!
“Calculating my bodily reaction to the Fireball’s explosive force, my maximum
speed will reach a peak of about 327 kilometers per hour." It'll be a piece of cake
to catch up to Ajest all the way at the front, considering the likeliness of
maintaining this speed until the end." ”
Romantica’s face was visibly paling as she stammered out, “There’s no way
you’ll be safe like that! No, if you hit something at that speed, you’ll die long
before you can react to it!”
Desir answered with the same overwhelming calm he had shown the whole
time." “But Romantica, you said yourself just a moment ago." ” He laughed softly,

10
as he continued, “We can’t die in this Shadow World, so we are free to use all
our power." That goes for me as well." ”
Romantica’s eyes opened wide."
Suddenly, Desir’s Fireball exploded."
Accompanying the loud sound of the explosion was Desir who got instantly
propelled forward." He was so fast that getting a glimpse of him was tough."

Romantica was the only one left now."
As Desir disappeared from view, she stopped running." She had realized running
was utterly meaningless at this point." “What."."."."."." ” Romantica looked in the
direction Desir had been launched to and muttered to herself in the desolate
calm, “Where in the world did that lunatic pop out from?”

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**Chapter 6 - The Returner’s Entrance Exam (5)**

Accelerating."
Moving at an extreme speed."
The wind whipping past his skin."
Desir was blazing forward at incredible speed." He rocketed through the course,
deftly avoiding all the obstacles in his way."
As the various environments of the Shadow World flashed in and out of view,
Desir approached the finish line at breakneck speed." Ajest, who’d looked as
small as a dot before, slowly came into view."
Even with her tremendous lead, Ajest had kept her wits about her." With her
sharp instincts, she had already sensed Desir’s location, estimated his speed,
and quickly evaluated the state of affairs." ‘The fact that the 1st circle mage came
this far means that he must have already defeated the 2nd circle mage." It should have
been impossible for him to win with magic power, so that leaves two possibilities:
either the 2nd circle mage is worthless, or the 1st circle mage is more powerful than the
average for his circle." ’
The latter seemed much more likely—no one could generate that amount of
momentum with mere 1st circle magic." This level of acceleration required 3rd
circle magic at the very least."
This situation completely defied common sense."
While looking back at Desir—the source of Ajest’s vexation—her chest started
burning with curiosity and a competitive fire." In an instant, she calculated and
compared Desir’s speed against her own." ‘At this rate, he’ll surpass me in less than
a minute." ’

14
She weighed two potential solutions: ‘First, use acceleration magic on myself as
well." ’
But she immediately discarded that idea." Even though acceleration magic was a
2nd circle physical-type magic, she would need too much time to reach Desir’s
velocity." After all, the gap between their current speed was insurmountable—
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15
It only took Ajest Kingscrown eight seconds to cast her array of magic." ‘If your
analysis ability is great, then I’ll make my spells even greater." ’
[Prey of Magic Arrow." ]
Magic Arrow." It was a spell almost anyone could use—after all, it was only 1st
circle-level magic." But the magic that Ajest wielded was another story: she had
manifested at least 600 arrows, and they filled the sky above the spellsword."
‘I used about 15 seconds." But this should be enough." ’ This attack would end it: that
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16
Ajest frowned, realizing she’d lost control over some of her magic." ‘His analysis
speed is abnormally high."."." at the level of a 6th circle mage, at least." It’s highly
probable that he’ll hijack the rest if given enough time." ’
Ajest had no more time to spare." She raised her arms upward, then pointed
forward—and at her signal, hundreds of Magic Arrows showered towards Desir."
The terrifying sound of hundreds of shrieking arrows echoed through the
Shadow World." Ajest’s magical formation created what looked like a tidal wave,
threatening to drown its adversary." But Desir stood resolutely in the wave’s
center, and yelled, “Trajectory adjustment!”
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17
‘I can’t afford to panic." ’ Ajest calmed her breath and gathered her thoughts,
returning herself to a state cool-headedness." Once she had gotten rid of her
panicked emotions, she calmly read the situation in front of her—and the whole
process took her less than a second." ‘He’s making a path by altering the trajectories
of the most dangerous arrows." ’
Just like Desir had read her magic formulas, Ajest read through his plan." ‘The
reason? The arrows were destroyed." The solution?."."." ’
Ajest’s eyes shot back and forth." 21 Magic Arrows remained in the air." Desir
had four, she had 17." And there were less than 200 meters left between them—
he would overtake her within five seconds."
Ajest manipulated her mana." ‘Change calculation." Lower the number of arrows,
prioritize power and accuracy." ’
The arrows resonated with her overwhelming magic power." Seven of her
remaining 17 arrows lost their form and fused with the rest." Now strengthened,
a searing light beamed from the remaining 10 arrows." Each arrow’s individual
power was comparable to a 2nd circle spell."
Then she adapted her pattern of attack: “Changing operation method." ”
The arrows repositioned in the air as if waiting for their commander’s signal."
They lined up, head to tail, and arced towards Desir in a single file—much like
machine gun fire concentrating on a single point." This time, the arrows hit with
much more force than before."
With the new arrow formation, Desir knew that if he failed to knock even one
of them away, it would be the end." Their power far exceeded the Magic Arrows
Desir controlled." ‘She’s using her head." ’
Desir shot all of his arrows forward to intercept Ajest’s attack." Using four
arrows, he was able to nullify two of hers." But Ajest still had eight Magic
Arrows left."

18
However, Desir still had no intention of losing." ‘You used your head."."." but you
came up with the wrong answer." ’
Desir gazed at the incoming arrows, as he began running through more mental
calculations." “Hijack." Acquired control of four Magic Arrows." ”
Desir had the capacity to hijack up to 200 arrows before—he’d intentionally left
some leeway at the start, not using up all 200." This was his buffer room, so he
could negate anything Ajest threw at him."
‘Deciding to concentrate every arrow onto the same point was too reckless." You should
have doubled down on your strategy and increased the number of arrows, even if the
power took a hit." ’ If she had done so, Desir would have been skewered, judged
dead, and disqualified." But thanks to Ajest gathering all the arrows into one
spot, Desir could wipe them all out in one fell swoop."
‘If this was a few years later, you would have found the right answer." ’ Judging from
Ajest’s tactic, Desir confirmed once more that he was the only one who had
returned from the future."

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**Chapter 7 - The Returner’s Entrance Exam (6)
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The possibility that Ajest had also returned to the past—that the spellsword
was facing a similar situation to his—had crossed Desir’s mind."
If that had happened, hypothetically, the Ajest he knew would have shrewdly
hidden that fact from others and played along as the 'present' her." Desir sought
to find out the truth through their battle."
And now, he had confirmed that this Ajest had not come from the future."
This Ajest was very young." Her prowess in magical warfare, her ability to form
counterattacks—she was strong, but her abilities and experience were
incomparable to the Ajest he knew."
Desir hijacked the Magic Arrow in front of Ajest’s massive assault." “Trajectory
adjustment!”
Desir turned his arrow around to collide with the next one in line—and each
one of Ajest’s lethal arrows rammed into each other, exploding on impact."
'Tsk." ’ Ajest went to draw her sword when she realized what was happening."."."
but she reacted too slowly."
By the time she unsheathed her sword halfway, Desir had already passed her—
and now he stood, looking at her with amusement, from the finish line."
| The clear-objectives of the Shadow World have been met."

| The Shadow World will be terminated."

20

| Please wait while the entrance exam results are calculated."

\*\*\*

"As expected, the same thing happened again."."
An icy aura rose from below the stone-paved floor of Hebrion Academy."
Somewhere deep within the recesses of the school, a group of people had
gathered." Most were professors of Hebrion Academy—some hailed from the
Western Kingdom."
Hebrion's Dean, Justin, stood at the head of the table—he grasped a gavel in his
hand and started at the parchment in front of him."
"So far, no commoners have been selected to enter the Alpha Class."." The
Swordsmanship professor, Kellivan, briefly summarised the outcome of the
entrance exam up until that point."
A decent number of the present individuals demonstrated their enthusiastic
approval—in particular, Head Professor Pugman vigorously nodded his head."
"Of course that’s the case." The Alpha Class only has places for the glorious
nobility." It is not for the likes of commoners that are incapable of receiving a
proper education."." [1]
Professor Pugman, intoxicated by the pleasure of his own words, was unaware
of Professor Brigette’s face stiffening across from him."."Those commoners
should thank us for even being admitted to Hebrion Academy in the first
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student."."."."."
"The one that bested the Spellsword."."."."
Justin interrupted their musings with a question."."From what I hear, this
student is a 'recommended commoner." ' Who recommended this student’s entry
into Hebrion?"
A hand rose from among the professors: Magical Science Professor Brigitte."."I
gave the recommendation for that child."."
"On what grounds?"
"He has studied magic theory for a long time and his willingness to study has
remained strong." As such, I wholeheartedly recommend him." I very nearly took
him in as my personal assistant instead of admitting him as a normal student."."
"How did you come to know this child?"
"I met him by accident in an orphanage from the ruined country of Eolleta."."
"Eolleta."." that is."."."."
"Yes, Dean, it is indeed the place that you are thinking of."."
"Ahem."." Justin cleared his throat."
He turned to the supervisor."."What were the results of his pre-test?"
"Magic aptitude, D-rank." Though we gave him the rank of 1st circle mage, it
seems that was only a tentative rank, to meet the bare minimum requirements."
His mana is very unstable and impure." By all accounts, he seems like a
completely talentless student."."
"Is that how you see it? Please take a look at this." Assistant, if you could play
the video."." At Justin's request, his attending assistant placed a crystal ball on
the center table."

22
As the attendant injected the crystal ball with magic energy, the ball emitted a
short fizzle, and a video began playing in the air."
It was a recording of Group D’s entrance exam—everyone concentrated on the
video as it played from start to finish."

.."."."."."."."."

.."."."."."."."."

.."."."."."."."."

| The clear-objectives of the Shadow World have been met."

| The Shadow World will be terminated."

When the video ended, everyone in the room wore expressions of surprise."
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23
The Tacticians Professor spoke with his hands on his head."."His battle sense
and use of psychological warfare were excellent." He conserved his own
strength to surprise his opponent at the end—his strategic prowess was
exceptional."."
"I agree, it’s as if he were a veteran who had spent his whole life on the
battlefield." I’m no expert on magical combat, but his tactics were impeccable."
It’s like he had complete control of the flow of battle."."
"To think that there was someone among the commoners with this level of
training."."." I don’t know what to say."."
"Of course he’ll be admitted to Hebrion." But why did you ask us to discuss it,
instead of just declaring the decision, Dean-nim?"
"That is because after seeing the video, Professor Brigitte advocated for this
student to be placed into the Alpha Class."."
"."."."."."." !" It was like someone had just thrown cold water had been thrown on the
group." The electric atmosphere had been replaced by a chilly silence."
After what seemed like hours, one professor raised their hand to speak."
"Esteemed Dean-nim."."
It was Head Professor Pugman."
"As you know, there are regulations in place for this sort of thing." Rules dictate
that class placement is based on skill." Here, we place the best students in the
Alpha Class, and the less experienced in the Beta Class." By differentiating these
students, we allow them to receive an education best suited to their skill."."
Justin leered at Professor Pugman."."What are you trying to say."."
"To enter the Alpha Class, a student must demonstrate exceptional skill."
Objectively, only 2nd circle mages and above have a shot at it." As a 1st circle
mage, Desir does not possess the requisite magical repertoire." I think it is still

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too early for him to be admitted to the Alpha Class."."
"Hmm."."."."."."
"That’s a good point."."
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25
Professor Brigitte was one of less than 10 people on the continent to have—as a
commoner—risen to the level of a 5th circle mage."
Pugman Pasehl Napoleka was the heir to the title Duke of Napoleka, a family
second only to the Royal family itself."
Their arguments represented a fundamental clash of values."
The sound of Justin's gavel brought the argument to pause."
The Dean spoke with a grave tone."."There will be silence." Time is wasted on
arguments." Let us decide on the matter." We will now judge whether student
Desir is to be admitted to the Alpha Class or not."."
It was the final judgement—everything was to be decided here."
Brigette cast her vote in support while Pugman casually cast his for the
opposition, as though there was nothing more to see."
Justin tallied and announced the results." 18 votes in support, 22 against."
"1st circle mage, Desir Arman." By rights, he should be admitted to the Alpha
Class." However, because Professor Pugman believes his circle is too low, he is
to be admitted to the Beta Class."."
Justin inserted Desir's application into the box labeled 'Accepted'."
"Of course, for a commoner."."."."."."
"No matter how impressive his skills are, being admitted to the Alpha Class
straight out of the entrance exam is."."."." absurd." ”
Brigitte protested the outcome."."Dean-nim! If you were aware of what goes on
in the Beta Class, you would never make that decision!"

26
"The decision was made by a majority vote." I cannot overturn it."." Justin rose
from his seat, indicating that he would entertain no more arguments."
"If he is as exceptional as you have said he is, he will prove himself during the
Promotion Exam." If he really possesses those skills—as you claim he does—that
should be a simple matter, no?"
"H-however."."."." Brigitte stuttered."
"Enough, let's see ourselves out."."
At a wave of the Dean's hand, the room’s torchlights extinguished themselves."
As though the darkness itself had closed her mouth, Brigitte fell silent."
And like that, the meeting adjourned."

March had arrived, heralding the spring season." The willow trees had turned
green, and the blooming forsythias gave off a warm glow."
The results of Hebrion’s entrance exams were to be released today."
In the middle of a corridor in the academy stood a bulletin board." Upon that
bulletin board were the names of all the prospects who were admitted to the
academy, as well as the classes to which they had been assigned."
The first half listed the students admitted to the Alpha Class, the second half
listed those in the Beta Class." Desir found his own name exactly where he had
expected to find it."."Just as I thought."."
The academy had assigned him to the Beta Class, despite the fact that he had
beaten Ajest and secured 1st place." Though he knew it was bound to happen,
confirming it with his own eyes left him with a bit of a heavy heart."

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"As expected—they didn’t disappoint me."."
Beta and Alpha."
Hebrion's split its students into these two halves." The system was intended to
allow students to receive the education best suited to their skill level."
With each student being assigned to the class most appropriate for them, this
individualized method of admission resulted in the best-possible learning
outcomes for all the students."
No."."." ‘should have’ resulted."."."
Desir grit his teeth." ‘But now, that honorable intention is nowhere to be seen." ’
In the beginning, Hebrion had successfully implemented that system." But now,
so long after its inception, things were different."
Technically, Hebrion Academy still placed the most skilled students in the
Alpha class." But most of those students were nobles who had been
systematically trained from the beginning of their education."
That’s why the Alpha Class had an aristocratic, superiority-obsessed air to it."
And in that sort of atmosphere, a commoner with the appropriate skills would
sometimes rightly qualify for the Alpha Class—but they would always be
pushed back into the Beta Class."
Just like they had done to Desir."

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**Chapter 8— School Life! (1)**

‘And thus, this is why students who were sent to the Beta Class are unable to properly
grow,’ Desir thought."
Alpha Class students received excellent lessons from the faculty’s most brilliant
professors." As such, the faculty, carefully and with great passion, nurtured the
Alpha Class and ensured they received the best attention the professors could
offer." With this, their talents would surely awaken." They would inevitably
become excellent combatants that would conquer the Shadow Worlds."
Yet Beta Class was the complete opposite."
It was mostly composed of commoners who lacked any kind of support." Care
and passion was not pointed towards the students of the Beta Class as almost
none of the lectures had proper professors assigned to them." Because of this, it
was extremely difficult for these students to reach their full potential."
Desir smiled bitterly." ‘Even in my past life, I was a Beta Class student." ’
Desir had been born as a commoner." So, of course, due to his social status, he
had been assigned to the Beta Class." And without proper education, it had been
impossible for him to improve." So, when he’d first entered the Shadow
Labyrinth, he had only been a 1st circle mage."
‘In an environment like this, many talented people were buried." The system was at
fault." If it weren’t for a system like this, Beta Class students would have been able to
become stronger." They wouldn’t all have been massacred so easily, nor so quickly." ’
Yet, the only person who had survived to the end as a Beta Class student was
Desir." Being reminded of such end results, Desir decided on one goal in his
heart." ‘I will make sure the most talented students in the Beta Class will be promoted
to Alpha Class." ’

29
In the past, Desir had failed to clear the Shadow Labyrinth." But there were
many hidden gems in the Hebrion Academy." And he knew that if he was able to
properly nurture them and guide them to their best potential, then it wouldn’t
be impossible to clear the Shadow Labyrinth." ‘To do that,’ he thought." ‘I must
move together with them." In other words, I’ll create a party." ’
He would find the ones with the most potential based on his past life
experience and knowledge." He would find these hidden gems, convince them to
join his party, and then he would ensure their promotion into the Alpha Class."
And he knew who the first gem would be: Romantica Eru, the Wind Mage who
had taken the entrance exam with him." She was the esteemed daughter of
Baron Eru and was called the Tempest Sage." Her specialty was chant-less
magic." In the past, she’d also been a veteran mage who’d survived in the
Shadow Labyrinth for 8 years."
And Desir was determined to win her over and make her his first party
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A girl with clean, lustrous hair cascading down her shoulders sat at a desk in a
lecture room."." Her snow-white skin clashed with her red cheeks." And her
usually bright coral green eyes exuded a gloomy darkness."
“To think I would end up in Beta Class,” she sighed."
The ancient clock on the wall screeched with every movement the minute hand
made." The lecture room’s damp atmosphere, creaking chairs that gave off a
rotting cucumber smell, and marked up desks with gashes carved into them
only proved to make the girl’s shoulders slump even more."
It was truly a horrifying scene."

30
Romantica could not believe this was a classroom." At that moment, a shadow
loomed over her open book."
“Hello." Are you Romantica Eru of the Eru Barony?”
Romantica raised her head." Three people stood before her, wearing the shiny
blue badge on their right chests, which represented the Alpha Class."
The person who’d spoken was the tallest person amongst the three." With thick
eyebrows and thick lips, he exuded a heroic aura."
“You know my name, but you haven’t introduced yourself yet,” she said."
“Pardon me." ” He sat down across from her." “My name is Doneta Hadun." I’m a
new student just like you."."." and I’m currently looking for a new party member." ”
He spoke very politely, the dulcet tone of his voice flowing between them, so
different from the atmosphere of the room."
“I hope you find a good party member who suits you,” Romantica said."
“I hope so, too." That’s why I came here,” Doneta said."
“Do you have some business with me?” she asked."
“I wanted to meet you, but it was difficult to do so." As you know, the lecture
rooms for Beta Class and Alpha Class are quite far apart." ”
‘In more ways than one." ’ “Well, yeah,” she said."
“I heard you are an exceptional Wind Mage." Furthermore, I heard your family
has the title of Baron." For an exceptional Mage with noble status to end up as a
Beta Class student, the academy must have made a mistake." ”
A stiff smile stretched across Romatica’s face." The awkward moment spread out
before her, as she tried to maintain her poker face." “Well, even the academy
professors are people, too." They’re bound to make mistakes." ”

31
“Oh, right." However, it’s still unacceptable for the academy to assign you into
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“I said I wish we could start dating." ”
So, she hadn’t heard him wrong." “Have we met before?” Romantica asked."
“At the entrance exam’s banquet hall." It was love at first sight, Romantica." ”
She forced Doneta to let go of her hand."
“There are no reasons for you to decline, Romantica." ”
“I just need some time to think about it." ”
Doneta’s face wore a dumbfounded expression." “Why?”
“I need some time to think." ”
“Of course, but."."." this is—”
Romantica’s green eyes, which looked like the wind itself, glittered sweetly at
Doneta." “You should give this lady some time to think." If you truly are a polite
gentleman." ”
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33
“It’s a tradition followed in my Kingdom’s military where we gift this Kemubin
to the person we love." ” Pushing the groove of the handle with his fingers, the
knife and the handle separated with a click." At the same time, a smooth golden
chain necklace trickled down from inside the dagger."
Doneta gave the necklace to Romantica."
But, she shook her hands to politely decline." “This is too much." ”
“You don’t have to feel pressured." ” After lightly bidding his farewell, Doneta
headed towards the exit."
As soon as Romantica saw him leave, she went limp." She felt like a tempest had
passed by." But without even a moment’s reprieve, another person approached
her from behind and stopped at her side."
“You surely are popular, Romantica." ”
“Kya!” She yelped." With a crash, Romantica’s chair fell back." She had been lost
in thought, so she did not notice another person’s presence from behind her." It
was her bad habit to yell when she was taken by surprise."
As if untouched by this scene, Desir Arman nonchalantly sat next to her." “I
greeted you five times, but you wouldn’t respond." So, I decided to personally
come to you." ”
Embarrassed, Romantica quickly pulled her chair back to its original spot and
settled back into her seat."
“We first met at the entrance exam." So, I guess it’s been two days since we’ve
met?” Desir said."
“What do you want from me?” Romantica cleared her throat, her face pinched
with annoyance."

34
Naturally, Desir was unfazed by it." “I came here to invite you into my party." ”
Party invitation."
She responded back, uninterested." “I have nothing to talk to you about any
party." ”
“Are you declining my invitation because you don’t want to date me? Don’t
worry." I won’t ask you to date me." ”
Romantica scoffed." “Enough with the lame jokes." I’m not in the mood." ”
“If I ask for a reason, would you answer me?” Desir asked."
Romantica sighed." Opening her palm, she showed him the golden chain." “You
see?”
For the first time, Desir lost his usual calm composure as one of his eyes
slightly widened." The lights of the dim, magical lamp flickered, dyeing
Romantica’s hair a bright red."
She blew out a breath." “If you were me, which party would you choose? One of
the largest Alpha Class parties where I’m guaranteed success, or a no-name
Beta Class party?”
Desir knew how sweet Doneta’s offer sounded to her." The Blue Moon party was
one of the few powerful guilds in the academy." Party activities were the main
focus of Hebrion Academy, making the offer even more charming."
She couldn’t decline." There was no reason to decline."
But Desir knew one more thing: choosing The Blue Moon party would be the
worst life decision she could possibly make."
“But you still haven’t decided yet, Romantica." ” Desir’s voice was certain."

35
“That’s because."."." I needed some time to think." But thinking about it now, I
made a bad call." Doneta was right." From the beginning, my answer was already
determined." I can’t think of a reason to decline his offer." ”
“Even if you have to date him?” he asked."
“It’s actually more beneficial for me to go out with the Hadun family’s child as
a condition to join the best party." ”
“That’s quite cold and calculating." ” Desir said."
Despite Desir’s sarcasm, Romantica’s decision did not change." Rather than
being shaken, it seemed like her conviction became stronger." “Since we’re done
talking, can you leave?”
‘I guess it can’t be helped." ’ Desir reached into his pocket, feeling as if he was
pulling out a knife, but his hand only held a slip of paper." A letter." Calmly,
Desir passed the letter to Romantica."
However, Romantica tried to get rid of the letter without reading it."
But then Desir spoke." “Best to dispose of that quickly." Though, you should be
more careful with it since it contains all of your secrets." ”
Startled by his sudden declaration, Romantica looked back and forth between
the letter and Desir, now unsure of what to do." Her previous haughty attitude
had vanished, and Romantica sat frozen in place."
Raising his eyebrows, Desir simply urged her on."

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**Chapter 9 - School Life! (2)**

Slowly opening the letter, her eyes began scanning the lines of text filling the
page." As she digested the words before her, Romantica’s eyes widened." She
whipped her gaze to meet Desir’s." Confronted with the seemingly impossible,
she read the letter again in its entirety." And then her gaze darted back to Desir,
her eyes opened even further." In denial, she scrutinized the letter once more, as
if she was willing the contents contained within to change through the act of
rereading." But the words on the page simply stared back at her, defiant."
The details were all there." Written out with intimate precision." The naked truth
of why Romantica Eru had actually been assigned to the Beta Class."
As she read down the contents for the third time, she shuddered." As she
reached the final sentence of the letter, she found herself frantically ripping the
entire letter into shreds."
Her trembling eyes met Desir’s carefree gaze for a final time, and the two
stared at each other in silence." The air was thick with tension, and with each
breath Romantica felt like she was slowly suffocating."
Suddenly, Desir leaned towards her, causing Romantica to jump in fright." “Do
you want to talk to me now?” His calm voice matched his lackadaisical
expression."
Romantica could not say no." Afraid that someone might hear, she whispered,
“How."."." how did you."."." how do you know about this?” Her shaky voiced had
been drained of all the vigour it previously possessed."
“I don’t think I’m obligated to tell you,” Desir answered."

4
Hearing that, Romantica’s mouth went dry." She knew that, in this moment,
Desir held all the cards." “Have you told anyone else?” she quickly asked; her
question sounding more like a single word than an entire sentence."
Desir shook his head." “No, but most of the professors are already aware." How
else could you have been assigned here?”
“B-but, this place is hundreds of kilometers away from the Prilecha Kingdom!”
Romantica exclaimed in disbelief."
Desir chuckled at her naivety." “You’ve sorely underestimated the intelligence
gathering network of Hebrion Academy." ”
Self-assured as he was, Doneta had been mistaken about the reason why
Romantica was assigned to the Beta Class." The entrance exams and its
participants were subject to much closer scrutiny than most students were
aware of." Even the most closely guarded secrets of one’s past was bound to
come to light eventually." And at this current moment Romantica’s own secret
past was streaming forth from the lips of a man who she barely knew."
“Years ago, a humble merchant family amassed a substantial fortune through
conducting business in the Prilecha Kingdom." That commoner family then
bribed a struggling baron in the south for his title and thus came to inhabit the
Von Eru Castle." This happened when you were 4, right? Your family bought
their way into nobility." Even if you claim that you’re a noble, there’s no denying
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5
“That's."."." !” Righteous indignation turned to ashes in her mouth as Romantica
realized he was right."
Desir’s knowledge of Romantica’s most intimate secret was only natural."
Romantica Eru was a Beta Class member who had weathered eight long years
in the Shadow Labyrinth." One of Desir’s closest companions." As his teammate,
Romantica often told him about her past." After all, with the spectre of death
lurking behind every blind corner, what is there left to hide? Knowing this,
each of them treasured the opportunity to live on in the memories of their
allies." And in return, they all listened carefully to one another’s tales." Desir was
no exception." He remembered all their names, their faces, and their stories." As
such, it was easy for Desir to recall his memories of Romantica Eru."
Romantica Eru."
The daughter of Baron Eru who had paid his way into nobility."
The little girl who paid for her father’s decision with a lonely childhood."
Desir continued, “You know, the Blue Moon Party’s assigned professor is
Professor Nifleka." One of the few professors who knows about your little secret."
The man loathes commoners." If you end up in his party, he’s not going to just
roll over and do nothing." ”
“."."." Doneta will protect me,” Romantica weakly protested, gaze lowered to the
floor."
Desir raised an eyebrow." “Did you see the way he looked at commoners? Are
you sure about that?”
To Desir, Romantica’s current thoughts were as transparent as glass."
Romantica, born a commoner, was keenly aware of how Doneta viewed
commoners." The way he stared as if looking over lowly livestock." She was
overcome with fear at the thought of him looking at her the same way should
she ever be found out." She had tried to convince herself that her fear was
unfounded." But now, it was threatening to become reality."

6
Desir began picking up the scattered pieces of paper from the floor." “So what
will you do?”
“You really think a party created out of blackmail is going to be any good?”
Romantica sputtered, knowing full well she wasn’t in any position to negotiate."
“You’re right,” said Desir." “How about this? I’ll add a condition." One month."
Party up with me for just one month." If you still feel the same way after, then
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7
Breakfast tasted terrible." There had been only two options." Bread stale enough
to dig a grave with and a watery soup sprinkled with tiny scraps of boiled lamb."
Romantica was almost dumbfounded." That was when it truly dawned on her:
this was the Beta Class."
She did not enter the academy to be treated like this." This was going too far."
She was well aware that the two classes were treated differently, but to think it
was to this extent! From what she’d gathered, the Alpha Class enjoyed
luxurious buffet-style dining for all their meals." Just thinking about it made her
become angry, but not angry enough to starve."
With strenuous effort, Romantica broke a piece of bread in half with her hands."
It came apart with the dull sound of a slab of granite splitting in two." She
couldn’t help but wonder if they really were actually being fed rocks." But a look
across the table at Desir quickly dispelled such notions." His plates were already
empty." Romantica asked in disbelief, “How can you eat this?”
Desir paused to finish chewing before he responded, “Why not? It’s better than
orc meat." ”
Romantica furrowed her brows." “That’s a figure of speech, right? Orcs have
been extinct for a long time." ”
Desir shrugged." He pointed to the bread and soup in front of Romantica." “If it’s
too hard to eat, dip the bread in the soup." ”
Romantica did as he said." The bread became softer, and with some effort, she
was able to get it down." As she ate the bread and looked at Desir sitting in front
of her, it finally hit her that they were in the same party." ‘Right."."." ’
Technically, ‘will’ be in the same party." After all, they weren’t ‘official’ yet." The
minimum requirement for a party was three people." But right now, the
members only included this bastard and her."."."

8
According to him, they hadn’t even found a professor who was willing to be
assigned to the party." Nothing about this shitty party was in any way proper."
And she was in it." “I think I’m done eating." ”
Having lost her appetite, Romantica put down her spoon." When they came out
of the cafeteria, Romantica's face was darkened with dismay." She made sure to
keep a steady distance behind Desir as they walked."
Desir broke the silence, “Don’t worry, we won’t have any problems setting up
the party." ”
But the look of concern did not leave Romantica’s face." “You."."." you do know
how hard it is to create a party, right?”
There were two conditions to creating a party." A roster of at least three people
and an assigned professor." Setting aside the problem of the professor for now,
they still needed another member to meet the headcount requirement."
“There are already a few prominent parties in the Beta Class." All the new
students will want to go to those, you know? Nobody’s going to bat an eye at a
newbie party like this one,” Romantica spat into the cold night air." “Say
something! You-”
Desir cut her off with a grin, “At first, you were going on and on about how bad
this party was." Now, you’re concerned we won’t be able to get it off the ground."
I knew you’d come around." ”
Romantica reeled." “W-w-w-what?! I just thought about what an annoying
month it’s going to be if this party fails."."." So I’m just looking out for number
one, got it?!”
It was hard not to find Romantica’s child-like embarrassment at something so
trivial to be anything but endearing."
Desir explained as he continued walking, “I told you, there won’t be any
problems." I already know a professor that’ll take care of the party

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authorization." And for the third member, I already have someone in mind who
hasn’t joined a party yet." We just have to convince them." ”
At those words, Romantica puffed up her cheeks in muted frustration, “You
should’ve told me all of that from the beginning!”
Replaying Desir’s nonchalant revelation in her mind, Romantica couldn’t help
but feel as if she was being teased." Everytime she spoke with him, it felt like
conversing with a snake."
The pair branched off of the path leading away from the cafeteria and started
heading toward the training hall." The path became much wider." Romantica
caught up to Desir and asked, “So, who’s this kid you have in mind?”
Desir replied, “Pram Schneizer." ”

The sun was shining brightly in the sky." The first thing they noticed when they
entered the glass-roofed Beta Class training hall was the state of disrepair it
was in." Signs indicating lack of care or proper maintenance were everywhere
they looked." The wooden bleachers had several holes large enough for careless
students to fall right through them, and one of the load-bearing pillars had
deteriorated to the point of needing some hastily applied magic support to prop
it up." Everything about the training hall was worn down."
Today, it was the location where the Alpha and Beta Class were holding a joint
sparring session." Once the class began, the students split off to find opponents
to spar with." The observing crowd was split in exactly two groups." The first was
the students of the Beta Class." Ordinary in appearance and plain in attire, they
were the students that would normally be using this training hall." To them, the
state of the room was nothing out of the ordinary."
To the other group, the inadequacies of the facility were apparent enough to be
jarring." These were the students of the Alpha Class, easily identified by their

10
fine clothing and imperious air." They made no attempt to hide their disdain for
the class’s choice of location."
“This really is a disgusting place." ”
“The facilities are pathetic." ”
They looked around in disgust, wrinkling their noses as if encountering some
foul stench, and continued to pile on the insults."
“I’m not really a fan either,” said Romantica, as she took a seat next to Desir on
the benches in front of the bleachers."
They were waiting for their turn." Because there were more students than
available room, they had to wait until the others were finished to use the
training hall."
“There’s no grass." No protective magic walls." It doesn’t look like anyone’s been
taking care of the place at all." There’s mud everywhere." Not to mention, it’s so
small that we have to take turns to even use it." This is one of the reasons why I
wanted to advance to the Alpha Class." ”
Even though she complained, she knew that there was no point." The midday
sun was hot on her skin." She held a hand above her eyes and looked over the
crowd on the floor of the training hall."
“So that person is here? Pram something-or-whatever?”
The one called Pram Schneizer." Desir remembered that name clearly." He was a
Beta Class member who had lasted nine years in the Shadow Labyrinth."
Pram’s specialty was leveraging the keen point and agility of a rapier to
produce flurries of potent thrusting stabs." Combining his prodigious knack for
swordsmanship and incredible effort, his skills with a rapier were truly mighty."
Just on the basis of his piercing stabs, he was a top-tier, formidable swordsman."

11
Desir continued to scan the pairs of students in the training hall." “He’s a
swordsman of incredible ability." Likely the strongest in the Beta Class." ”
Romantica tried to downplay her growing curiosity." “Hmm, I want to see that." ”
Desir pointed towards somewhere close to the center of the hall." “Oh, he’s right
there." ”

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**Chapter 10 - School Life! (3)**

Pram Schneizer was lightly stretching his body in the gymnasium." He gave the
impression of being very young, his face gave off a slender look." His rather
feminine eyebrows and long eyelashes only accented his beauty."
“What is that adorable little thing?!” Romantica exclaimed."
Desir agreed with her, “Pram sure has a cute side to him." ”
Romantica violently shook her head left and right." “A cute side? That's wrong!
It's not a side, he's adorableness incarnate! How come I didn't know there was a
kid like that here?” Romantica spouted nonsense." “He’s so cute! Super cute! I
want one." Where can I get myself one? I’ll use my entire fortune if I have to!”
Her attitude resembled that of a spoiled brat who had caught a glimpse of
something she desperately wanted." Desir shook his head in disappointment."
In a spar, lethal weapons weren't allowed." Instead, the sparring hall would
provide dozens of various wooden weapons ranging from rapiers, broadswords,
claymores and others." Anybody wanting to spar was obliged to choose from
those provided weapons upon entering the sparring stage."
There existed six sparring stages." Pram was assigned to the fourth stage." Before
he entered the stage, he stopped right in front of the collection of wooden
weapons." Going from left to right, the size and weight of the weapons
increased." Pram hesitated for a moment before reaching out to his right." He
grabbed the weapon and held it up." It was a wide bladed greatsword."
Desir’s eyes narrowed." “A greatsword."."." ?” Desir spoke anxiously."
Romantica clapped and leaned forward." “The best swordsman of Beta Class." I’m
looking forward to this." ”

13

Pram’s opponent was a knight from the Alpha Class."
Percival Ahsegunits."
Having learned swordsmanship from an official knight, he was a strong
opponent to say the least." He had pulled his sword out, which was attached to
his waist by a scabbard." The sword looked to be a wooden broadsword, a mix
between a longsword and a shortsword." Percival stared at Pram with a
menacing and savage look." Pram put his right hand on his chest and lowered
his head as to greet his opponent in a respectful bow."
“Beta Class." I’m Pram Schneizer." ”
“I have no need to introduce myself to some filthy Beta Class." ”
While both were fixated on each other, the referee lowered his flag announcing
the start of the battle."
“Hiyat!”
The first one to move was Pram." He charged at his opponent, keeping his
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14
breathe." He had succeeded in pushing Percival all the way to the edge of the
stage."
Desir observed the fight with a darkened expression." This wasn't the Pram he
had expected." Pram's strength didn't lie in his usage of the greatsword." All his
movements were simple and blunt." As a matter of fact, Pram should've been
using a rapier, a weapon which perfectly matched his style of fast and accurate
swordsmanship, not something as dull as a greatsword." At this point, Desir
wondered,
‘Why isn’t he using a rapier?’ Desir’s worries soon became reality."
The spar was straightforward." Pram swung his sword around without giving it
much thought while Percival simply blocked all his incoming attacks." Even
though it all looked simple, swinging such a large sword was draining Pram's
stamina."
Percival opportunistically leapt forward and began to furiously attack Pram." In
an instant, the flow of the battle had flipped in Percival's favor." Pram fell back
and almost collapsed, distraught by the sudden change in Percival's stance."
Percival's attacks were overwhelmingly strong and accurate, giving Pram no
room to readjust his defense." As expected, Pram's lack of expertise in
greatswords would be the end of him." After blocking multiple attacks, Pram's
stamina was completely depleted." As he brought up his greatsword to block an
incoming attack, he twisted his right wrist."
“Kuaaap!”
In a battle between swordsmen, a brief opening was of utmost importance." This
held true especially if one was being barraged by attacks." Percival gave of a
fierce roar as he leapt in, striking the side of the awkwardly held greatsword."
Pram's wrist couldn't withstand the impact and was forced to let go of the
heavy weapon." “Kuok!”
The wooden greatsword flew into the air." It spun around a few times and
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15

The victor was decided."
Pram had lost."
As Pram stared down his weapon, he let out a sigh and bowed his head." “I lost." ”
Contrary to Desir’s expectations, the battle ended rather plainly." Romantica put
on an incredulous expression, “I'm pretty sure you mentioned that that kid
called Pram was a strong swordsman, didn't you? What kind of swordsman gets
tired while swinging a sword? Not even a beginner makes such a mistake." ”
“Yeah."."." ” Desir unknowingly responded."
Romantica placed a hand on her chin." The excitement in her green eyes was all
but gone."
“He's cute and all, but that has nothing to do with his combat abilities." If he
stays like that, it'll be useless to recruit him to our party." Why don't we find
another student?” Romantica’s words reflected the reality of the situation."
A party was better off without having any weak members." They would only
serve as deadweight, dragging the party down instead of lifting it up."
If Desir didn't already know Pram's future, he would've surely followed
Romantica's advice." Staring at Pram, Desir suddenly got up from his seat and
shouted toward Percival." “Enough!”
A fight between both of them had broken out." Pram was on the ground while
Percival was stood up in front of him, holding up a fist." Percival had instigated
this fight by throwing the first punch." He turned his head over to where the
noise came from and noticed Desir approaching him."
Percival chuckled." “Ha." ” His chuckle was filled with ridicule."

16
He pointed his wooden sword at Pram and spoke “If you don’t want to end up
like him, you better scram." ”
Desir sighed." The world has its fair share of people who solve everything with
violence."
“Why are you doing this?”
Percival did not reply." In that moment, Pram got up from the ground." His
tattered robe was stained with dirt." He rubbed his reddened cheek and spoke,
“Damn, Alpha Class sure are something." Did it anger you that you got pushed
around by a Beta Class, even for just a moment?"
The boy was right on the mark."
He was a bit too right."
Percival's eyes lit up in anger as he swung his wooden sword."
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17
It was an incredibly fast strike." It was done in the heat of the moment and
purely out of anger." But having swung the weapon with all his mustered up
strength, the thought that it could have been blocked hadn't even crossed
Percival's mind." A single droplet of cold sweat ran down Percival's spine." “S-so
what?”
Desir inhaled a deep breath then proceeded to stare down Percival." Percival felt
like Desir's penetrating gaze were a dark abyss that could swallow him whole."
“The battle is over." You won." What else do you want?”
Desir’s eyes were completely devoid of any emotion." No anger, no fear, no
irritation was shown." He was just plainly staring at Percival." Without Percival
having realized it, Desir emanated an incomprehensible and strange
atmosphere that left him dumbfounded and without breath." Percival had felt
something like this before." He recalled a time when he was very young." The
knowledgeable veteran general who had taught him everything would stare at
Percival with the same eyes each time he made a mistake."
“Be thankful that a professor isn’t here right now." If a professor saw your
conduct just now-” Desir exclaimed."
“Don’t you lecture me." ” Percival snapped back."
Percival rapidly turned around and left to go somewhere else." As though he did
not want to stay in that place a second longer, Percival left Desir's sight with a
half run."

\*\*\*

Desir's arm had taken a serious beating." The spot where he had blocked the
wooden sword was swollen, and the area around the wound had turned black
and red with bruising." It was a silver lining that his bone hadn't been broken."
The wood splinters were removed, and his wound was carefully disinfected and
bandaged."
“Your wound hurts a lot, right?” Pram asked, concerned."

18
After moving to the infirmary, Pram had begun providing first-aid to Desir." He
carefully wrapped bandages around the wound, making sure they would not
unravel." For some odd reason, the ends of the bandages were tied into a ribbon."
Desir had to hold back laughter at that fact." It truly was a meticulous
handiwork."
“I’m really sorry." ” Pram was on the verge of tears."
He blankly stared at Desir’s arm wrapped in bandages." Even now, blood was
seeping through the wrappings."
“I am truly sorry." Life is going to be a lot tougher with a wounded right arm like
yours." ”
“It’s alright." I was the one who decided to intervene." ”
“No, no." This was all my fault." If I don’t take responsibility-”
“I told you, it’s fine." ”
“Well, if you say so."."." ”
Even as he said that, Pram remained restless."
“Seriously, don’t worry about it." ” said Desir, trying to appease Pram’s worries."
“But."."." ”
Pram took a seat next to Desir and cast a downtrodden glance."
“You've made yourself an enemy in Alpha Class just to help someone you didn’t
know." ”
“I was well aware of that as soon as I decided to step in." ”

19
When Desir said that, Pram raised his head." His eyes were filled with surprise
and awe." “A-anyways, thank you." I’ll never forget this." ”
“It was nothing." ”
“Ah!”
Pram suddenly realized something."
“Now that I think about it, we’ve just been calling each other ‘you’." ”
A light hearted laughter was exchanged between the pair." Pram pointed to
himself and spoke, “I’m Pram Schneizer." ”
“Desir Arman." Nice to meet you, Mr." Schneizer." ”
“There’s no need to address me with such formality." ”
“Hmm, if that’s the case."."." Schneizer?”
Pram shook his head." “No, no." Just call me Pram." You can just speak casually
with me." ”
Desir spoke defeatedly, “Alright, Pram." Does that work?”
Pram's face lit up as soon as he heard Desir concede." He truly was happy."

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**Chapter 11 - School Life! (4)
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As long as Pram approved, Desir was happy with it." At the same time, Desir
noticed that Pram’s face had become unnaturally red." Unable to understand
why, Desir decided to ignore it and continued speaking, his tone belying his
embarrassment." “You don’t have to speak to me so politely, you know?”
Pram’s own face showed a steely determination as he responded, “No, no, it’s
fine, Mr." Desir." This is more comfortable to me." ”
“We’re the same age; ‘mister’ is a bit much, don’t you think?”
“No, really it’s fine." I want to call you Mr." Desir,” Pram insisted." He appeared
bizarrely resolute." Desir sighed a little inside, but, ultimately, decided to drop
the topic." He could let Pram speak how he wished."
“Oh? It’s this late already?” blurted Desir in surprise." He had been so caught up
in the conversation that he hadn’t realized that the clock was already pointing
at 1." It was lunch time."
Having finished the first aid, Desir got up to move, but as he opened the door to
leave, Pram suddenly moved in front of Desir and lowered his head." “Thank
you for today, truly." I’ll never forget this debt." ”
“I only did what anyone would do in that situation,” Desir responded."
They left the infirmary together, and Pram spoke up again." “If there’s anything
I can do to help, please tell me." You can ask me any time you’d like." ”
Desir’s brows suddenly furrowed." “Anything you can do to help."."." ”
Noticing Desir’s suddenly serious expression, Pram pressed, “Anything at all!”

21
‘Anything?’ Desir’s eyes flashed." “Then, Pram, if you haven’t applied to a party
yet, would you join mine?”
Pram’s eyes jumped in surprise, before his face broke into a wide smile of pure
delight." “Of course, Mr." Desir!”
And with that, Desir completed his party."

Desir, Romantica, and Pram walked across the long, empty corridor, before
coming to a stop in front of an elegant wooden door." An engraved plaque on the
door read, ‘Brigitte de Fahellibos." ’
The door swung open, into a spacious and well-organized room, elegantly
decorated." Atop a small table near the center, four tea cups were neatly sat, as
if the professor had been expecting them."
As the three entered the room, Professor Brigitte spoke."."I'm afraid you've
called to meet at a busy time."."
Desir, Romantica, and Pram sat opposite Brigitte." Desir bowed his head as he
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22
Brigitte placed her teacup back down." “You were truly amazing at the entrance
exam, Desir." ” She continued, “I’ve never seen you do that before, you know?”
Desir blushed as he responded, “Haha, is that so?”
“Certainly." That day was the first time I’ve ever seen such skillful application of
magic from you." ”
“."."." It really wasn’t that much." ”
“You’re humbling yourself too much,” Brigitte insisted." “You won against the
much favored Ajest, after all." ” Brigitte flashed a wide smile at Desir as she
continued, “Remembering how hopeless you were when I was first teaching
you, I do feel quite betrayed at seeing how brilliant your magic is, huhuhu." ” [1]
Desir froze, speechless, as a chill ran down his spine."
Seeing this, Brigitte spoke up again." “It was a joke." Drink, before the tea cools."
It took quite a bit of effort to get these leaves imported from Heidna." ”
“."."." Yes." ” Desir raised his cup." His hands were still shaking violently."
Romantica looked at him while snickering quietly." She hadn’t expected there
was someone who could win against Desir with words."
Her teacup now half empty, Brigitte gazed intently at the group." A mysterious
light flickering across her eyes as she asked, “So these are the party members
you’ve found?”
Without another word, Brigitte examined Romantica, Pram, and Desir one by
one, only speaking again once she was satisfied." “What’s your reason for
creating a party, Desir?”

23
Of course, she was asking for the party’s objective." Their goal was something
that Desir saw clearly in his mind." In fact, he had created this very party for
that single reason."
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24
“What!? What are you talking about!” Romantica, who had been listening
silently, shot up from her seat." “Forget being in the top 9." There’s no way we
could even place in the top 30 of the tournament." And even if we did, any Beta
Class parties would be targeted by everyone else immediately!”
“She’s right you know." ” Brigitte agreed, nodding." “It’s obvious who will be in
the top 30." The majority of them will be elites, all in large parties." Last year,
there was the Blue Moon party with 15 members, the Red Dragon party with 9,
and the remaining 6 were all from other Alpha Class parties." Not a single
student from the Beta Class has ever placed in the top 30 in this academy’s
history." ”
Now with a better understanding of what Desir’s plan entailed, Pram spoke
warily, “So obviously, there’s no way the Alpha Class will go easy on anyone
from Beta Class, and they’ll likely even target us." ”
“That is correct." ” Desir said."
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25
Desir spoke with a smile." “Think about it, professor." If the Beta Class who are
thought of as trash wins Single Ranker titles for everyone in a 3-man party,
how would people react?”
“That is."."."." ” Brigitte’s was unable to answer Desir, falling silent as the
implications of his plans dawned on her."
Desir continued, “‘The Beta Class is talentless, so I refuse to teach them." ’
Opinions such as these would become mere excuses, and the truth would
become apparent." The Beta Class will finally be able to remove their shackles of
inferiority." ”
Steam rose from their cups, the tea within still warm, and its fragrance filled
the room."
Desir gulped nervously." Other than the occasional blink, Professor Brigitte sat
as still as a statue, contemplating Desir’s words quietly."
As the three students held their breath in silence, Brigitte finally spoke,
“Alright then, I’ll authorize the creation of your party." ”
A sigh of relief escaped Desir." “Thank you, professor." ”
However, before Desir could fully relax, Brigitte continued." “But before that,
there’s something I must be sure of." ” Brigitte looked at Pram and Romantica." “I
need to hear Pram and Romantica’s consent." ”
Pram and Romantica each took a deep breath; they both understood the weight
their decision would carry."
Brigitte looked at the two of them sternly." “You must be absolutely certain
before giving me an answer." Joining Desir’s party also means agreeing with
Desir’s ideals." In other words, you’re throwing in your lot with him." You must
obey your party leader’s commands, and follow his instructions at all times." To
join this party under these constraints, what matters most of all is your own
determination." ”

26
Pram showed no hesitation in reaching his decision." “I will apply to join Mr."
Desir’s party." ”
Brigitte passed a paper over to Pram." “Then please sign this contract." ”
The pen moved without reserve, and Brigitte picked up the completed contract."
While quickly checking the contract in her hands, Brigitte said, “Now there’s
only one person left." ”
With that, everyone’s gaze fell on a single person in the room."
Romantica was holding her chin, lost in thought." She was currently holding a
heated internal debate." Was it really possible to enter the Alpha Class this way?
To reach the top 9 in the academy that gathered the greatest talents from
around world." She was only a 2nd circle mage." The spellsword Ajest included,
there were surely much more than 9 people who were easily stronger than her."
To be honest, Romantica thought that even the notion of entering the Alpha
Class was little more than a pipe dream." ‘That is."."." if I were alone." ’
Romantica looked at Desir." What she saw was a man with overflowing
confidence." His look was one that said ‘there’s no way I could possibly lose’." It
was as if defeat had never even crossed his mind." Looking at him, she recalled
the time when he’d taken control of her magic." It was truly a creative, even
ingenious, way to use magic." It was the first time Romantica felt like she’d
caught a glimpse of an unreachable level." Her horizons were expanded that
day, and she had decided to never allow herself to become conceited again."
Romantica thought for certain that if it were Desir."."." if it were him, she felt he
could create something incredible."
“."."." Whew." ” Romantica sighed deeply and turned to Brigitte." “Where do I sign?”

27
The main building, located in the center of the academy’s campus, was split
into six unique sectors, and the distance between each sector was so great that
magic-powered buses were necessary for transportation between them." Each
sector was named after the purpose it served." The area containing the
dormitories was called the Residential Sector, and the area that conducted
magical research or research on Shadow Worlds was called the Research
Sector; the other four sectors were named in a similar fashion."
| This stop is the Training Sector."

Desir, Romantica, and Pram got off the bus." In front of the station stood an
ivory-colored marble statue of a swordsman." Behind it stood large buildings
boasting an incredible height, rising far up into the sky." Walking side by side,
Desir’s group entered the training center."

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**Chapter 12 - Little Bird (1)**

Just like its exterior, the interior of Hebrion Academy showed off the school’s
opulence." This was especially evident in its training center: the grandiose

recreational area was home to both a track-and-field section and an aquatic-
training section."

The track-and-field section featured an enormous running track as its
centerpiece." Other specialty facilities surrounded the circuit, such as practice
arenas, simulation training areas and fitness gyms staffed by personal trainers."
The academy had also spared no expense on its aquatic area, which showcased
an olympic pool with over 30 lanes and many other arenas to prepare students
for underwater battles."
And between the two training centers, a grand tower stood imposingly—a
training facility for student mages, according to Desir’s guidebook."
The tower had a total of five floors, each one dedicated to training a specific
attribute." And, like the training centers below, each floor housed a number of
different training areas."
Hebrion Academy’s massive training section could easily accommodate the
entire student population at the same time." The sheer grandeur of the facility
took Romantica’s breath away."
Anyone would feel honored to train with such amazing amenities." No other
place in the world boasted such a collection of top-tier facilities."
"If I could just access these training areas, I would swear loyalty to Hebrion
Academy forever." I mean it." ” Of course, Romantica meant unrestricted access of
those facilities." After all."."."

For Alpha Class use only."

29
That sign, posted above the entrance to those luxurious training facilities,
spoke to the reality of the situation: blatant discrimination in treatment
between the Alpha Class and the Beta Class."
The trio moved on, leaving the Alpha Class training area behind them."
After climbing a winding staircase, they reached the shabby and dingy Beta
Class training facility, at the very top of the training area." By size and
convenience of access, the Beta Class facility couldn’t compare to the Alpha
Class’s—it looked like an old attic."
The rusty door, left unoiled for an untold amount of time, creaked unpleasantly
as it opened." The sight was enough to destroy all their motivation."
“."."." Unbelievable." ”
“This isn’t even comparable." ”
Layers of dust swirled up as the trio entered the room, and their noses met a
rotten smell."
"Ahhhhh!" Pram’s outburst rang through the room."
Romantica was already on-edge, and almost yelled,."What's wrong?"
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30

"I absolutely cannot ever train here! I hate mice!"
"Let's look on the bright side."." Desir rubbed his hands together."."No one ever
comes here, except for us." Again, this is the best training area for us."."
Romantica uneasily began to inch away towards the exit, but Desir was one
step faster." Desir blocked the door—Romantica’s only way out."
"Lets clean this place up and use it as our office."." Desir grinned at Romantica."
"Y-you're joking? Please tell me you're joking? Please?"
"We're going to become an amazing party here."."
"Look at this place! Look at this absolute mess of a place! It’s a rat’s nest!"
\*click\* At that moment, the light that had struggled to stay on went out."
Romantica inched towards the light switch to try to turn the light back on."."." but
before she could, a flood of red eyes appeared in the darkness."
"Oh."."."." It took a full three seconds for the dire situation to register in
Romantica’s head."
“Squeak." ” Rodent and human squared off against each other in an interspecies
stare-off." And as expected, the rodents achieved the victory! “Squeeeeek!” A
swarm of angry rats charged at the humans."
"KYAAAAAAAAAA!" An ear-splitting scream rang out, and Romantica flew into
the air and latched onto Desir." The girl had gone hysterical, and her whole body
was shaking like a leaf."

31
Art from Official Release

32
As the light blinked back on and the darkness retreated, the army of mice
skittered away."
Desir blinked." “Lots of rats, huh?”
“Squeeeeaaaak."."."." ”
Though the rodents had disappeared, Romantica had no intention of letting go
of Desir." She channeled even more strength into her arms and legs and
clambered even further up Desir’s body, as if touching the ground would kill
her."
Desir sighed as he looked at Romantica’s face, milliseconds away from bursting
into tears."."Fine."."
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Six hours later, the Beta Class training room looked totally different." The fully
recharged magic light cast a bright gleam across the room, reflecting off the
spotless, almost mirror-like floor."

33
Desir, with a satisfied face, looked around the room, then at his cleaning crew—
everyone wore a similar expression."."Well done, you all worked hard."."
"Wow!"
"Whoaa."."."."
Without any further words, they all collapsed in exhaustion and relief on the
floor." Just the cleaning process alone would have sufficed for their first
physical training session." But unfortunately, Desir had other plans."
"Ok, we'll rest for 30 minutes, and then we begin training."."
"Whaaaaat!?!" Romantica exclaimed in exasperation."."We cleaned everything
today, let's just call it here!"
Desir shook his head."."Romantica, you haven't forgotten what Professor
Brigitte said when you joined this party, have you?"
"That’s."."."."."." Romantica grimaced, recalling Professor Brigitte’s warning."
“You must be absolutely certain before giving me an answer." Joining Desir’s party also
means agreeing with Desir’s ideals." In other words, you’re throwing in your lot with
him." You must obey your party leader’s commands, and follow his instructions at all
times." To join this party under these constraints, what matters most of all is your own

determination." ”

The professor’s words had contained no ambiguity." Desir continued,."And I also
have the contract that you signed."."."."
"I get it! Alright! Fine! I’ll just do it."." Nothing but a series of hardships." Little by
little, Romantica began to secretly regret her decision to join this party."

\*\*\*

34
Thirty minutes later, Desir kicked off Romantica’s training by bringing out a
blue ball."."First of all, we’ll have you work on your casting speed."."
"My casting speed is already plenty fast! You saw it during the entrance exam."."
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35
Desire knew the Romantica from his previous life very well." She had already
specialized in speed-chanting, and the danger of the Shadow World pushed her
to constantly hone her skills and discover new talents."
Her efforts had given rise to chantless casting, an ingenious new method of
releasing magic without ever having to speak."
But the Romantica of his previous life had spent an unimaginable amount of
time and effort developing that method—Desir would help the present
Romantica develop those skills in a much shorter span of time."
"That impossible!" But as for right now, that was Romantica’s immediate
reaction."
Desir had expected as much."."No, it's possible." You just feel like it’s impossible."."
"I told you I can't!"
"If you can't, then you can just stay in the Beta Class, eating stale bread."."
The thought of the stale bread broke the stubborn stalemate."
“."."." you're not lying, right?" She knew as long as she was part of this party, she
would have to follow Desir’s directives." Romantica sighed."
"."."." Alright." Let's give it a try."."
Desir smiled."."Great." Here, watch this ball."."
Desir placed the ball at Romantica's feet, then proceeded to draw two circles on
the ground using a pen: one around the ball, and another five meters away
from her."."Try moving the ball from that circle to this circle over here."."
Romantica placed the ball down and tried to push the ball across, but Desir
interrupted her."."No physical contact." You are not to move from where you are

36
now." And, of course, you can’t speak." Use nothing but air currents to push the
ball."."
Air current manipulation."
Trying to control the air’s current was like a human trying to flap a pair of
wings." It wasn't just exercising one of the body's five senses—rather, it was an
entirely new, unfamiliar limb."
It was obviously difficult." However, if a mage could master air current
manipulation, they were well on their way to learning chantless casting for 1st
circle spells."
Romantica focused her mind and stared down at the ball." But how was she
supposed to create a current without chanting a spell?."Hnnngggggg."."."."."."."."
As he observed Romantica’s efforts, Desir spoke up."."Romantica, do you
remember what you felt when we were cleaning?"
'Remember what!?' Romantica grew frustrated, both by her current inability to
move the ball, and by the memory of their slave-like labor." There had been so
much to clean up, they could only barely finish the task with the help of magic."
"You may have utilized spells at the time, but you definitely should have felt
something else—like you were moving with the wind." Remember that feeling."
That feeling of sweeping away the dust." Think of the ball as the dust."."
Romantica blinked, glared down at the ball, and refocused." ‘Think of the ball as
the dust."."." ’
Romantica applied Desir’s advice, and the ball budged from its spot for the first
time." Though it had inched in the wrong direction, the fact that it had moved at
all was worthy of praise."
Desir patted Romantica's shoulder."."Your first steps are good." Keep at it."."

37

Her first praise."
Romantica forcibly choked down the cheer forming in her throat and continued
to practice."
"Right, next is Pram's training."." Desir turned towards Pram, who had moved
some distance away so as to not interrupt Romantica."
Pram looked up at the approaching Desir, eyes brimming with expectation."
However, that expectation was to be betrayed—Desir had no intention of
training Pram."
The reason was simple."
"Truth be told, I have nothing to teach you."."

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**Chapter 13 - Little Bird (2)**

“Really? How come?”, asked Pram."
“You’re already a fully-fledged swordsman—you know all the basics, have great
senses, and your flow isn’t bad,” noted Desir." “You are apt at finding a flaw in
your opponent’s stance, and would not have any problems going to the
promotion battle right now." Even the Alpha Class has few people matching
your skills." ”
Desir recalled Pram from his memories." His gallant figure charged into the
heart of the enemy, holding only a silver rapier." The sliver of a sword raced
across the battlefield, striking at the speed of lightning." A true King-rank
swordsman and living legend amongst the survivors."
But that was in the future."
Desir remarked, “Of course, that would require you to relinquish the
greatsword in exchange for a rapier." ”
Pram failed to meet Desir’s eyes as he gripped the greatsword tightly." He
became silent and discovered a newfound interest in the floorboards."
Desir noticed his reluctance and simply asked, “Why won’t you use the rapier,
Pram?”
“Must you ask?” whined Pram."
“This concerns the overall strength of the party, so yes,” said Desir."
Pram lowered his greatsword." Their eyes met." Desir saw a touch of
vulnerability in Pram’s eyes." “Then."."." could you come with me?”

4
The overcast sky gave hints of dusk approaching." Rain was sure to come in the
next few hours, but none of that compared to Pram’s appearance." His face
darkened with each word:
“I didn’t know my father."
“It’s not because he died when I was young." He was a noble, and my mother
was a commoner." I was a bastard, simple as that." Even so, we used to be pretty
well-off."
“Thinking back, I think he provided for us." My mother didn’t even know how to
stitch." ”
Pram unlocked the door to his dormitory, and let Desir in."
“Every night before we slept, she would always tell me about what a wonderful
person he was." She was so proud of him,” explained Pram." With each word,
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5
Pram gave Desir a bittersweet smile as he reminisced." “My mother never told
me his name—not even once." Instead, she always told me that I should never go
looking for my father." I get it—I really do." There’s no way that a highborn noble
family would accept a bastard." She never told me his name, even on her
deathbed." ”
A bastard was a disgrace; in the case of Pram, he wasn’t even the son of a
concubine." If a commoner appeared at a noble’s doorstep and said he was a
bastard, the result was obvious." She kept her silence to protect her son."
Regardless, Pram wanted to know his father’s name." Despite his mother’s
concerns, he always wanted to meet his father."
“Call it curiosity." Isn’t it just human to want to meet your father?” asked Pram."
“That’s why I came here - with so many nobles gathered, I would definitely be
able to find a clue to my father’s whereabouts." ”
Desir nodded in agreement."
“I had the rapier inspected as soon as I got here—my only lead." With weapons
from all around the world gathered here, there had to be somebody who could
give me a clue based on this rapier." ” Pram’s eyes hardened."
Desir inspected the blade." Although the handle was extremely high quality, the
blade itself was worthless." The silver plating had worn off, and revealed a
rusted iron within." It resembled a toy more than a weapon."
“The result is in your hands." It’s made of a cheap iron that could be from
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6
Pram retrieved the rapier from Desir, and threw it to the side in frustration."

The greatsword cut through the air with a powerful slash." Pram was practicing
his swings." The most fundamental move—an important step to understanding
the sword."
Desir watched his display with apprehension." ‘It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to
say that Pram has no talent for the greatsword."."." it would be pointless to even teach
him." ’
The greatsword was not designed for accuracy, but for its crushing weight."
Utilizing the slow and destructive strength of the broad weapon required
training to handle its hefty weight." Pram’s physique did not meet any of the
conditions in training with the greatsword, but were rather optimized for a
rapier."
Much of this was due to habit—based on Pram’s story, he trained with the
rapier for at least 10 years." If he had switched to the greatsword recently after
he had the rapier appraised, he had been using the greatsword for less than two
weeks." It would take many times more than that to break his ingrained habits."
Desir sighed at the thought." Everything would be resolved if Pram simply
picked up the rapier, but he was taciturn in his answer." Desir was frustrated,
but did understand Pram’s feelings." If he were Pram, he would likely do the
same thing."
‘It’s still too early to give up." ’
Desir hung on to one major flaw in Pram’s story—something that didn’t add up
that even Pram couldn’t know about." His future."
‘In my past life, he used the rapier." ’

7
Pram Schneizer and his rapier were inseparable." That was a fact." Through his
honed skills, he gained accolades and found himself at the apex of the blade,
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| This stop is the Business Sector."

8
Stepping off the bus, they were enamoured by the sight of a wide avenue lined
with thousands of street lights." The hustle and bustle of the street vendors as
they bartered with the city folk was lively." The crossroads, plaza, and even the
alleys were filled to the brim with shops as far as the eye can see." This sector
was the only area in Hebrion Academy open to the public." People from across
the world would come to inspect their wares, and the crowded streets left
barely any space to move, save for a few small gaps."
“Can I ask you one thing? Why did you sell your sword?” questioned Desir."
Passing by a smith’s stall with swords on display, Pram examined the swords
available." “It became clear to me during our talk, Mr." Desir." That sword was of
no help to me,” said Pram politely."
Desir realized that he had changed the future—Pram may never use the rapier
ever again in his life." He shook his head to get rid of the thought."
‘It’s not too late." The most important thing now is to find a reason for Pram to use the
rapier." ’
The two students entered an alley, covered in a shadow cast by the nearby
roofs." As they travelled deeper into the alleyway, fewer and fewer stalls
propped themselves out for display." Eventually, the two made their way to a
large, imposing building in the distance."
“I can’t see why there’s a store all the way out here,” said Desir with a tinge of
doubt."
Pram responded, “They said they also purchase illegal goods." That’s probably
why." ”
The building was adorned with marble, with a simple sign written in Common
in front of the door."

9
Ujukun’s Antique Shop." The most trusted shop in Hebrion Academy for antique
appraisals and purchases." Do not touch unsold items." No refunds even if you
change your mind." No refunds for damaged items." No refunds under any

circumstances."

Desir frowned." There was another line obscured when Desir originally read the
sign."
Top-class security always present." Cannot guarantee the lives of thieves."
“Looks hard-fisted,” said Desir." He fanned himself with his hands as he read
over the sign again, ensuring that he didn’t miss any additional information."
“Are you planning on going in?” Pram asked."
“Yes,” said Desir."
“I’ll say it as many times as you want—I will not use that rapier,” said Pram
crassly."
As Desir entered the shop, Pram followed in resignation." After they passed
through a narrow hallway, they came to a stop in a beautiful passageway with a
glittering chandelier descending from the center of the ceiling." At the end of
the hall, an imposing steel door laid shut." Pram rapped against the door using
the steel knocker fashioned in the shape of a wolf."
Moments later, a man emerged from inside." His stature was much taller than
the average man, looking to be one of the northern barbarians—a giant." As
Pram and Desir entered, the door was slammed shut behind them." A roar
echoed across the hall as the steel door was closed yet again." Silence filled the
hall."

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**Chapter 14 - Little Bird (3)**

“."."." It’s a bit cramped,” mumbled Desir." Past the iron doors, the walkway was
extremely narrow." Where they were standing, there was barely enough space
for one person to squeeze through." More accurately speaking, the room itself
was spacious, but they had little room available to them." The display shelves
around the room were all blocked off by wire screens." “It can’t be helped,
security-wise,” Desir said."
Beyond the barbed wire, a wooden display stood in front of a keen-eyed
merchant, who introduced himself as Ujukun." His eyes were very thin and
slender, and accented by a few strands of greying hair." Wrinkles covered his
bespectacled face, giving him the appearance of an old man." The merchant’s
hands rested on the counter, and his fingers rapped in anticipation of his new
customers."
“Judging by the entrance, you seem quite concerned about security,” remarked
Desir."
“You can never be too careful,” Ujukun responded." “Naturally, plenty of thieves
tend to come by." ” Ujukun pushed his glasses up and stopped tapping on the
counter." A silence filled the air as Ujukun sized up the young man sitting in
front of him." ‘He’s going to be a difficult one,’ the merchant thought." His eyes
lazily moved over to the other boy and he quickly recognized the face." “Weren’t
you here about two days ago? Do you have something else to sell to me?”
“On the contrary, he’s here to see what he’s sold,” explained Desir." The
merchant’s expression turned sour, before Desir added “Of course, this isn’t for
a refund." We will be purchasing it back." ”
At those words, Ujukun’s face lit back up and he was ready for business." “If
that’s the case, you should have told me earlier." ” He entered the storeroom
behind him." It felt like an eternity until the merchant returned with the sword."

11
The silver paint on the sword flaked off, revealing years of rust underneath."
Ujukun placed the sword on the counter."
“It’s a heavily rusted useless sword,” explained Ujukun."
“The price is 90 bronze pieces?” asked Desir."
“If it were a sword, you would be correct." However, this is not a sword—for a
rapier, it is a bit large and light,” said Ujukun with a delighted grin on his face."
At this point, Desir recalled something—the gift Romantica received from
Doneta appeared in his mind."
“."."." Kemubin?” guessed Desir."
Ujukin calmly explained, “That’s right." Not a sword, but a kind of Kemubin." In
the empty space within this sword, a swordsman from a warrior’s lineage
would place something inside as a gift to their lover." ” As Ujukun confirmed
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12

“The price has gone up a lot since it was sold,” said Desir."
Ujukun furrowed his brow and responded with his own justification." “40 silvers
is cheap." If I knew how to open this Kemubin, I would have charged you 80
silvers." ”
Even high-grade Kemubin would rarely cost more 10 silvers, unless they were
specifically laced in pure gold." No matter how they looked at it, there was no
way this item should be worth 40 silvers."
‘This sword is definitely the reason Pram wields a rapier." ’ Desir thought about it
hard but quickly made a decision." If Pram once again picked up the rapier, 40
silvers was a price more than worth paying." “I’ll buy it." ”
“Mr." Desir!” Pram was reluctant to have Desir pay the cost of his mistake." Desir
ignored Pram’s cry and took out his wallet." He counted out the silver pieces and
pushed them towards Ujukun."
The merchant gazed greedily at the coins in front of him." “38, 39, 40." It’s all
there." Take it." ”
Simultaneously, the steel door opened and the Kemubin was laid in front of
Desir’s eyes." He raised the Kemubin and swung it around lightly." As expected,
this is far lighter than you’d think." Desir paused and gave it another thought." Is it
possible that the Kemubin is empty? Why is the handle in such good quality but the
rest of the sword worthless?
The young man could’ve wrap his head around the Kemubin." The sword Pram
wields in the future had the exact same handle as this." Desir shifted his attention to
the handle." He glanced at it from different angles, felt the contours and looked
at it intently." The handle was extremely high quality." The rusted iron blade
didn’t match the intricate handle whatsoever."

13
As Desir ran his hands down the spine of the blade, he continued searching for
any sort of switch." As he felt around the edges of the handle, a smile appeared
on his face." ‘Found it." ’
There was a small indentation on the sword handle—it was carefully hidden by
the design of the blade." Looking at it, it appeared to be a simple black line
blended in with the wood grain." If Desir hadn’t seen Doneta’s Kemubin, he
would have never been able to find it." Desir offered the Kemubin to his fellow
student." “Take hold of the sword, Pram." ”
Pram was speechless." “Wha."."." But."."." ”
“Do you see the indentation on the handle? Insert your fingernail and lower it
like so,” Desir insisted."
“Mr." Desir." I won’t use this sword,” replied Pram." Flashbacks of betrayal welled
up from inside Pram." He couldn’t—no." He wouldn’t let his father’s legacy hurt
him again."
“Pram, this isn’t the sword as you knew it." It was simply a Kemubin,” said
Desir, encouraging Pram to take a closer look."
“Even so, it’s useless." It’s just an empty Kemubin,” retorted Pram." Taking the
Kemubin from Desir, Pram raised the sword up." He had this sword for years,
and he knew." It was simply iron and nothing more." Pram looked at Desir
apologetically." “It’s unfortunate that you spent 40 silvers for nothing, Mr."
Desir." ”
“If that Kemubin was empty, you would be correct." However, the situation is a
little different from that,” smirked Desir."
“This sword, Kemubin or not, has nothing else in it." It only weighs so much as
the iron sword and the wooden handle." ” Pram frowned." Desir wasn’t making
any sense."
“It’s just that you can’t feel it." The item inside has no weight,” explained Desir."

14
Pram looked at Desir with doubt, as if he was going crazy." His expression was
earnest, but his words sounded like a joke." “There is no such thing,” answered
Pram." He wasn’t sure if he was answering Desir or trying to convince himself."
“If you’re having doubts, why not open it for yourself?” questioned Desir." Pram
bit his lip." A pregnant pause filled the air." Desir did his best to reassure him."
“Listen to me, Pram." Trust me." ”
After a moment’s hesitation, Pram inserted his fingernail into the indentation."
The sound of metal fixtures clicking into place rang in the storeroom." At the
same time, the handle loosed itself from the previous iron blade." Now freed
from its rusted prison, a sword emerged from the Kemubin, giving a
luminescent glow."
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15
At that moment, the giant’s sword crashed upon Desir’s head." The cold steel
was inches away from taking his life." “That’s dirty of you,” chuckled Desir."
“Hand over that sword,” demanded Ujukun."
Desir wanted to laugh at the merchant’s avarice." “Don’t make excuses now that
we’re done." What you sold was a Kemubin." I paid the price." Our transaction has
finished,” said Desir curtly."
Ujukun’s face grimaced at the thought of losing such a priceless item." “If I knew
it was Blanchume, I never would have sold it,” explained Ujukun."
“If my friend knew it was a Kemubin, he never would have sold it either,”
retorted Desir." Based on the tone in Ujukun’s voice, the time of pleasantries
was over." “It’s exactly as you did,” continued Desir." He glared right at the
merchant, who couldn’t meet his eyes." Ujukun couldn’t respond to that." He was
outwitted by his own logic."
As Desir took another step towards the door, the giant raised his glaive to
Desir’ neck." The giant opened his mouth for the first time." “Owner."."." said."."." stop."
You." Will stop." ”
“."."." You’re really going to push it this far?” asked Desir."
“You should do this while I ask nicely,” said Ujukun." All of his mercantile
charisma drained out of him as he slowly unlocked a set of iron bars directly
behind him." As he moved behind the bars separating him from the two youths,
he set his gaze on the boy who sold him the Kemubin." Although he was capable
of thinking rationally, Ujukun turned a blind eye to the events unfolding soon
in lieu of his avarice." He would go to these lengths for an item made of
Blanchume."
Desir scratched his head." ‘."."." Well, I did reveal that it was made of Blanchume in
front of him, but I didn’t expect this to happen." ’

16
Ujukun’s eyes turned cold as he made a motion of slitting his throat with his
hand." The loyal barbarian did not hesitate." He took large strides towards Desir
and it didn’t take long before he enveloped his entire field of view." However,
after 5 steps the giant had to stop." Pram stood stoically in his path."
“I don’t want to fight, but if you come any closer."."." ” said Pram." He raised his
rapier in perfect form, prepared to lunge at a moment’s notice." His hips were
low, and every muscle in his body was poised, ready to respond." Pram’s small
frame was in distinct contrast to his explosive aura." His lips were pursed,
analyzing the giant’s movements." “."."." Then not even I will forgive you." ”

At the sound of the threat from the little boy, the giant roared in displeasure."
The giant’s muscles bulged as he swung his weapon." The glaive and rapier
clashed head on." “Oraaaaa!” screamed the giant." As he feinted a swing of the
sword, he let loose a fist at Pram from the other side." He fought like a true
swordsman of the North, blending together true swordsmanship and brawling."
Pram found himself backed up against the wall." Without hesitation, Pram
rolled to the side and evaded the attack."
The wooden wall crumbled under the weight of the giant’s fist." The barbarian
spat in annoyance as he shook off the splinters embedded in his left arm." If
Pram hadn’t moved immediately, his head would have shattered like a
watermelon." The behemoth let out a guttural cry." He unleashed a frenzy of
strikes at Pram." The student, now equipped with his legendary rapier, was on
his back foot in lieu of the reckless barrage."
Swords clashed in the storeroom, one side with unbridled fury and the other
with confident vigor." The hulking figure showed no signs of stopping his
assault, and the rapier could only just parry the attacks." Pram dodged the glaive
by the skin of his teeth." A split second of indecision was all it would take to
signal his end." As the battle ensued, Pram began to dodge, roll, and parry all of
the incoming attacks."
The giant became tense." With the current pace, he would undoubtedly lose the
duel." His attacks became more vicious and frightening." When Pram tried to
side step the next attack, the enemy narrowed the distance with a single
stride—the distance was too short."
The glaive swung down like a guillotine." A vertical strike with nowhere to go."
“Kuarrrgh!” The hulking figure roared in triumph."
The ferocious blow landed on Pram’s body."

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**Chapter 15 - The Returner’s Promotion Battle (1)
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But nothing happened." The barbarian felt no resistance as the glaive completed
its sweeping downwards arc." The only thing he had struck was air."
“Gruuh."."." ?” The barbarian stared quizzically at Pram." He hadn’t cut so much as
a single hair on his head." A glint of silver was now jutting out from the wooden
wall behind Pram." Something sharp with the silhouette of a crescent curve." The
barbarian snapped his neck down to look at the glaive in his hands." Except, it
wasn’t a glaive anymore—the blade was cut clean off." He was left with a
wooden rod."
Pram raised his rapier." “Shall we go again?”
The barbarian flung the wooden handle aside and closed the distance with a
swing of his fist." In an instant, his knuckles were close enough to obscure
Pram’s entire head from view." Pram wove to the side, letting the punch rocket
past him like a battering ram, and seamlessly vaulted into the air with a
backflip." With all the grace of a seasoned acrobat, he landed behind the
bewildered giant, and followed up with a swing of his rapier." [1]
The giant spun around and raised an arm to block the blow with his gauntlet,
but Pram’s rapier drew a perfect arc around his guard, and thrust into the pit of
his stomach." The now hapless giant tried to retreat, but Pram was faster." The
rapier plunged into the barbarian’s solar plexus." Tough as his body may have
been, it was a decisive blow to a vulnerable weak point." The giant’s body
quavered, his legs gave out from under him, and he collapsed into a crumpled
heap."
Desir nodded silently, as if confirming something he’d already known." “Looks
like it’s over." ”
“Nonsense,” screeched Ujukun." “That door is made of Kichlean steel." There’s
only one person here who can open it, and I’m pretty sure he’s in no condition
to do so." ” Kichlean steel was famed for its unyielding tensile strength." It was
also proportionately heavy." A door of this size would likely require the strained

20
efforts of half a dozen men to even budge." “Which means you’re stuck here
until my guards arrive,” cackled Ujukun."
“Oh, I don’t know about that." ” The Blanchume rapier streaked through the air,
making short work of the door’s hinges." The door flattened with a thunderous
crash." Apparently, even Kichlean steel was no match for Blanchume." As the
pair made their exit, Desir turned to the dazed Ujukun." “Looks like it’s
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They’d only been running for a few minutes but Desir was already out of
breath."
“Alright, I think we’ve lost them." I really need to exercise some more." I can’t
believe I’m this weak."."." ” Desir muttered between stilted breaths." Though, his
lack of breath did little to damper is cheerful voice." “Good thing we got the
sword back, right?”
While nodding, Pram moved his hand to the rapier at his waist without even
realizing it." The pale rapier glittered like starlight, or even moonlight." He pulled
out the sword, and couldn’t feel the slightest weight." A truly incredible feeling."
“So you’ve decided to use the rapier?” Desir said, recalling how Pram had
fought with the rapier a few minutes before."
He’d held the rapier, and subdued the barbarian giant with overwhelming skill."
The fact that Pram had took up the rapier again was especially meaningful to
Desir."
“The situation was too urgent so I had no choice, but."."." ” Pram was still
hesitating." He eventually let out a sigh." “Why would my father hide something
like this in that old, worn-down Kemubin?”
That was the cause of this entire ridiculous incident." If he’d made it obvious
from the start that it was in fact a Kemubin, Pram would never have had any
reason to resent his father."
“Your father made a wise choice, Pram." ”
Pram raised his head at Desir’s words."

21
“A Blanchume sword is an incredible thing." Imagine if word got out that you
owned it." Over a hundred people just like Ujukun would have come to hound
you,” explained Desir."
“But there was still a chance I would never have found out,” said Pram."
“He left it behind because he thought you’d figure it out eventually,” said Desir
assuredly." Pram’s father always believed that Pram would realize, as long as he
kept carrying the rapier around."
“How can you be so sure?” asked Pram."
Desir grabbed the rapier, and pointed at the grip." Pram looked at it." On the
Kemubin that had the shape of an old, worn sword, there were written some
unreadable words." The reason they were unreadable was because they were
incomplete." When the Blanchume was revealed and the rapier showed its true
form, the words on the grip took shape." It looked like there was a hidden
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The Alpha Class’s private restaurant was on a high floor, the view overlooking
Hebrion Academy." A cold breeze blew in from the open window." A colorless
night view lay outside." The stars shone solemnly in the deep dark."
Romantica shuddered in the cold."
“Here’s your order, madam,” said the waiter."
The lights glittered yellow and the waiters moved between the tables like birds
flying in and out of their nests." The menu was seafood—a salt-grilled fish and a
crab gratin were laid in front of Romantica, and she thanked the waiter with a
smile."
“The Alpha Class meals are so much better, right?” said Doneta Hadun, seated
across from her."

22
She hadn’t known that he’d arrived." She guessed he’d come while she was
looking out the window." There was nothing strange about the fact that he was
there." In fact, what was strange was the fact that she was here." Without the man
sitting across from her, she could never have even set foot in this place."
“At long last." I’ve wanted to see you all this time,” said Doneta warmly."
“I see,” responded Romantica curtly." Romantica waited for Doneta’s food to
come out." A moment later, Doneta’s food was laid in front of him, and they
both raised their forks." The grilled fish tasted good, and the gratin was slightly
greasy, but its flavor was exquisite." The two of them didn’t say anything for a
while, savoring the food."
“So, what did you want to talk about?” asked Doneta."
There was no reason to hesitate." Romantica placed a wooden dagger on the
table." It was decorated with all sorts of ornaments." Romantica explained
herself, “I came to return this." ”
Doneta pushed up his glasses and looked at the Kemubin as if it were his first
time seeing it." Romantica pushed the Kemubin toward him." Doneta showed no
reaction for a moment." No rage, no annoyance." He merely collected his breath,
and pondered why he had gotten rejected." Only a third-rate noble would show
his emotions on his face." “I thought there was no reason for you to refuse-”
“You thought." ” Romantica looked at Doneta with her wind-touched green eyes."
Doneta’s heart started racing as he looked back at her gaze." “If you’re perhaps
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23
“Yes." A commoner’s party." The people you regard as trash,” said Romantica."
Doneta slammed his fork on the table." Everything had grown cold." The air
blowing in from the window, the soup on the table, the atmosphere between
them." “I don’t understand." Did you get blackmailed?”
“Maybe."."." ” Romantica shook her head." “No, this was my decision." ”
“Then you weren’t thinking rationally,” said Doneta." He opened the Kemubin."
A golden necklace slid out into Doneta’s palm like a snake."
“I don’t have any regrets,” said Romantica." She stared at Doneta with renewed
vigor."
“Don’t be hasty." There’s still time,” smiled Doneta."
Romantica took a deep breath." “I’m not taking back my decision." ” Doneta’s lips
were upturned, but he wasn’t smiling." Romantica did the same." “I honestly
think I made the right choice." I didn’t want to join that party at first, but I
changed my mind as time went on." This party is fun." The leader trains us
diligently." My skills are improving quickly thanks to him." ” With each word,
Romantica became more sure that she made the correct choice."
“If it’s improving your skills, our party can do that as well,” refuted Doneta."
“Of course, that’s only one of the reasons." Doneta, do you remember how you
told me the Beta Class were all worthless commoners, nothing but trash?”
asked Romantica."
Doneta paused." “I don’t see why you’re bringing that up." ”
“The reason,” explained Romantica." She breathed in deeply filled up her lungs."
Glittering red snake eyes stared back at her." She breathed out, and said the
words that sealed her fate." “."."." is that I’m a commoner." ”
Doneta slammed his fork down into the table." A sharp clang slammed into
Doneta’s eardrums." All of the concern and affection washed off of his face." A
slight look of scorn could be seen on his face." Romantica could no longer find
the slightest affection in his eyes."

24
“Hm." ” He let out a slight cough." In a split second, he regained his poker face
after realizing his mistake, but it was too late." His feelings toward commoners
was close to physical repulsion, and he couldn’t contain it immediately." Just as
somebody wouldn’t need a reason to hate cockroaches, he didn’t need a reason
to hate commoners." A look of panic showed on his face—he looked desperate."
“That’s a lie." ”
“Your reason for thinking that?” asked Romantica."
“If you were truly a commoner, you would have kept your mouth shut and
joined my party." That would be the only way a commoner like you could have
entered the Alpha Class,” explained Doneta."
“That’s right,” Romantica admitted it." “But when they found out I was a
commoner, at least they didn’t look at me like you." ” Doneta was right—if she
joined the Blue Moon Party, she would have an easy time entering the Alpha
Class." In contrast, Desir instead invited her to his party even though he knew
she was a commoner." There was no discrimination." She didn’t have to lie, or
fear that she would be outed for being a commoner."
“I see." ” Doneta opened his mouth." “Of course." You’re all the same trash, after
all." ” His bitter tone was reflected in his demeanor."
“Trash."."." you’ve got that right,” said Romantica." Her voice carried the same
bitterness as Doneta’s, as she answered him, her voice filled with remorse."
“Nobles will always hate commoners." They hate and despise them as if they’re
biological enemies." I know very well why you nobles can’t stand commoners."
“It’s the same reason Hebrion Academy is an aristocracy instead of a
meritocracy—the same reason why Alpha and Beta aren’t divided based on
rank, but status." The reason is that you nobles are afraid of the birth of a new
Republic." ”
“."."." Watch your mouth." ” Doneta whispered back immediately." His eyes shifted
side to side and he looked around to make sure nobody was paying attention."
Romantica ignored him and laid the final nail in the coffin." “Times have
changed." The Shadow Worlds have toppled the balance." Anyone strong enough
can acquire magic crystals." You’re all living in a castle of sand and it’s
crumbling." ”

25
Her voice now reinvigorated, Romantica said, “You live in constant fear, not
knowing when everything will collapse." ”

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**Chapter 16 - The Returner’s Promotion Battle (2)**

In the past there had a group who had revolted against the Kingdom, under the
name of ‘Republic’." They had rallied support through a common ideology: ‘The
Kingdom is a crumbling sandcastle and the nobles are its inhabitants’."
Doneta closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them slowly." “So you’ll
create another Republic." That’s what you’re trying to say?”
“If I wanted to lose my head, then maybe I’d try that." ” Romantica shrugged." “I
was only talking about you people who scorn the commoners." You nobles who
still fear them, even after more than 10 years since the Republic’s destruction." ”
“Don’t pretend like you actually understand." If you knew what really happened
back then, on that day, you would never say that." ” Doneta gazed at Romantica."
No, he was looking through her, as if she were a window to the past." “12 years
ago, a commoner student of Hebrion Academy struck the spark that lit the fire
of revolution among the commoners, and raised up an army of rebels to destroy
the Kingdom." They called themselves the Republic." ”
Yes, the rebel leader had been a graduate of the greatest academy on the
continent, Hebrion."
The Republic grew rapidly, and their advance was merciless; they ravaged
every place they passed through."
“As the Republic and the Kingdom fought, the country became divided, and
countless people were driven to ruin." ” As he continued to speak, Doneta’s tone
became more aggravated." “Even the nobles were no exception; many families
fell during that time." ”
In the end, they were almost able to take the capital, where the great royal
palace stood." But they defeated by the King’s forces, putting an end to the
commoner uprising."
Doneta clenched his fist, his voice now seething with rage." “Most of the Hadun
family, my parents included, died that day the Republic attacked the capital."
Beheaded by the guillotine to the cheers of thousands." I still can’t forget the
look they gave me, their gazes remained locked to mine the entire time, until
their heads were lopped off." ”

27
“It’s not just me, you know." ” Doneta’s voice became calmer, and he looked
Romantica in the eye." “There are so many among the nobles will never forget."
To this day, the dregs of the Republic still remain, which means we cannot trust
the commoners." ”
Romantica grimaced, as she finally glimpsed the depths of Doneta’s hatred."
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Shards of glass exploded across the room." Ajest watched indifferently as black
ink slowly spread over the floor." Professor Nifleka didn’t bother hiding his
anger." He crumpled the newspaper in his hands and threw it at the students in
a rage; Ajest caught it as she was the closest."
For the first time in 17 years, Beta Class students are in the top 30! On May 1st,
these students will enter a Class 5 Shadow World to decide who amongst them

is the strongest."

28
As critics question the fairness of the Alpha and Beta division standards, the

academy’s board of directors refute."."."

Public opinion in the Kingdom sways towards the Republic’s ideals that the
monarchy is a relic of the past." The academy entrance committee in charge of
the class of the 46th year states that hasty judgments should not."."."
“These Beta Class trash dare to."."." !” The atmosphere in the Blue Moon party
office felt heavy." The students standing in front of Professor Nifleka all stood
frozen." Getting on his nerves would have dire consequences on their future in
the academy." His anger towards the Beta Class students gave them all the more
reason to be careful."
There were nine students in total in the office, with Ajest at their head." Twelve
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29
Desir’s name echoed throughout the room." Pugman was in a rage, his eyes were
bloodshot, and veins pulsed on his neck." “To think we have to take this
humiliation from that bitch because of him." ”
There was only one person in the entire academy who Pugman would call
‘bitch’." Professor Brigitte Redwen, the target of his long-standing hatred."
“."."." ” Ajest stared at Professor Nifleka indifferently." Even the director’s rage was
of no concern to her." In fact, this situation was to her benefit."
Ajest focused on a single thing Nifleka had said." She whispered it to herself
after tuning out the raging professor." “Desir Arman."."." ”
A wave of heat swept across her body." Her heart began beating strongly, as if it
were trying to break out of her chest." Ajest forcibly held still her shaking hands."
She hadn’t forgotten it even once." How could she? She still couldn’t let go of the
bitter taste of her first defeat." Desir Arman had won against her, and that fact
had been engraved into her mind." The memory of her loss had at some point
morphed into a burning desire to win." But Desir had been assigned to the Beta
Class, and her hopes of a rematch had only grown further away." She’d started
to think she’d never meet him again."
‘Desir is coming." ’ A light flashed across her previously ice-cold eyes." He had
returned to her." He had overcome all the odds and would come fight her once
more." ‘I can finally fight against him again." ’
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30
over the party for a moment." His eyes stopped on Ajest." ”You’ve fought Desir
before, haven’t you?”
Ajest finally spoke, “Yes." ” The professor’s question had dragged her back to
reality."
Nifleka’s gaze sharpened." “Then you should more or less know how to deal with
him already." ”
Ajest nodded." “I’ve thought of a few methods." ”
Ajest was someone who excelled in every field." When someone as skilled as her
said she had a method to deal with Desir Arman, Nifleka’s eyes shone with glee."
“Good, that’s more than enough." Ajest Kingscrown, I appoint you as the leader
of the Blue Moon party’s 1st year group." ”
Selecting the group leader so hastily was shocking to the students present, but
not a single one of them objected."
Ajest Kingscrown: a Spellsword, a Pawn-rank knight, and a 3rd circle mage on
top of that." Peerless in politics, history, and every other field; she was the
subject of awe and admiration." It was only natural that nobody would doubt
her abilities."
Professor Nifleka looked upon Ajest with a smile." “Do your utmost to eliminate
Desir Arman’s party." ”
His words clearly had a more insidious undertone, but Ajest Kingscrown was
happy nonetheless." She would absolutely beat Desir this time around." The
situation was similar to when she was with Elheim, but now Ajest Kingscrown’s
mindset was completely different." She no longer thought of Desir as a
weakling; instead, he had become someone she had to unquestionably defeat."
He had become her rival."

31
Desir spoke, smiling from ear to ear." “First, I want to congratulate both of you
for a job well done." At this rate, we’ll pass the final stage of the tournament
with flying colors." ”
Still smiling, Desir dropped a small stack of books on the table, causing dust to
fly everywhere." There were three books." An incident timeline, the structure of
the Privius Clock Tower, and finally an analysis of the creation of the Republic
in 1218." Each book was large and thick with pages."
“What is all this?” Romantica asked."
Even though it was the lounge, it was still disrespectful to make such loud
noises in a library." Pram raised a finger to his lips to shush her." Romantica
flinched, but her stubborn nature wouldn’t let her admit she was in the wrong,
so she snorted in reply."
Desir spoke, wearing his usual enigmatic smile." “Starting today, we won’t be
training anymore." ”
Romantica and Pram went wide-eyed at Desir’s words." This was the first time
they’d ever skipped training since the formation of their party." But of course,
Desir had no intention of letting them rest." “We’re going to study history
today." ”
“Huuh? History?” Romantica frowned." She wasn’t pleased." Not pleased at all."
Suddenly studying history? ‘What kind of stupid idea is this’, she wondered."
Desir chuckled." “It’s actually very important." It’s because we need to learn the
original history of the Class 5 Shadow World we’re entering." ”
Class 5 Shadow Worlds always required proper planning."
Class 7s had simple objectives, such as travelling from point A to point B or
gathering objects."

32
From Class 6 and onwards, the Shadow Worlds became fashioned after
historical events and settings." For example, traveling with a knight, or guarding
a caravan in a time period before the invention of modern vehicles, when trade
relied upon such archaic methods of transportation." Understanding and
preparing for the time period was one of the most crucial elements in clearing a
Shadow World." Class 5 Shadow Worlds were all copies of certain historical
events, most of them important enough to be recorded in the history books."
Desir stroked his hand across the cover of the history book." “By clearing a
Shadow World, we can obtain magic crystals." This magic crystal contains all
the information about the Shadow World it comes from." The Shadow World
being used in this promotion battle will be one such reproduction of an already
cleared Shadow World." ”
Desir continued, “That means the conditions can be controlled." Safeguards are
an example of this." ”
Pram nodded his head in understanding." “You’re talking about the Shadow
World we went through during the entrance exam." ”

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**Chapter 17 - The Returner’s Promotion Battle (3)**

Desir continued." “Even though we can manipulate it in various ways, we can’t
change the fundamental properties of the Shadow World, such as its historical
events or the clear objective." That’s why we have to study history." ” This was
why the study of history in this world was so abnormally advanced, to the
extent where there were specialized teams of historians dedicated only to
studying the Shadow Worlds."
“So what you’re saying is."."." ” said Romantica, “these books are references for the
Shadow World of the promotion battle?”
“Precisely,” answered Desir."
Romantica glared at the disgustingly large pile of paper before her." She didn’t

know if she would be able to get through it all even if she pulled three back-to-
back all-nighters." “You’re certain that this is relevant to our promotion battle?”

Romantica’s question was blunt, to the point."
Desir responded calmly." “No." ”
“So."."." ”
Desir spoke sternly." “No objections, Romantica." ”
“Ugh." ” Romantica threw her hands in the air in protest, but there was no way
Desir would change his mind."
“These are the historical events that I feel are most likely to appear in the
exam." If you don’t agree with my methods, you can instead try reading every
history book in this library." ” It was a joke, but for Romantica it was no different
than a threat." Desir watched sympathetically as Romantica cringed and
shuddered."
‘I didn’t want to be this harsh, but."."." ’ Desir sighed." He had no other choice." After
all, he couldn’t exactly tell them that he came from the future and knew exactly
which Shadow World would appear." Desir ordered them to get started." “Read
all the history books I picked out and write a short essay summarizing their
events." ”

34
“Aaaaargh!” Romantica slumped back on her chair, unable to prevent the cry of
agony from escaping her lips."
Romantica closed her eyes and whimpered." Then she focused, gathering
unpleasant memories together and releasing it all with a breath." Desir was truly
exceptional at tormenting people." This was no different than torture."
“That guy is definitely a sadist,” she muttered."
Pram turned a page." He looked up from his book, which was already read
halfway." “He’s doing this to help us." ”
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35
Pram flinched and turned to focus on his book." “Hmm, so this happened in
1417." I should remember this." ”
“Hey, don’t ignore me." I’m on to you." ” Romantica’s tone was light as she
playfully reached over to tickle Pram."
Pram desperately tried not to make a sound, covering his mouth with hand
while trying to wriggle out of the way." As they messed around, Pram’s elbow
accidentally bumped the desk and a precariously placed book fell on the floor
loudly."
“Stop playing around and start studying." ” Desir was stern as he spoke to his
party members."
“Sorry, Mr." Desir." ”
“Sorry~”
Romantica bent down to pick up the book, but an elegant looking hand got to it
first." As her eyes looked up, she traced the hand back to its owner." Once she
saw who it was, she gasped in shock." Standing before her was a goddess of
beauty with eyes cold enough to shatter ice." Her platinum blonde hair swayed
gracefully by her waist."
“Ajest."."." Kingscrown." ” Romantica’s eyes immediately fell upon the Blue Moon
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36
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37

“It’s been a while." ” She said, emotionless as always."
Desir answered her with his usual lackadaisical tone." “So it has." ”
This was true—as the two had not met again since the entrance exam, this was
their first encounter in two months." Two months." For some, this was a long
time, whilst for others it was short." Regardless, it was long enough to decide
one’s affiliation."
“The Blue Moon party." You chose well." It’s very fitting for you." ” complimented
Desir."
“What’s fitting?” Ajest responded with doubt."
“That you and the party both stand at the top." ” Desir had nothing but praise for
Ajest."
“Not anymore, unfortunately." ” Ajest paused for a moment before elaborating,
“After all, you’re here, Desir Arman." ” Desir put his book down and rested his
chin on his hand." Ajest’s implication was clear: You brought me down."
“I heard you passed the tournament." ” Her voice contained a tinge of
excitement, something unusual for Ajest."
“We did." We were lucky,” said Desir."
Ajest was dissatisfied with his answer." “You can hardly say that you were lucky
when your specialty is analysis." Well, no matter." ”
By passing the tournament, Desir’s party moved into the top 30 of Hebrion
Academy, which meant that they had earned the right to participate in the
promotion battle."
“So when we next meet."."." ” Desir’s question was abruptly cut short by Ajest." “It
will be on the battlefield." In the Shadow World." ”
Desir followed Ajest’s train of thought." He was certain what was coming next."
There was only one reason for Ajest to visit them." “Have you come to declare
war?”

38
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39
an attempt to enter the Alpha Class, but Desir had already known that, as a
commoner, he would be assigned to the Beta Class."
No—the main reason was Ajest Kingscrown." By defeating her, his plan was to
make himself her target." The mighty spellsword." The woman standing at the
top in the Shadow Labyrinth." Desir would gladly become her rival if it meant
that she would become stronger." No, she absolutely had to." ‘Because you’re the
key to clearing the Shadow Labyrinth." ’
Desir’s eyes were looking far into the future, as always." Looking at the big
picture." This woman was the shining ray of hope in Desir’s plans." “I look
forward to an honorable duel, Ajest Kingscrown." ”

The cheers were so loud that they could have blown apart the main building of
Hebrion Academy." There was a magic-strengthened metal frame supporting a
gigantic panel that covered the ceiling." The panel shone down on the main
building, over 10,000 spectators, around 200 professors and supervisors, and
the 30 participants of the promotion battle."
Spectator seating wrapped around the Shadow Gate like a coliseum." The
interior of the building was no different than an arena." This was intentional, as
the interior was recently remodelled to resemble an arena for this special day."
Many kinds of people gathered in the audience." Aside from the expected
students and professors, there were many visitors from all over the world."
Ticket prices were expensive, but just the name of Hebrion Academy’s
promotion battle was enough to sell out the seats."
It was a highly entertaining spectacle after all." In the safety of the modified
Shadow World, boys and girls would kill and be killed in order to move up in
the ranks." Additionally, these were the top students of Hebrion Academy." They
would surely display skills worthy of the greatest school in the world."
Spectators were looking forward to a high-level battle." The promotion battle
was one of the biggest money makers for Hebrion Academy."
“Let’s go over our roles,” Desir turned to Romantica first, “Romantica, you’re
our sniper." Use detection magic from long range and take out enemies one by
one." ”

40
“."."." I’m not sure if sniping will work on Alpha Class students,” she answered
nervously."
“Don’t worry." That’s why we practiced, right?” Desir gave her clear instructions
and helped her calm down." “Take as long as you need when using detection
magic, but as soon as you locate an enemy, immediately cast your sniping
magic." Even if they’re Alpha Class, they’ll go down if they can’t react fast
enough." ”
“Okay, but I still have a problem." ” Romantica said." “This is my first time using
long-range sniping magic." I don’t know how much power to use." ”
Desir smiled, he had already expected her to get cold feet." “Remember the ball
you practiced with? It was about as tough as a person’s head." ”
Romantica’s eyes widened." She had spent countless hours getting accustomed
to the level of power required to destroy those balls with her ranged attacks."
“Ah, so that’s why."."." ”
Desir already had this in mind." He’d been set on her role from the beginning."

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**Chapter 18 - The Returner’s Promotion Battle (4)
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Desir walked past Romantica and headed towards Pram."
“What’s my role, Mr." Desir?” asked Pram, with an oddly expectant light in his
eyes."
Desir paused as he said, “Pram, the role I’d like you to take is."."." ‘damage dealer." ’
But to better fit our party composition, let’s call your role ‘half-damage’." ”
“Half-damage."."." ” Pram repeated, as if trying to engrave the words into his
memory."
“You’ll need to protect us." We’re mages, so we’re very vulnerable to melee
attacks." Your role as our sole melee attacker is very important." ”
“I’ll do my best!” Pram exclaimed, as he saluted playfully."
Desir couldn’t help but smile, seeing how insanely cute he was, and Pram
smiled back at him." [1]
Romantica piped up as she observed the exchange." “Desir, what will your role
be?”
“Hmm." My role is."."." ‘anti-mage." ’ Well, to put it simply."."." ” He paused, as he
pondered his choice of words, before finally speaking, “A playmaker, I guess?”

4

It was time." An announcement blared out."
| The Shadow Gate is opening." Students, please proceed into the Shadow Gate."
Desir took a step forward." The Shadow Gate bulged outward, enveloping him in
a blinding light." He closed his eyes reflexively."
When they opened again, the scenery had changed completely." Birds chirped
noisily around him, and a gentle, soothing fall scent drifted up from the fallen
leaves crumpled underfoot." The location was a forest, and the time was 11 AM."
Desir took a deep breath as another announcement sounded out."
[Objective: Locate the enemy’s base." ]

[Failure condition (an unknown input has been entered): Participants in
this world cannot die." Upon taking lethal damage, the failure condition
will be met, and you will be ejected from the Shadow World." ]
| You are a soldier." You have received information on the location of the hostile
forces’ base." As a soldier of the allied forces, you must find the hostile forces’

base." Pain limit is reduced to 20%."

He looked around, but couldn’t see either Pram or Romantica." As expected, the
30 participants had all started in different, randomized locations."
“Lucky for me." ”
Desir sensed the flow of magic power behind him simultaneous to the sneering
voice." He ducked, as an Ice Bolt flew over his head and stabbed deep into a tree
with a thunderous crack, chilling the air around him." He turned to see a girl,
around the same age as himself, smiling maliciously."
“Lucky I found you so quickly, that is." ”

5

Desir arched an eyebrow in response." “Was I that famous?”
“."."." Not in a good way." ” A pulse of magical energy radiated from her as formulas
appeared in front of her." In response, Desir began casting his own spell."
“I’m Desir Arman, party nameless,” he said, almost casually."
“Lapras." Blue Moon party." ”
Their spells shot forward simultaneously."
[The throne of ice sinks into a freezing cold." ]
[Ice Blast!]
Lapras’s spell was Ice Blast, a higher tiered version of Ice Bolt." It was a spell
produced by encasing an Ice Bolt in an orb of ice, before shattering the orb and
releasing the bolt again."
The orb shot towards Desir, leaving forsty air in its wake."
[The road of flame burns stronger than any other." ]
[Fire Road." ]
Fire Road." A 1st circle flame spell that shot a ray of condensed heat." Desir had
expertly predicted the trajectory of the Ice Blast, and released the Fire Road
directly into its path."
But Lapras wasn't done yet."
[Aqua Wave!]
A stream of water shot up, rising nearly 2 meters into the air before washing
over the Ice Blast." With a dull sputtering and a burst of steam, the Fire Road
disappeared as it struck the water." At the same time, what remained of the
water froze from the bitter cold of the Ice Blast, forming a pillar of gleaming ice
that held the orb in place."

6

Desir looked at Lapras, who smirked as she looked back."
With a horrible crinkling, the ice pillar shattered like a sheet of glass as the Ice
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7
Lapras’ eyes widened in shock as she watched each of those thousands of tiny
fragments fall out of her control, and gather in front of Desir, like iron dust
pulled by a magnet, until a single, perfect ball of ice floated in front of him."
“That’s."."."." !” she sputtered."
“Watch and learn." ” Calmly, Desir raised his right hand, letting the fist sized orb
hover inches above his palm." Without hesitation, he grabbed it and threw it at
Lapras."
The orb flew across the air before it split apart into an incredible number of Ice
Bolts flinging in every direction." It was the most powerful ice projectile spell in
existence: Ice Orb."
Before Lapras could react, dozens of Ice Bolts burst into existence and impaled
her all over her body."
“KUUAAAA-!” She shrieked in pain as her body was struck again and again -
And then, as the fifth Ice Bolt struck, the screaming stopped as she disappeared
and her body fell to a pile of ash."

| A contestant has been eliminated." 29 contestants remain."

Romantica felt her mana surge as she created the formula."
[The wind lies in my embrace, becomes the eyes and ears of the hawk as it
hunts its prey on the ground." ]
A detection spell formula formed in front of her." It was a 2nd circle spell, but,
depending on how much she wanted to boost the range, the mana consumption
could rise to that of a 3rd circle spell." Since the moment Romantica had entered
the Shadow World, she had been casting this detection spell without regard for
her mana."
[Detect." ]

8
A heavy wind radiated from Romantica’s position, and everything the wind felt
was transmitted to Romantica; trees, rocks, and, most importantly, living
creatures." She could sense five people within 1 kilometer so far."
The spell hadn’t even been completed, but Romantica didn’t hesitate in the
slightest as she instantly shot a Wind Bullet at the nearest target."
Chantless, ultra long-range sniping." There was almost no delay between the
detection and the shot." She hadn’t liked it at first, but the chantless magic Desir
had taught her to use was definitely bearing fruit."
The bullet tore through the air." She had little problem controlling the power;
after all, the ball she’d been training with this whole time had been around the
same strength as a human head, so all she had to do was match that same level
of power."
She heard the slightest thump, before an announcement sounded."
| A contestant has been eliminated." 26 contestants remain."

“Okay, that wasn't him,” she vocalized, before preparing to cast her detection
magic again."
“Is the search for Mr." Desir going well?” interrupted Pram, who stuck tightly to
Romantica." Fortunately for the two of them, Romantica and Pram had ended
up with fairly close starting locations." Romantica had found Pram the first time
she’d cast her detection magic, and now, there was only one member of their
party left to find."
“Not yet." But we’ll find him soon,” assured Romantica." Once again, the heavy
wind spread from Romantica, transmitting what it felt back." There were four
living creatures, in total, within range." She raised her hand and a bullet formed
in front of her." Once again, she fired and began counting down the seconds
until the inevitable." “3."."." 2."."." 1." ”

9
She waited for a moment, but the expected announcement never came." Instead,
she felt the bullet slip out of her control before dissipating into a light breeze
that blew back past her cheek." Romantica grinned as she spoke." “Found him." ”
“Found what?” called an unexpected voice from behind the pair." They whipped
around to see a two man group, comprised of a swordsman and a mage." “You’re
broadcasting your own location by flinging around detection magic like that,
you know,” said the mage, haughtily."
Romantica smirked at the mage’s mocking attitude." “Even if you know."."." ”
“I wonder why you’re so sure you can take us down,” finished Pram, as he drew
his rapier."
“Stop spouting bull."."." ” the swordsman started." He had just grabbed the handle
of his blade as he spoke, but before he could finish his word, Pram had already
closed the distance." In an instant, the rapier pierced through the swordsman’s
heart." “Huh."." ?”
Simultaneously, Romantica fired a bullet at the totally unprepared mage
standing behind him." It was perfect coordination." Both bodies vanished into a
pile of white dust."

| 2 contestants have been eliminated." 24 contestants remain."
“Now then, should we go find our stupid party leader?” Romantica asked
rhetorically as she stretched her shoulders."

Dark clouds rolled across the sky as an ominous rumbling rang out through the
air." The light breeze from before had quickly grown into a powerful gale, and
the temperature had begun plummeting rapidly." Rain was all but inevitable."

10
“I took out two people by myself,” Romantica preened as she looked at Desir
with a smug expression on her face, her arms folded across her chest."
Desir smiled and patted her head." “Looks like you haven’t been slacking off on
your practice." ”
Romantica looked up at Desir, annoyed." “Wa-wait! Don’t touch someone’s head
without getting permission!”
Desir hurriedly retracted his hand." He had pet her head without thinking
because of how cute she looked, [3] but wisely withdrew."
“Mr." Desir!” Out of nowhere, Pram slipped in between Romantica and Desir
like a ghost." “I took out someone too!” He quickly moved Desir’s hand on top of
his own head, and stood quietly, patiently waiting." [4]
Romantica looked at them as if she were annoyed, and turned away."
“Stupid Desir." ”

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**Chapter 19 - The Returner’s Promotion Battle (5)**

In any case, they managed to accomplish their first goal—get the party
together." Unfortunately, they had been fighting the entire time, and were
exhausted." After casting detection magic constantly, Romantica was looking
much worse for wear." Desir motioned towards a tree stump and spoke." “For
now, let’s rest." ” The party cleared out the fallen leaves and sat down."
After sitting down, each of them opened up the packets supplied by the
academy—inside were two energy bars and a bottle of water." Desir took out an
energy bar and started eating." He grimaced in response to the taste, but it was
no time to be picky."
His eyes wandered over to Romantica." She went through her energy bar slowly,
melting it in her mouth." The girl who always grumbled about hard food was
nowhere to be found." Pram also noticed this sudden change and stopped eating."
Romantica, noticing their stares, stopped eating in embarrassment." “What are
you looking at?” she asked."
“Are you alright, Miss Romantica?” questioned Pram."
“Mm? What are you talking about?”
Desir had a knowing smile on his face." “Looks like you’re completely used to it
now." There shouldn’t be any problems even if we leave you in the Beta Class
now." ”
“Don’t be ridiculous!” exclaimed Romantica." She threw her food packet at
Desir."
Desir deftly caught the packet, and buried the remainder of the party’s packets
to hide their tracks." After they finished eating, they enjoyed their momentary

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break before returning back to reality." Desir grabbed a stick and took this
opportunity to explain his plans:
“There are two ways for us to enter the Alpha Class." First, we are among the
last 9 survivors." Second, we clear the Shadow World’s quest and take 1st place." ”
As Desir explained their goals, the wind bit into their skin and the drizzle
coated the plains." Romantica, intently listening, offered her own rebuttal." “But
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A torrent of rain washed over the land." The sound of raindrops pattered against
the leaves and resounded across the entire forest." Their party was truly lucky—
they’d found a place to rest where they could avoid most of the rain."
Unfortunately, that was where their luck ended."
A clear bell rang out and the party all turned towards the northeast
simultaneously." The peals could be heard over the rain." “Romantica, what time
is it?” asked Desir."

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“1 o’clock,” responded Romantica."
It was starting." An announcement played in Desir’s ears."
| The time has come to test your knowledge." The Privius Clock Tower has been

activated—it creates a demon once every hour."

| The clock strikes 1, and the sin of cunning crawls out from the depths of hell."

The Killdra Mouse has been summoned."
| The quest has begun."

[Survival: Demons live in the forest." Survive and defeat the demons." ]
“Kiaaaaaaaak-!” A sharp cry rang out, followed by dozens of similar screams in
response." The first cry alone would make anybody’s heart palpitate and shoot
right out of their chest, but the chorus of monsters would make a person’s heart
stop."

“Everyone, get back." ” Desir ordered the team and hesitantly rose up." The leaf-
covered dirt shifted, thumping up from the ground." It looked like the spirits in

the dirt were dancing with the raindrops."
“Eugh, the smell!” Romantica complained as she pinched her nose." She’d
smelled this before—the smell of rotten meat and blood, pungent enough to
paralyze a person’s sense of smell." She tried to recall the smell." It was definitely
when they were cleaning the training ground."."." A shiver ran down her spine."
“By the first demon, they can’t mean."."." ”
“Squeak-!” A red blur burst out of the rumbling dirt."
Romantica held her shaking hands together and screamed." “Rats!”
It was a rat with jagged teeth, covered with red flesh." It looked as if a child had
molded it out of clay." The slow contractions of its stomach matched its

14
heartbeat." An exoskeleton covered its entire body, starting from the two horns
sprouting on its forehead." ‘Demon’ was the only word Romantica could muster
to describe the creature."
| Your prior knowledge has revealed the identity of this monster." Killdra Mouse."
2-star demon." This monster commands countless rats, consuming human flesh."

After determining a target, it never gives up on its prey."
“Squeaaaaak-!” The Killdra Mouse cried out, and its ear-splitting scream
reverberated across the forest." Tremors broke out yet again, the ground
bursting at the seams trying to contain the pressure." The bulging ground
exploded, and black creatures emerged from the dark crevasse."
Rats." Thousands of rats swarmed out from the hole, and they squirmed and
scurried like one massive organism."
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Romantica flung a spell at the mess of rats, but it had very little effect." For
every rat blown away by the spell, a dozen rats came to take their place." The
current situation was extremely bad for the three of them." The ground was
slippery, and the densely packed trees made getting away several times more
difficult." The group was losing their breath, and growing more exhausted with
each passing second." On the other hand, the rats continued barrelling down on
them, with no sign of stopping."
“We’re blocked off!” said Pram." An enormous tree appeared their path, fallen
on its side." Fragments of ice glittered on its stump." Desir immediately
recognized this tree."
‘The tree that fell during my fight with Lapras." Of all times, why now!’ Desir
estimated it to be 1 meter tall." Pram didn’t hesitate, vaulting over the tree and
landing lightly on the other side." The problem was Desir and Romantica, who
were mages." Desir let go of Romantica’s hand—it would only impede their
movement." They had to run as fast as possible to make it past."
“3."."." 2."."." ” Each second was precious." They sprinted to the foot of the tree and
Desir contracted his leg muscles with all of his strength."
“1."."." now!” Desir kicked off the ground, and flew in the air until he landed on the
other side." Looking to his side, Romantica landed face-first in a puddle." She’d
caught her leg on the tree as she jumped." The last hint of reason fell away as
Romantica felt an imminent sense of foreboding looming over her." With a
thunderous slam, the giant tree exploded into pieces, as the wave of rats rushed
forward." The party was barely three steps ahead of the rats."
“We’re going to get caught!” Romantica shrieked."
Desir had to quickly come up with a solution." “It’ll be over if we kill the Killdra
Mouse!”
“And where’s that!” shouted Romantica."

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“In the swarm of rats!” said Desir."
“You idiot! How are you going to kill a rat in THAT?” retorted Romantica."
The monster’s main body—it was definitely possible to find it in the swarm." It
had an unusual form, so they would be able to tell the Killdra Mouse apart from
the other rats." Unfortunately, because it was buried in the wave, it was
impossible to aim an attack at the main body alone."
‘But what if we can draw the Killdra Mouse out?’
The squirming rodents were nipping at their heels, and there was no time left
to run." There were even rats scrambling over the backs of the swarm to make
headway for fresh meat." Some of the rats climbed onto the party’s shoulders
and began gnawing into their skin."
They was no time." Desir breathed out deeply." ‘I have to draw the Killdra Mouse
out from the swarm." ’ He’d use it." The reason the monster was chasing them." Just
before the rat wave reached them, Desir bit down on his thumb, and blood
spurted out of his finger." Immediately, he thrust out his finger and a stream of
blood flew across the air."
A figure rocketed out of the wave, careening at the glistening red liquid—a red
rat, covered in a black exoskeleton."

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**Chapter 20 - The Returner’s Promotion Battle (6)**

The Killdra Mouse leaped into the air with its mouth wide open, trying not to
miss even a drop of Desir’s blood."
[Wind Bullet." ]
Romantica seized the opportunity." Wordlessly, she quickly formed a Wind
Bullet and shot it straight into the mouse’s belly." A large crack sounded—but
there was something off about the sound."
The exoskeleton covering the rat’s body had definitely broken, but the mouse
hadn’t died." Either the exoskeleton was stronger than she’d thought, or her
nerves had broken her concentration." Either way, the plan had failed." The
Killdra Mouse fell back down and retreated into the torrent of rats." It was
impossible to get to it now."
Suddenly, Pram sped past Romantica."
“Pram!?”
Faster than Romantica or Desir could react, Pram dove into the rolling mass of
rats, and thousands of rodents immediately began ravaging Pram’s skin." But it
wasn't enough to break Pram’s concentration."
The Killdra Mouse couldn’t pass up the smell of blood." It moved quickly
through the swarm." With his keen eyesight, Pram spotted the demon as it made
its way towards him." “Haap!” He stabbed at it, his sword splitting the wave of
rats like a beam."
“Squeeee."."." eeeeak." ” A silver light pierced through the dark mass of rodents."
The grotesque sound of skewered flesh echoed out." The Killdra Mouse, pierced
by Pram’s rapier, shivered and went limp." The rodent swarm, which had

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previously operated like a well-oiled machine, suddenly devolved into an
incoherent mess." “Squeak? Squeeeak?”
As if they’d just woken from a dream, the rats looked around for a moment,
dazed." But when their eyes landed on the gigantic humans next to them, they
scattered back into the forest like a retreating tide."
| Survival quest complete." You have defeated the Killdra Mouse." Survival

success."

“It’s over." ” Pram breathed out and collapsed on the spot."
Desir flicked away the remaining rats clambering on Pram’s shoulders." “Good
job, Pram." ”
“This much."."." is nothing." ”

Everything had returned to normal, as if nothing had even happened." The ear-
splitting sound of rats was nowhere to be heard." The rain, indifferent to the

fierce battle that had just taken place, poured relentlessly on their faces and
bodies."
“Cold." ” Romantica muttered, her entire body soaked to the bone." She looked
like a soggy rat."
Desir smiled, and pointed northwest." “It should be a bit better over there." ” The
thunder rumbled, and the clock tower, far to the northwest, cast a long shadow
on the ground."

19
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20
| The quest objective has been revealed." You already possess knowledge of this
place." The quest description has been altered to account for this."
| The Privius Clock Tower is a large-scale magic device containing the highest
level of dark magic." Each hour, it will summon a demon that can summon other
demons." The summoned demons will each have unique characteristics

depending on when they are summoned."
| The final quest has been revealed."
[Quest objective: Stop the clock tower." ]

| At the top of the clock tower lies the clock’s power source." Destroy the power

source, and the clock tower will stop."

The sharp ring of a sword slash rang out, and the frozen Killdra Mouse
shattered into pieces." Blood and meat danced together in a macabre waltz as its
corpse fell to the ground." Ajest, cold and indifferent, flicked the blood off her
sword."

| You have defeated the Killdra Mouse." Survival success."

The rats had been surrounding the Blue Moon party, pushing in from all sides."
But after the boss rodent perished, they stopped in their tracks, and soon
scattered; their cowardly natures restored themselves after being freed from
the control of the Killdra Mouse."
“We’re alive!” “We won!” Excited cheers rang out from the group."
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Overall, out of the 30 participants in this quest, over 10 had been eliminated—
more than a third." The Blue Moon party had put up a decent fight."."." but Ajest’s
mood had soured, though nobody noticed the change in her emotions because
of her indifferent expression."
Percival walked toward Ajest." “We have the lead now." Almost half of the 18
survivors are in our party." ” Mathematically, the remaining survivors could only
be small parties of three to five people." “Once we take care of the other parties,
we’re guaranteed to rank first." ”
The rain was still falling." The water soaked their bodies, washing away the
sweat." It was a refreshing feeling after their long fight against the rats." Ajest’s
silver hair blew in the wind." It was a weak north wind, blowing in with the rain."
One couldn’t even feel it without paying attention."
At that moment, Ajest’s eyes flashed open."
[Telbricsa’s shield of ice protect us." ]
Magic formulas formed in front of Ajest at an incredible speed." Within a matter
of seconds, a transparent pillar of ice emerged in front of Percival." As soon as it
reached full height, the ice pillar shattered and fell over."
“Wha, what was that just now?” Percival’s voice shook."
“Sniper." ” There was no trace of any emotion in her voice, but Ajest also felt
some shock." It was because there was barely any gap between the detection
magic—the wind—and the snipe." If she hadn’t noticed the detection magic,
Percival would have been eliminated right there."
‘There shouldn’t be any mages here capable of casting this quickly."."." ’ More
accurately, there was nobody with that level of skill among the freshmen,
herself excluded." Regardless of her expectations, the important thing was that a
high-level wind mage was targeting them." And no matter how skilled her Alpha
Class teammates were, a sniper of this level was incredibly dangerous." Ajest

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commanded the party members standing behind her." “Enemy." Tankers in front."
Wind mages, disrupt the air currents." ”
Her team moved into the defensive formation, following Ajest’s orders." The
tankers stood in front, shields out." The mages stood behind them, disrupting
the air and preparing to counterattack."
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From the third floor of the clock tower, Romantica looked out the window at
the forest below, eyes furrowed in frustration." Desir stood next to her." “It
doesn’t matter." I didn’t expect the snipe to work as long as Ajest was there." ”

23
“What? You told me to snipe them knowing it wouldn’t work?” Romantica
scowled and puffed up her cheeks."
“Yes." To tell them that we have a sniper on our side." They’ll have to spend every
moment looking out for a snipe as they move, and they’ll have to constantly use
detection magic to prepare for it." That alone should be a huge mental burden
for them." ”
Romantica released the air from her cheeks, but she still wasn't convinced."
“Since the snipe failed, they’ve found our location." ”
“And that is the core of the plan." ”
Romantica raised an eyebrow." “What?”
Desir spoke again." “Snipe every party, not just the Blue Moon party." Let them
know our location." ”
Romantica’s shrill voice berated him." “Did you hit your head?” Desir smiled in
response."
Their objective was to lower the number of survivors below ten, whatever it
took." Of course, since the Blue Moon party held the majority, it was impossible
to avoid an eventual conflict with them." There was no way his group could win
against the Blue Moon party in a direct confrontation." “But a melee’s a different
story." ”
“A melee?”
“We make every party fight at the same time, right here, in this clock tower." ”
That was the best option for their party, considering their small number." “Right
now, the Blue Moon party has an absolute advantage." But what would happen if
every party gathers here? There’s no way the other survivors will fight each
other when there’s such a powerful group sitting right there." They’ll team up
against the overwhelming enemy." ”

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Desir paused to breathe, then continued." “When that melee happens, we’ll
balance them out." We’ll take out any enemies if we have the chance." If we see
one side winning, we’ll tip the scales toward the other side." We’ll slowly reduce
the number of survivors down to nine." ”
“In other words, we make them work for us,” Pram concluded."
“How scummy of you, Desir." ”
Desir raised an eyebrow at Romantica’s insult, and spoke with a smirk." “What
matters is that we win, right?”
Pram folded his arms." “But if we use that strategy, it’ll be so unfair for the other
parties." After coming all the way here while defending themselves at the same
time, they’ll be stuck in a huge melee." It’ll truly be hell for them." ”
“Wouldn’t it be heaven for us?” A peculiar twinkle flashed in Desir’s eyes."
Romantica shivered." He was a master at tormenting others." A demon in human
form."
Desir clapped his hands." “Well, that’s just the way it is." Our job right now is
simple: keep sniping every party to tell them our location." Tell them their
enemies are right here, in this clock tower." ”
Romantica moved to the window." She spoke as she cast her detection magic
silently." “I don’t know if they’ll come even if I keep shooting them like this." ”
“What other choice do they have? This place is the quest objective." ”
After all, everyone had to come to Privius Clock Tower to clear the quest."
Desir’s party was simply reminding them of that fact, with bullets instead of
words."
“Now, let the mud fight begin." ” Desir clapped."

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The sound of a bullet was lost in the wind."

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**Chapter 21 - Showdown (1)
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| The final quest has been revealed.
[Quest objective: Stop the clock tower.]

| At the top of the clock tower lies the power source of the clock. Destroy the

power source, and the clock tower will stop.

The door creaked behind them as the Blue Moon party entered the clock tower.
To their surprise, what greeted them was no sound of ticking gears, or
multitude of traps set for intruders.
Instead, six survivors stood in a loose semi-circle, chattering furiously amongst
themselves. But as they saw Ajest cross into the tower, the tense conversation
rapidly ceased. A silence fell over the tower as all eyes were turned towards
her.
Ajest looked around carefully. “2 eliminated,” she said softly, to nobody in
particular. There were 16 remaining survivors; of them 13 were standing here.
However, it was also clear that the wind mage wasn’t among the 13. Ajest was
now certain that the sniper belonged to Desir’s party.
A soft breeze blew through the room, momentarily interrupting the mounting
tension. Before the Blue Moon party had entered, the other two, more medium
sized parties, had been sizing each other up. They had similar strength and
similar numbers; consequently, it would hardly have been strange if a fight
broke out right then and there.
However, the appearance of the Blue Moon party considerably changed the
situation. The Blue Moon party had the most survivors; the other parties’

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leaders weren’t idiots, and it was bluntly obvious that, as smaller parties,
infighting amongst themselves would only be detrimental.
The two parties exchanged nervous glances. Then, without a word, they moved
in unison to block the Blue Moon party’s path.
“All members, form ranks.” Ajest’s dispassionate voice rang out, and the party
moved in unison. 3 tankers moved to the front immediately; behind them stood
2 knights with their swords drawn and ready. A lone mage stood at the back,
and magic formulas quickly filled the air in front of them. Their matching
uniforms and neat, crisp movements gave them a near-overwhelming presence.
But the other survivors had, after all, also made it all the way to the end, and
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he had instead elected to gather every other party. ‘Does he think he can snipe us
all down? But that doesn’t make sense. He wouldn’t give up his enormous lead on the
quest progression for such a reckless plan.’
Ajest blinked slowly as comprehension dawned on her. “Clearing the quest
wasn’t his objective,” she thought aloud.
Ijente frowned. “What are you talking about?”
Without a word in response, Ajest took a step forward. Her eyes were already
behind him.
He blinked. She disappeared. A cloud of dust exploded from where she had
stood. In an instant, Ajest’s sword was past him.
There was no warning. Ijente turned to look down at his body. As he did, he
faded into tiny motes of light.

| A contestant has been eliminated. 15 contestants remain.

“Aahhh! The party leader died!”
“Everyone, charge!” The screams ran out from panicked students.
Ajest calmly surveyed her charging opponents, and flicked her sword in her
hand. ‘5 people...and spectators.’ She looked up. She couldn’t see deep into the
dark tower, but it didn’t matter. She knew they had to be there. “All members,
stop Desir’s party’s sniper,” she ordered as she pointed at the stairs.
“All members!? What about these guys right here?” Percival replied,
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“All—all five!? By yourself?” he spit out in disbelief.
Ajest never answered him. She had already entered the fight.

A low, whining creak came from the rusted hinges of the door as it swung open.
A silhouette illuminated against the open doorway. As the figure silently drew
closer, it came into view. It was a girl, wearing a strange leather coat embedded
with metal plating. Blood ran down the side of body, leaving a trail of droplets
as she walked. She held a blade in her hand. Blue light glowed along its edge.
Her long, platinum hair was unmarked by blood, striking a sharp contrast as it
flowed behind her.
She examined the three of them as she approached, like a lion stalking its
quarry. Instinctively, his party members shifted back behind him.
“A pointless scheme.” Her voice was ice cold.
Desir’s face froze at the criticism. “It would have worked if not for you.”
He meant it, truly. After all, his opponent was Ajest Kingscrown. She was the
strongest spellsword in all of Hebrion, and one of the six who had survived to
the very end. When they’d all united under the Expedition’s banner, she had
been the commander, so gifted was she in battle.
Desir had expected her to figure out his plans, to some extent, anyways—it
wasn’t as if his plans had been suddenly, unexpectedly seen through. Rather, he
had made quite the serious miscalculation. “To think that you would take out
every remaining survivor by yourself,” he said softly, in admiring tones.
The fight that Desir had wanted had happened. But Ajest had given him no
room to interfere. The entirety of the Blue Moon party, minus Ajest, had
masterfully obstructed Desir’s party while Ajest single-handedly humiliated the

30
other survivors. They could do nothing but watch as she subdued them, took
them hostage, and dragged them to a safe area.
“While we kept your party from doing anything, our party captured the
remaining survivors. There’s still over 10 alive,” Ajest stated coldly. Clearly,
there would be no way to even touch the 10 downstairs without going through
Ajest first. Their plan had been utterly ruined. They had one choice left.
“The only thing left is a head-to-head fight.”
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With a hiss, the pillars disappeared into a thick vapor, as Ajest immediately
ended the spell in response. The dense fog filled the corridor, blocking
everyone’s view.
“They’re coming!” Pram shouted as he stepped forward and swung his rapier.
He felt it land. At the same time, he twisted his head to the right. A sword sliced
neatly through the space where his head had just been. The fog scattered in the
wind, revealing Doneta. Without missing a step, Pram saw Doneta’s improper
stance and thrust the rapier at his stomach.
“Oof!” [1] Doneta grunted in pain as he twisted back. Romantica immediately
followed up, sending her spell screaming towards him.
[Wind Strike!]
The bullet of compressed air exploded, but there was no announcement.
Instead, a gigantic shield appeared out of the dispersing fog. Percival’s sneering
face appeared behind the lowered shield. “Weak as shit for a 2nd circle spell,”
he spit at Romantica contemptuously.
“I’m exhausted after sniping so much, you moron!” Romantica shouted back in
a fit.
The fog returned, filling the space between them again and erasing them from
each others’ vision. Doneta whispered to Percival, “that swordsman...looks
strong. Be careful.”
Percival scoffed. “You’re just weak, you idiot.” He’d faced Pram once before.
According to his memory, Pram wasn’t a particularly skilled swordsman. His
sword was a bit fast for Beta Class, but that was it. Pram was hopeless; he’d
exhaust himself soon after the fight began.
He charged. “Eat this!” He swung his sword at Pram, but, surprisingly, sliced
only thin air. “What?” Percival stopped, bewildered, as he realized he couldn’t
see anything in the fog. He looked back, just in case, and was nearly hit as he

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barely managed to parry Pram’s surprise attack. He ground his teeth. “You
cheap bastard.”
“You did it first.”
The echo of steel on steel rang out through the tower.
Born and raised in the north, Percival’s sword style was wild and savage. He
preferred to use his strength to simply beat into his opponent, without giving
them a moment’s rest and wear them down over time. The Pawn-rank
swordsman’s talent was just starting to bloom and his sword was already fierce.
He attacked at an oppressive speed. At the same time, he protected himself
with his shield as he advanced, like a towering mountain.
Pram was a speed-focused swordsman, much like Percival. Unfortunately, he
had neither the strength nor the force Percival did, which meant, in theory,
that he would be hard pressed to gain an advantage in this fight.
Indeed, to everyone else, it appeared like Pram was getting pushed back. But, to
Percival’s growing discomfort, it soon became clear it was quite the opposite.
Each of Pram’s movements were calculated. At every moment, he would dodge
or parry Percival’s blade with the smallest movement possible, keeping his
positioning tight and constantly looking for openings.
He kept his distance, and warded his opponent off with only the tip of his
sword as he danced gracefully around the room. At this rate, the longer the
fight drew out, the more Pram would be at an advantage.
Pram was well aware of his limits. He avoided letting the duel turn into a
contest of strength, and attacked Percival’s openings whenever he could.
Slowly, almost imperceptibly, Percival felt his sword getting pushed back. It
was clear that he would lose if this kept up.
Backed against a wall, Percival made a desperate gamble. He threw his shield at
Pram.

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**Chapter 22: Showdown (2)
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At that range, even Pram couldn’t avoid it." He collapsed as the shield slammed
into his body."
He shook his head in an attempt to reorient himself, and searched around
frantically for Percival’s location."
It was too late." Percival covered the distance rapidly." Pram’s entire body
reverberated as the two swords met." The duel had turned suddenly against
Pram; it was no longer a contest of skill, but now of strength, one where
Percival dictated the flow."
Pram’s hands trembled as he held off Percival’s blade." Sensing the opportunity,
Percival pushed forward, forcing strength into his blade." Pram felt his arms
giving way."
But Pram still had a few tricks up his sleeve." Suddenly, he shifted the angle of
his rapier, subtly manipulating the point of contact to let Percival’s sword glide
down the blade." Percival’s strength worked against him as he suddenly found
the resistance lighten." He stumbled as momentum carried his body forward."
It was too much of an opportunity to present someone of Pram’s skill." Like a
lightning bolt, his rapier thrust forward into Percival’s shoulder, and the
Blanchume tore through the steel chestplate like a hot knife through butter,
splattering blood through the air."

34
Staggered by the pain, Percival instinctively rolled back several times, [1]
rapidly making distance between himself and Pram, before barely standing
back on his feet."
‘I was injured?’ He blinked repeatedly as he stared at his shoulder in shock and
confusion." The attack was hardly enough to incapacitate him; it was
impressive, but some shoulder pain was the extent of its damage." No, it wasn’t
merely the attack that had him reeling." Mere weeks ago, he had been clearly
superior to Pram in skill." But just from that one exchange, one thing was
obvious: Pram totally outclassed Percival." “Y-you! The hell happened to you?”
he shouted at Pram, incredulously."
“To what might you be referring?”
“How did you change so much in just a few weeks?”
“Is there a reason I should tell you such a thing?” replied Pram, with a
mischievous smile across his face."
Percival scowled at Pram’s non-answer, and he cursed under his breath." It was
clear that he could no longer take Pram so lightly." Rushing in would almost
certainly result in his defeat." Unable to hide his intense frustration, he shouted,
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Doneta drew his sword and held it out in front of him." It was meaningless." The
whole area around him was covered in a thick fog that made it impossible for
him to find Romantica." “Are fogs normally this thick?” he asked aloud, before
shaking his head." ‘Of course not." ’ No, according to Doneta’s memory, the fog
should simply have lifted after the first strike, but, instead, it had seemed to
only be getting thicker and thicker over time." “Hmph." You’re quite clever
utilizing the fog like this,” he said, seemingly to nobody."

35
It was clear what was happening." The fog was being held in place—indeed,
more than that, magically enhanced, entirely intentionally." Unfortunately, even
if that was the case, there was little Doneta could do about it, which meant."."."
He staggered as yet another wind bullet slammed into him, but endured the
throbbing pain on his hand and kept a firm grasp on his sword."
It was a truly bizarre situation." He had no idea where Romantica was hiding—
in contrast, she clearly knew exactly where he was all the time, and was
wasting no time using the information disparity to rain magic upon him with
impunity." To top it all off, whenever he chased down where the attack came
from, it was clear that Romantica had already disappeared to another spot to
continue her merciless barrage."
‘Is she detecting my movement through the wind?."."." Damn mages." ’ Doneta felt that it
was almost certain that a mage would be able to, which would explain his
current predicament." It was quite the exhausting situation, having to simply sit
and take the enemy’s attacks."
“Well, it seems like they’re using their heads, but that won’t be enough." ”
Doneta stood up straight, and tapped the golden necklace he was wearing with
a slight smirk." In an instant, the fog cleared."
"That necklace."."." it was an artifact?" Romantica asked in shock."
Artifacts." Items imbued with magic power." Compared to a regular item, it
would be many times more expensive."
"I told you that you'd regret it didn't I?" Doneta asked smugly." He raised his
hand and aimed the ring on his thumb towards Romantica." She quickly realized
that the necklace wasn’t the only artifact he possessed."
[Fire Ring." ]
2nd circle fire magic."

36
A ring of fire formed beneath Romantica’s feet for a moment, before a wave of
heat shot upwards, pinning her within the circle." She was trapped."
Doneta raised his blade and held it inches from her face." She simply shrugged
her shoulders in response." “Well, I guess I do regret it a little,” she said calmly."
“It’s too late to regret it now,” replied Doneta harshly."
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[Breath of Earth!]
A 2nd circle earth spell, which could both bind and attack the enemy."
The floor broke apart and shot up in Romantica’s direction." Desir quickly
interjected his body between them." The rocks fell upon him, entombing him
within." Doneta approached the pile and swung his sword into it."
He winced, unexpectedly, as he felt his hands go numb for a moment." “What?”
he asked in total confusion." Somehow, he wasn’t able to cut through." The
simple earth that surrounded Desir had become as hard as steel."
“Don’t use magic against him!” The voice came from behind the bewildered
Doneta." A silhouette flew past him in a blur."
In an instant, Ajest swooped down upon Desir." For a moment, it almost
appeared as if she had disappeared into the rock." But then the rocks parted, and
Ajest flew past."
She turned back, just as Desir rose from the rock and rubble." As their eyes met,
Desir opened his mouth."
[Stone Break." ]
The earth exploded outward." The explosion rocked the tower and sent Ajest
flying with its shockwave." From where Desir stood, fragments of dirt flew
towards Ajest like shrapnel."
She dodged the shots and executed a perfect backflip to land gracefully." Then
she nearly jumped in shock as the earth beneath her fingers melted and
encased her wrist." She felt near bone-crushing pressure on her wrist."
[Winter Fist." ]
Ice spread rapidly from her hand to the surrounding earth." She smashed the
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38
She bit her lip in frustration." At the same time, she began deploying her magic."
Desir did the same."
A massive spear of ice formed in front of Ajest, looming ominously with its tip
pointed at Desir’s throat." Then, in an instant, it melted into a puddle." Sparks of
fire raced across the ground, licking at the combatants’ feet, and were
extinguished as the stone floor turned in on itself." Water rushed forward,
threatening to drown everyone in the tower, before suddenly turning into
nothing but a fine vapour." Back and forth, magic exploded into existence and
dissipated into nothingness."
Ajest was being pushed back." She felt a slight twinge of surprise—not at the
result, but at how readily she seemed to accept it."
It made sense to her now." It was never a matter of power; Ajest’s mana far
exceeded Desir’s own." She possessed skills seen only once every hundred years;
she held a power none could keep up with." If they both cast the same Fireball,
Ajest’s would have had twice the power." If it was an ice attribute spell, it
would’ve been three times the power."
But in magic combat, the winner was not merely the one who possessed greater
mana and wielded stronger magic." Tactical awareness, understanding battle
conditions, speed, suitability—indeed, at the simplest level, magic combat was
perhaps best understood as a high level psychological fight." Being able to read
the opponent’s intentions, develop a countermeasure, and quickly execute it—
all these were more important than simple magic power output."
And, as much as Ajest hated it, as much as she wanted to beat Desir straight up
in a magic duel, she had no option now but to admit the sorry truth: in this
psychological fight, Ajest was completely outmatched." There was absolutely no
way she could beat Desir in a magic duel."
Her magic had been repeatedly totally countered by far weaker magic." Her
simpler spells were constantly hijacked, and her more complex spells were

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were rendered irrelevant." Desir was reading her like a book, and effortlessly
dragging her into his pace."
That overwhelming difference in experience became his spear and shield itself."
It loomed over Ajest like an insurmountable wall."
‘It doesn’t make any sense." ’ Ajest’s mind swirled in confusion." No matter how she
broke it down, there was no way Desir wasn’t of similar age to herself." The gap
in experience was incomprehensible." ‘Just who is he? What is his identity?’
She paused and stepped back to gather her wits and refocus."
Doneta, who had been watching the duel unfold from the sidelines, suddenly
interjected, “Party leader! Let me help you!”
Ajest shook her head in response." “No." This is my fight, do not interfere." ”
“But."."." !”
“Just go and help Percival." ”
“Percival? That fight should’ve ended."."." ” Doneta’s voice trailed off as he
realized, shockingly, that it somehow hadn’t." Contrary to expectation, the duel
between Percival and Pram was still dragging out." Indeed, Doneta realized in
horrified shock, Percival was somehow losing." Pram’s sword was repeatedly
violating Percival’s being." [3]
“Romantica’s mana is nearly drained." For all intents and purposes, she’s out of
power." Join Percival and eliminate both of them, quickly,” Ajest commanded in
an icy tone that left no room for argument."
Without hesitation, Doneta immediately headed towards Percival and joined
the fray." Pram, who had been closing in on victory, saw the opportunity slip
away before him with the relatively healthy Doneta joining the melee." It was
now Pram and Romantica dueling Percival and Doneta in pairs."

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“Upset?” asked Desir."
Ajest paused before she answered." “To speak the truth."."." yes." ” She nodded, and
continued, “To be honest, it’s not a very pleasant feeling to lose to someone
without even a thousandth of my magic power." Would it make sense to you if
you lost to an ant in arm wrestling?” [4]
“Well, I think I can grasp your feelings." ”
“I’ve decided I cannot defeat you in a contest of magic." There’s nothing else I
can do now." ” As she spoke, she shook the red glow off her right arm, letting her
mana subside." Her grip fell upon the sword at her waist."
A shrill whistling cut through the air as Ajest lunged towards Desir with the
point of her sword aimed at his chest."
“Seems like you really want to win against me." ” Magic formulas filled the air in
front of Desir as he readied himself."
[Balance." ]
[Strength." ]
[Vision." ]
[Magic Bestowment: Hardening." ]
4 spells cast in an instant." Desir followed up by drawing the short sword at his
waist."
The echo of steel on steel reverberated through the air as Desir parried Ajest’s
blow." The ground beneath Desir cracked and shook from the force, as if an
earthquake had struck the tower."
Ajest’s eyes widened in shock." “You blocked."."." ?”

41
“Why? Did you think that just because I’m a mage, I would be weak in close
quarters combat?” replied Desir calmly."
Her lips twisted in distaste, and she shoved Desir back forcefully." A loud thump
accompanied a cloud of dust where he hit the far wall."
He rose, slowly, and dusted himself off, seemingly uninjured."

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**Chapter 23 - Showdown (3)**

Ajest’s eyes narrowed and she bit her lip." “So you’re prepared for close combat
as well." ”
“Sure, but with my magic power, 5 minutes is my limit,” Desir admitted with a
smile."
Ajest wasn’t naive enough to trust somebody revealing their weakness, but she
didn’t doubt his honesty." Desir’s mana was being expended at a visible rate."
Hearing those words, Ajest approached without pause."
Outside of expectations, Desir faced the prodigy’s sword head-on." Ajest had the
lead in the head-to-head melee, but Desir was holding on." He read the
trajectories of her swings, and led his sword in advance to parry." Even with his
body strengthened with magic, he straddled the line between life and death,
each blow heavier than the next."
“Aren’t you."."." having fun, Ajest?” said Desir, as he received the third strike."
A look of confusion appeared on Ajest’s face as they dueled." “Fun?”
“Of course." You’ve always reigned from the top." You’ve probably never met
anyone who could be your equal." ” Desir parried another blow and pushed Ajest
back." “With all of your being, you hate losing." Isn’t that right, Ajest
Kingscrown?”
Desir knew this woman very well." The future commander Ajest Kingscrown
hated losing." Beneath her icy surface, she honed her talents and refused to let
anybody surpass her." The entire time, she led a lonely life on her throne,
without a single person able to match her in combat." ‘This time, things will be
different." ’

43
Desir pointed at himself." “You want to defeat me, right? To use everything at
your disposal and beat me down." That’s why you came to me to declare war and
led me into this duel—so I wouldn’t be able to avoid this fight." Ultimately, that’s
what you’re aiming for." Now that you’ve accomplished that, you’re having fun."
Am I right?”
Ajest was speechless—she was seen through completely, even though she
wasn’t wholly aware of it herself." She gathered her thoughts and replied." “I
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44
“In this space, a mage is able to use an unlimited number of spells without
calculation." My ice magic has no limits in this space,” said Ajest." Hundreds of
magic circles formed in the air, clustered so tightly that Desir could barely see
through them." All of them were directly right at him."
‘An area with access to magic without limits."."." ’ The Frozen Palace formed with a
single throne of ice at its core." This was her palace, and the throne from which
she ruled." ‘The signature spell of Queen Ajest." ’ Frozen Throne was one of her
signature spells even in the future—she was using everything she had against
Desir in this fight." ‘But she still hasn’t caught on." ’
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In the meantime, Ajest was preparing her third round of spells." Her magic
didn’t have any effect on Desir, but she didn’t falter." She had known from the
start that it was impossible to fight Desir using magic." All of her spells would be

45
hijacked." No matter how carefully crafted they were, it wouldn’t take much
more than a wave of his hand for them to dissipate." He was on a different level."
Even in her Frozen Throne, she was unable to land a single hit on Desir." Her
abundant stores of mana, which were near full at the beginning of the battle,
had dropped to below 10 percent." Anybody else would think that it was a waste
to cast any more spells." Ajest felt differently."
She was stalling for time." Each spell projected and flying through the air
created time for Ajest to think." As she constructed her spells, she analyzed her
probability of winning, combing through each minute detail." Her thoughts kept
coming back to one thing: ‘Why am I losing in magic?’
The problem was the formulas." Desir had seen through every single one,
leaving her no way to land a hit." If they were casting the same spells, there was
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46
Magic Sword." Intertwining swordsmanship and magic, this was Ajest’s answer
to her opponent."
Her sword became enveloped in a blue light."
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Magic pulsed in ripples from the sword." The magic resonated with the
chambers of the Frozen Palace." Desir heard this sound many times before." ‘It
can’t be."."." she managed to manifest Magic Sword all by herself!?’ Desir’s eyes
widened at the discovery."
Magic Sword was the ultimate magic for a spellsword." The meshing and perfect
balance of magic and swordsmanship." Ajest had thought of it and made it a
reality." Her desire to defeat the man in front of her, spurred on by her talent,
allowed her to understand this new magic." In his past life, it had taken her
another 10 years to grasp the concept." ‘Truly incredible." ’
Desir was in awe." During his moment of contemplation, Ajest Kingscrown
dashed forward." The frigid palace crumbled as Ajest poured the rest of her
magic into Magic Sword." She would bet everything on this final move."
[Magic Sword: Ice Wave." ]
The gleaming silver sword drew closer, and a storm of freezing air whipped
across the room." Each movement of the sword froze the air." The current Desir
had no way of blocking her attack with his magic." He could tell just by looking
at it." A Magic Sword, formed with raw magic power, could not be hijacked."
Even if he strengthened his body to the limit to block the sword itself, the
magic stored within would wreak havoc on his body."
Ajest’s eyes asked the same question: ‘Can you counter this?’

47
Desir raised his hands without a reply." The shortsword he was holding spun
away as it dropped to the floor." The chandelier on the ceiling began falling as
well." Time slowed for the two as they reached the penultimate stages of their
duel." Ajest’s sword moved extremely slowly, and finally reached Desir’s neck."

A drop of blood fell from his neck, like a single drop of wine tainting a pure
white lace." The blood trickled as it fell, freezing black."
As it happened, Ajest could see Desir’s expression." His face showed none of the
emotions she expected." No sorrow of defeat." No fear of overwhelming strength."
No disappointment of loss." It was a smile of victory." The sword slowed further,
and as if time stopped, the sword froze in place."

Everything faded away."
| Shadow World clear! The demon summoning formation at the top of the clock
tower has been hijacked, taking irreparable damage." Quest complete."
| The ranks from 1st place to 30th place have been decided based on contribution

to the quest and number of eliminations."
[1st Place: Desir Arman]
[2nd Place: Ajest Kingscrown]
[3rd Place: Pram Schneizer]

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**Translator: Notalk and Billy Stevens
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It was May, and the sun-kissed showers of Spring were fading." It was almost time for the songs of love."

Small flowers kissed the entrance of Hebrion Academy, branching out from trees that contained limitless vitality inside." This was an annual tradition of Hebrion Academy." Romantica’s eyes sparkled at the sight of the breathtaking greenery lining their school." She had a spring in her step as she danced through the corridor." “Buckthorn trees." ”

“The flowers of the buckthorn tree symbolize progress,” added Pram." It was unusual of him to comment."

This was a historical tradition originating from the school’s founding principal, Eiricquel Hebrion." It was a prayer for the growth of Hebrion Academy and its students." Today, the students rarely cared about the founding principal’s wishes—they were just here to enjoy the scenery." As the pair strolled under the trees, they lost track of time, awed by the gorgeous landscape around them." Eventually, the sound of falling raindrops rang across the leaves." “It looks like it’s about to rain,” said Pram."

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Rain began to pour down from the overcast sky." It rained all across Hebrion Academy and the skies became murky." Romantica paused and pursed her lips." “I don’t want to get my clothes wet,” complained Romantica as the rain rode down the hem of her string-spun clothes." The rain flowed between the grooves in the strings like a river." The downpour quickly drenched the uniforms of Romantica and Pram." Despite that, they didn’t mind one bit."

“It rained like this back in the Shadow World, right?” reminisced Romantica."

“It was colder and more unpleasant back then." ”

The two of them knowingly smiled at each other and covered up with their jackets." “The rain hasn’t changed—it’s just that our situation’s different." ” Romantica took the lead as the two of them travelled to Starling dormitory, home of their fearless leader."

As they walked into the lobby, Romantica took the initiative to dry herself with magic." The Starling dormitory lobby was almost empty, likely due to the rain." Desir Arman sat in the center of the lobby, waiting for them to arrive." He wasn’t alone."

Sitting across from him was a beautiful girl with platinum blonde hair." Strands of gold woven with silver—the color of the southern lions." The mere sight of it made her peers sing praises of her name." The silver-haired spellsword, Ajest Zedga F." Kingscrown." There were in middle of a heated conversation."

“It was already past 2 o’clock by then." It was past the time for the 2 o’clock demon to appear." The gears of the clock tower should have stopped by then,” explained Desir." “My hijacking only works on spells cast through a formula." The demon summoning device in Privius Clock Tower appears to have been built on an advanced magic formula." It was only because of this that it was possible to hijack it." ”

“I see." I do recall the sound of the gears stopping at some point." I hadn’t realized that." ” The hint was there—she merely didn’t put it to good use." She was deep in thought as she collected her thoughts."

“Drawing me into close combat wasn’t a bad choice, but you should always keep the battlefield in mind." We were in a Shadow World—not taking the objectives into account was your downfall." ”

Ajest’s shoulders slumped as she took it all in." She had been goaded into her every move." “So you always had your eyes set on the big picture, instead of only focusing on our fight,” said Ajest bluntly."

“Well, maybe you’re right." ”

Ajest grew quiet, and reflected over the course of events that took place in the Shadow World." She closed her eyes, and organized her thoughts and said three simple words to Desir." “I lost." Decisively." ”

Desir waved his hand and dismissed Ajest’s thoughts." “You’re going too far." I can brag, but there was luck involved." If my analysis was a bit slower, or your blade a bit faster…”

“Then we would have avenged Mr." Desir,” said Pram." The pair interrupted the conversation and separated the two of them." “By that point, we’d essentially won our part of the battle,” added Romantica."

Desir grinned at the arrival of his party members." “You guys came." ”

The group of four crowded around a table and sat down." Romantica looked moody as she glanced at Ajest and spoke directly to Desir." “Weren’t we the only ones meeting you here?”

“Ajest’s only here for a moment." She had a few questions about our fight." ”

“Even so, she’s an enemy—right? We almost lost because of her." Don’t you think you’re be a little too calm?” Romantica’s eyes darted from Desir to Ajest."

“If that was all it took for you to lose, then you weren’t even worthy of entering Alpha class,” said Ajest."

Romantica’s eyed flared." “What?!” The regal Ajest gave Romantica a casual glance and said no more." Catching a whiff of the arising conflict, Desir hurriedly added some choice words to the conversation." “Ajest is just trying to say that we deserved it, seeing as how we passed the exam and have been promoted to the Alpha class." ” He scratched his head and gave Romantica a slight smile."

“What—that’s what that meant?” Romantica crossed her arms, putting on airs." “Well… I supposed if you’re going so far to say something like that, then so be it." ”

“Honestly, we wouldn’t have been able to win without Romantica’s sniping." Thanks, Romantica." ”

“W-wha? Thanks? Mm… well, you didn’t need to thank me or anything…” Romantica turned beet red and started twiddling her fingers in embarrassment at Desir’s thanks."

“And me? Mr." Desir, what about me?” Pram’s eyes gleamed in anticipation." “You did well too, Pram." ” Desir patted Pram’s head as the latter hugged Desir’s waist." Pram clung to Desir like a puppy and pushed his head into Desir’s palm."

Ajest watched the scene unfold from behind them." “This means we’re taking a break from training now…right?” Romantica looked apprehensive as she looked over to see Desir’s response."

“On whose authority? Training happens every day,” said Desir with a stern appearance."

“W-what? No! We barely got out of the promotion battle yesterday! This is too much!”

“Did you forget exactly what won us the promotion battle yesterday?”

“Even so… tch!”

The conversation turned into a noisy ruckus as Romantica and Desir bantered back and forth." Seeing the break in conversation, Ajest stood up from the table and announced her leave." Pram tried to cover up his laughter at the scene of his fellow party members, before seeing Ajest." “Hm? You’re leaving already?”

Ajest took a good look at the rest of the group, before wordlessly holding up her Identity Pass." Blue Moon Party’s insignia displayed on the display." A party summons." They couldn’t make her stay any longer." As she started walking to the door, she paused before turning around and looked at Desir." She seemed hesitant, a far cry from the ice queen they normally associated with her." “Desir, I have a… a request." ” Her eyes looked intently at Desir, as if searching for the answer without need to ask her question." “I know this is shameless, but may I join your training sessions?”

Romantica and Pram stood stunned at the request." Desir nodded cheerfully at Ajest." “Every morning at 6 o’clock sharp, and after class." We meet at the Training Sector’s entrance." ” The door creaked open and the sound of rain poured into the lobby." Ajest opened her mouth slightly, then closed it again." A whisper of a smile showed up on her face as she turned back around, and stepped out of Starling dormitory." The door closed, and the sound of rain died down."

Thank you."

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“So what are we going to do now, Mr." Desir?” Pram asked." “Now that we’ve been promoted to Alpha Class, are we done with the pa—“

“Of course not." ” Desir was resolute." “The discrimination against the Beta Class still exists." We’re going to create a path for all of the talent in Beta Class." ”

“What a wonderful plan!”

“What a pain in the neck…”

The responses from his fellow party members were very different." Desir teased “Then, Miss Romantica, are you leaving the party?”

“Wh-wha? Who’s leaving? I’m just saying it’s a hassle! Obviously I’m going to help!”

“If it’s ever too much, you can always quit." Hehe,” said Pram."

Desir sat back down and leaned into his chair, watching the two of them argue."

‘I shouldn’t forget my real objective." ’

He needed to handle the looming threat of the Shadow Labyrinth." Entering the Alpha Class was the first step." After gathering more party members and helping them grow, they would methodically clear away the Shadow Worlds, reducing casualties as much as possible." When the true threat known as the Shadow Labyrinth appeared, the party he trained would become the key to clearing it." As Desir became embroiled in his thoughts, he heard a familiar voice chime in."

“I see you’re all here." ”

Professor Brigitte stepped into the lobby and sat down in front of the three students." She surveyed the members with a mild expression."

“I have some very important news for everyone here." ” Brigitte raised her finger, and waves of mana exuded from her body." A chocolate cake appeared from thin air and landed on the table." It was a huge cake—large enough to cover the whole table." The decorations adorning the cake were exquisite." Romantica did her best not to drool all over the table." She recognized the cake immediately."

“Beswald Bakery’s specialty cake!?”

Beswald Bakery is a famous bakery whose prices made your eyes pop out of their sockets." Only then did Desir and Pram catch on." “Isn’t this a bit much?” asked Desir."

The professor laughed joyfully at Desir’s question." “Not at all." Seeing that pig-headed noble so humiliated is well worth it." ”

“Pig-headed?” Desir inquired about exactly who Brigitte was referring to, when she pulled him into a tight hug." Her arms were trembling and her cheeks flush with excitement." Desir was shocked by the current state of events and he tried to reel back in confusion." “Professor?!”

“Wh-what are you doing!” Romantica blurted out."

In quick succession, Pram also whined." “Wait your turn!”

Despite the protest of Pram and Romantica, Brigitte hugged Desir even more tightly." “Well done." You’ve done it." ”

“You mean…”

She held up three Alpha Class badges, and the three youths were ecstatic." They jumped in the air and were wild with joy."
“Congratulations." You have been formalized as Single Rankers of the 217th class." ”

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**Translator: NaturalRice
Rewriter: Aster0x**

“Humanity is currently at war with the Shadow World,” the guest lecturer explained."

Desir nodded along as the memories of his past life raced through his mind." Shadow World." A calamity that occurred every year." The greatest threat humanity had ever come in direct contact with."

The lecturer continued, “it is the characteristic of the Shadow World to continuously encroach on the real world." Encroached land will become surrounded by a dark fog." To date, no human has survived stepping foot into those lands."

“A devoured land becomes unable to sustain human civilization." The Tower of Magic has come to refer to this phenomenon as ‘Shadowfication." ’ We fight against the Shadow World to stop this process."

“We have been fighting the Shadow World for a long time, but the majority of our efforts have been marred with failure." Humanity has experienced defeat again and again, and much of our land has become Shadowfied." Less than half our continent’s original mass remains in our control." ”

Desir grimaced as he remembered the future yet to come." ‘Humanity will continue to experience defeat." ’ He looked around, noticing that students around the lecture hall were beginning to fall asleep." He chuckled silently." It meant, after all…

The lecturer continued, unaware or unfazed." “Of course, this story must seem unbelievable to all of you." Currently, 99." 9% of all Shadow World instances are handled successfully, so all of this talk of how dangerous Shadow World instances were in the past must seem quite boring to all of you." ”

The guest lecturer from the Tower of Magic stopped momentarily and caught his breath." He looked around the room, gauging the students’ reactions, before resuming." “However, we must all keep in mind that not even a half-century has passed since we gained this overwhelming advantage against the Shadow World." ”

48 years." That’s how long it had been since humanity finally managed to improve their success rate above 60%." In other words, humanity was able to steal the momentum against the Shadow World."

“An ongoing debate exists within academia regarding what truly lead to this change." Some academics may identify 3 key reasons, while another might point to 5." However, all academics are in agreement on one particular factor."

“We became capable of using magic crystals." All academics agree that this discovery represented a turning point that ultimately lead to our current success against the Shadow Worlds." ”

Magic crystal." Mana condensed into a crystallized form." Magic crystals could be earned by clearing the Shadow World instances." Prior to 48 years ago, magic crystals had been disregarded as worthless, but that had been the strange consequence of their composition, which was based on their creation."

“Magic crystals are largely divided into two parts; the ‘exterior mana’ and the ‘interior mana." ’ The ‘exterior mana’ is, as the name implies, an exterior covering, of solid, crystallized mana." Underneath the hard exterior is a flowing liquid interior: the ‘interior mana." ’”

The exterior mana’s crystallized state rendered it unusable." Humans could only make use of the interior mana—if they could access it."

“A peculiar characteristic of the exterior mana is that it blocks all access to the interior mana underneath." Under normal conditions, the interior mana, no matter how vast and powerful it might be, is completely inaccessible." At the same time, we also couldn’t simply break the magic crystal to release the interior mana." ”

Desir nodded in understanding." If the exterior mana broke, nothing held back the interior mana." As a result, it would rapidly dissipate into the air, like steam from an open kettle."

“However, this problem, and similar such problems, were resolved 50 years ago, when the Tower of Magic developed the ‘Enchant’ technique." ”

This topic evoked a bit of pride amongst those from the Tower of Magic, for good reason."

“In simple terms, a miniscule hole is formed in the exterior mana, by a technique developed by the Tower of Magic." The interior mana is directed to flow in a single direction, through this hole, and a formula is laid on top of the hole, to permit the crystal to be activated." ”

Indeed, once a method of utilizing the interior mana of the magic crystal had been established, magic crystals were no longer useless rocks, but critical resources." They enabled the development of a countless variety of magic equipment, leading to an explosive growth in magitek and magic industry: a Magical Revolution." It would not be far-fetched to claim that the Enchant technique was the discovery that defined that century."

“…and if we summarized the changes that followed this development…”

The lecturer began displaying his prepared material, in order to refresh the room’s mood." Panels activated by magic crystals displayed various images one by one." [1] Communication devices, powered by magic, that would enable people to talk across vast distances." An automatic lift that traveled up and down tall buildings in seconds." The intercontinental train with its magic engine."

“We are living in the height of the Magical Revolution, an era of grand magic." An era where everyone can experience the benefits of magic." ”

Desir nodded." Indeed, for now, life was prosperous and the population was growing." Shadow World instances were hundreds of times easier to clear, compared to before."

“Of course, at the same time, we must recognize that the Magical Revolution has created some unfavorable changes as well." The increased value of magic crystals has led to the creation of an outlaw group who attempt to illegally acquire magic crystals." This group, which calls themselves the ‘Outers,’ are a sinister organization of serious criminals." They have broken the Treaty of Bern and attempted several attacks on the Tower of Magic and the Western Kingdoms." ”

Pros and cons." The Enchant technique had made all of this possible."

“Now, how about a question? What is the name of the person who developed the Enchant technique? Hmm…The girl dozing off, over there." Romantica, was it?”

“Huh? What?”

Romantica, whose head had been bobbing up and down as she slipped in and out of sleep, jumped out of her seat in a panic as she heard her name."

With an ungraceful clunk, the chair fell backwards behind her." Snickers echoed around the room." Desir, who had been sitting beside her, carefully fixed her chair before whispering quietly into her ears, “The answer is ‘Zod Exarion, Romantica." ’”

“It’s Zod Exarion!” She fumbled for the words."

“Correct,” replied the lecturer as he nodded in approval." “The one who occupies the position of Head of the Tower of Magic, Zod Exarion." You may sit."

“This story has taken a detour like rabbit lost in the mountains." In any case, the conclusion I want you all to keep in mind as I wrap up today, is that the Shadow World is like a double-edged sword." It continuously wants to eat away at humanity’s territories, but, at the same time, provides us with the magic crystals we need to advance our progress." ”

The dozing students began to rouse themselves one by one as everything appeared to wrap up."

“We’ll end the class here." Students that have questions can come forward, but otherwise, class dismissed." ”

The students stood up, and began streaming out the back door in a remarkably orderly fashion." Only a single student seemed to be moving against the crowd towards the lecturer—but, on closer inspection, there were in fact two students beside him; a student whose gender was difficult to discern [2], and the female student who had been dozing off earlier." The lecturer smiled inwardly at this sight."

The male student in the lead spoke." “I am Desir Arman." On this side is Romantica Eru, and on this side is Pram Schneizer." We’re all Single Rankers and in the same party." ”

“Oh? Single Rankers? This is quite the honor." ”

“No, no, it is an honor for us to be graced with your great lecture, Mr." Prelude." ”

“So, what is your question?”

“Not really a question, per se, but a request." ”

Prelude felt an ominous foreboding as he realized where this conversation was headed." He paused briefly, before speaking very delicately." “Are you perhaps requesting a sponsorship from the Tower of Magic?”

“It’s a similar request,” replied Desir nonchalantly."

Prelude’s face grew stiff." There were always students like this, who were willing to cross any line in order to get a sponsorship from the Tower of Magic." It was hardly surprising; the sponsorship was a great help to any burgeoning party." He replied, in a very even voice, “the request for sponsorship from the Tower of Magic is always reviewed fairly." I believe the window for applications for this year’s sponsorship has come to an end." ”

“Haha, well, that’s regrettable, but, truthfully, I wasn’t able to process one due to interference from another party." ”

“Interference from another party?” asked Prelude, puzzled."

“Yes; it’s because there’s too much pushback against my party." A three person party, mostly made up of commoners." We’re not viewed in a great light by others." ”

“Ahhh, so you were that party." The rumored party from the Beta Class that became Single Rankers." ” Prelude nodded in understanding." News of Desir’s party had spread far and wide." Their individual names, clearly, weren’t well known yet, but many rumors had begun to circulate about how great Hebrion’s ‘Super Rookies’ were." They had become quite the hot topic, and for them to be composed of students from the Beta Class…well, opposition was only natural." Still, rules were rules." Prelude continued, “unfortunately, the window for requests has already closed, and we’re currently in the process of deliberation." I’m sorry, but it might be best to hope for next year." ”

Desir, rather than give up as Prelude expected, tilted his head quizzically at the reply." “Hmm…” he paused, and then spoke again." “I must have misspoke." ”

“Hmm?”

“I’m not looking for a sponsorship, per se." To borrow your idiom, we’ve become lost like rabbits in a field, and this story has taken an unexpected turn." Is this saying correct?”

“It’s rabbits in a mountain,” corrected Prelude." “In that case,” he continued, “what are you asking of me?”

In response, Desir wordlessly revealed the document he had been carrying, and handed it to Prelude." It was a written request."

“What is this?” [3]

“It’s permissible for anyone to make a request for a party from Hebrion Academy with a reward." ”

“I’m not asking the question because I’m unaware." I am fully aware of this, as the Tower of Magic has made a request for a party from Hebrion Academy before." I am asking why you are handing me this." ”

Desir smiled as he opened the lid of a pen and handed it to Prelude."

“Make the request." ”

“Please make this request." ”

“I hope that you will make this request of us." ”

The three members of Desir’s party all spoke in unison."

Prelude shook his head, and closed the pen." “No, the problem wasn’t with how you’ve phrased it." ” He handed the pen and the paper back to Desir."

Desir refused to take them." “You must make this request." ”

“You are being completely unreasonable." ”

“Unreasonable?” Desir smiled innocently at Prelude." “Their objective is the 2nd tier magic crystal held within Aeurelli." It will happen July 7th at 3 a." m." ”

“What?” Prelude asked, confused yet again."

“I have information that the Outers will attack the Aeurelli Branch of the Tower of Magic exactly 10 hours from now,” Desir stated matter-of-factly."

They were called the ‘Outers’ because they stood outside the lines of law, and they revelled in the name." They were a sinister group, one that had already attacked the Tower of Magic and the Western Kingdoms several times."

“They’re after Ruigenell’s Tear." ”

Prelude blanched." “Wait, how could you know that—”

Desir cut him off very suddenly." “The important part is that I also know how to stop them." Please put in a request to the Tower of Magic to hire us." ”

The root of the incident occurred 3 days prior, on July 4th." Desir’s entire party had been promoted to Single Rankers during the promotion event." As part of the promotion, they also gained access to a new (substantially nicer) office." The interior walls were a calming white, and the space was filled with plush chairs and gleaming desks in a comforting brown, with a view of the beautiful emerald lake through the windows."

As usual, Desir’s party was spending their afternoon at this office, once their training had concluded, and it was here that Desir made a very important decision."

‘I should definitely marry a woman like Pram." ’ [4] Of course, this decision certainly wouldn’t affect who he was actually going to marry in the future."

As usual, there was a mountainous pile of documents stacked on top of the desk." As Desir worked, he grabbed at the cookies laid out before him." They were flour cookies baked in butter, and although they didn’t look particularly appealing, they were surprisingly delicious." Pram had made them all by hand." Desir nodded in his mind in approval." ‘He’s pretty, with a good personality, and capable in the kitchen." He really isn’t lacking anything." ’ [5]

Pram had taken on all the housekeeping tasks for the party." Nobody had asked him to—it was something he had taken on of his own initiative." He was impressively good at them too; he did a fantastic job of cleaning, but his cooking skills were even better." And not just cookies—he brewed an excellent tea."

‘Really,’ Desir thought, ‘would a professional maid be able outperform him?’ His mind continued to wander." ‘How amazing would it be if Pram were a girl? No, wait, is he actually a girl? If that were the case…’ [6]

A voice suddenly interrupted Desir’s thoughts."

“Mr." Desir." ”

Aster0x’s Notes:

[1] Literally magic Powerpoint."

[2] Pram is a trap confirmed."

[3] UwU \*notices parchment\* what’s this?

[4] Be on the lookout for our new Desir x Pram BL FF."

[5] TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES REEEEEEE

[6] Desir likes traps confirmed."

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**Translator: Notalk
Rewriter: Wynn**

Pram wore a light blue apron on top of his clothes, staring intently at Desir." Hot steam billowed out of the teacup he just placed on the table." Pram’s rosy cheeks accented his flush complexion as he explained." “It’s a new type of tea I brewed." ”

“Thanks, Pram,” Desir said absentmindedly."

“It’s nothing." Anyways, what were you thinking about?”

“Hm—what do you mean?”

“You’ve been staring off into space for a while now, without even a glance of your papers." ”

“Oh, was I?” Desir was tempted to say ‘I was thinking about you’, but he held his tongue."

As he prepared to give Pram a sloppy excuse, Romantica prattled “It’s obvious if you look at him." He was definitely thinking of something stupid." ”

“Mr." Desir doesn’t think of stupid things! He’s obviously thinking of something important! Really important! It’s probably something about our party, or incredibly serious!” Pram jumped up in defense of Desir."

‘Wait! Don’t defend me, Pram!’ He really was thinking of something stupid—and he could never, ever let anybody find out about it."

“I’m right, aren’t I?” Pram’s eyes, filled with expectation, stroke down at Desir’s heart as he wanted to avert his eyes." He couldn’t betray Pram’s expectations."

“I uh—that’s right." Something like that." ”

“See, Miss Romantica?” In Pram’s eyes, Desir was infallible." He could do no wrong."

Romantica was swayed by Pram’s response." “Mm." I suppose you’re right." ” She quietly affirmed his opinion and glanced elsewhere."

Desir, feeling guilty, sipped his tea and changed the topic." “This is delicious, Pram." ”

“Of course! I spent a lot of time brewing it—it’s my secret recipe!”

“Impressive." You should write it down for me later." ” Pram nodded in agreement and went looking for a sheet of paper to write down the tea recipe." In the meantime, Desir returned to the pile of documents piled in front of him." The vast majority of it was paperwork that came with his position of party leader." As he trudged through the papers, he recalled that it was about time for the Tower of Magic to announce their sponsorships."

Desir glanced at his fellow party members out of the corner of his eyes." After confirming they weren’t looking in his direction, he shifted the documents off to the side and peered onto a sheet of paper on the bottom." This sheet of paper was the reason for his carefully crafted stack of papers." It detailed a timeline of events so that he could better organize his future plans." A few of them were crossed out."

5 Points." Entrance Exam – March 1st
5 Points." Single Ranker Promotion Battle – May 1st
2 Points." Exchange Battle – May 10th-21st Check This
4 Points." Tower of Magic Sponsorship Announcement – July 5th
3 Points." Attack on Tower of Magic’s Aeurelli Branch – July 7th
1 Point." Explosion at Hebrion Academy’s Pharmacy Faculty." 0 Casualties." – Approx July 9th-14th
6 Points." Emergence of the Shadow World – July 20th

Points were assigned based on importance." The more impactful, the more vivid the memory was for Desir." This in turn made the dates clearer for him." On the flip side, there were a few events that had less of an impact, and it was difficult for Desir to recall those dates."

‘July 5th—the application date for the Tower of Magic sponsorship is due tomorrow." ’

Hebrion Academy, being famous as one of the greatest magic academies on the continent, became a breeding ground for countless corporations to advertise their names." Parties would get stronger through sponsorship, and use their newfound power to clear Shadow Worlds." As the party grew, their fame would bolster the reputation of the corporation, so they spared no expense to help foster these parties." The most illustrious of these corporations was the Tower of Magic."

The Tower of Magic."

An international conglomerate that pioneered magical engineering, spanning across multitudes of industries." From military equipment to household products, finances, and education, the Tower of Magic’s influence had no limits." The parties sponsored by the Tower of Magic had access to the most cutting-edge equipment on the market, giving them a significant advantage in clearing Shadow Worlds."

Countless applicants would be willing to pledge themselves to the Tower of Magic, but they were only looking for the best." The Tower of Magic was very peculiar with their sponsorship: they only sponsored one party each year." Any party selected by the Tower of Magic was publicly acknowledged to be filled with potential." With diligent growth, they would become the foundation for humanity’s war against the Shadow World."

‘The Tower of Magic…’

Desir’s thoughts brought him back to his previous life." He had deep ties with the Tower of Magic—the Head of the tower was his comrade in arms, Zod Exarion." Age 91, he was a mage who conquered the 6th circle and surpassed the limits of humanity."

Head of the Tower of Magic."

7th Circle Mage."

Great Sage."

Prodigium Magnum."

Leaden with dozens of titles, he stood at the forefront of all magic." And together with Desir, they fought in the Shadow Labyrinth together—the worst Shadow World of them all." The Expedition, a group of over 150 million people were sent in to clear it, with only 6 survivors making it to the end." The two of them both made it to the end, before the incident that sent him spiraling back into the past."

The 7th circle mage was crucial to the Expedition’s quest to defeat the Shadow Labyrinth." His spells swept the landscape and tore down wave after wave of enemies." Their bodies wiped out of existence, without a trace to be found." That in itself was a monumental achievement, but Zod’s true skills lied in his mechanical prowess."

During their travels in the Shadow Labyrinth, Zod’s talents manifested and developed themselves out of necessity." His equipment had bolstered the ability of the Expedition by several fold." ‘If he weren’t there, we likely wouldn’t have even made it to the end." ’

Desir was deep in thought." ‘This is a chance." I was planning on contacting him anyways about “that”." Getting the Tower of Magic sponsorship is the best case scenario." ’ He would put the application in first before contacting Exarion." With that, Desir rose from his seat." He needed to collect the documentation to apply for the Tower of Magic sponsorship." ‘It is strange that the official documents and application forms still haven’t been sent when there is only a day left…’

Desir felt something tugging at him, but couldn’t place it." According to his memories, Professor Brigitte was the one who took the applications for the Tower of Magic sponsorship." With that in mind, he collected himself and proceeded to head to the Professor’s office."

\*\*\*

As Desir arrived at the professor’s office, she appeared to be about to leave." “Ah, Desir,” said Brigitte with a smile on her face." Seeing him approach, she put her coat back on the hanger and welcomed her student." “Good to see you." I was just on my way to find you myself." ”

“That’s good to hear." I didn’t want to waste your time." ”

“Waste my time?” said Brigitte." She looked puzzled at Desir’s words."

“I’m here for the documentation to apply for the Tower of Magic sponsorship,” explained Desir."

Brigitte cocked her head in confusion." She frowned as she responded to Desir." “I think you’ve misunderstood something." I am not the one in charge of the Tower of Magic sponsorship applications." That would be Professor Nifleka." ”

She fixed her glasses." “In all honesty, I was planning on taking care of it all myself, but with him being a stubborn old fart, the headmaster passed on the responsibility to him."

Desir’s eyes opened wide at the news." “Haha—I see." I made a mistake." ” Desir laughed awkwardly." ‘The future has changed." ’ Desir always knew that his actions would cause ripples that would change the course of the future as well." ‘But why Nifleka…’ He started becoming anxious at the news, shaking his head to clear his thoughts." “That just means I have to get the papers from Professor Nifleka, correct?”

“That’s the reason I wanted to talk to you, Desir." ” Brigitte had a concerned look on her face." “The application period for the Tower of Magic sponsorship ended yesterday." ”

Desir coughed abruptly at the information." He felt like he had been hit on the back of the head."

Based on the shock in Desir’s face, Brigitte figured that something was wrong." “Desir, why didn’t you apply?”

“Hold on, professor." Wasn’t the application deadline July 5th?”

Brigitte raised her voice slightly." “It was July 3rd." Normally, it is the 5th, but we decided during the meeting to move it a few days forward due to the fact that Professor Nifleka had to go overseas." Whatever the case, we did announce that the deadline was July 3rd." I suppose you didn’t check the official announcements." ”

‘Wait—official announcements?’ Desir didn’t receive anything of the sort." “I may have a tower of papers, but I still read everything, professor." There wasn’t any announcement." That’s the reason I came looking for you." I thought it was strange we weren’t getting anything." ”

Professor Brigitte was speechless." “So you’re saying…” She closed her eyes, her face flush." She rubbed her forehead, as if nursing a headache." “You’re saying that only our party didn’t get the announcement that was supposed to go out to everybody." ”

“I searched through everything, I swear on it." I didn’t throw anything away, so you can see for yourself." ”

Brigitte trusted her student." “You wouldn’t lie about this." That means the problem was on the staff side…” Professor Nifleka was in charge." If Desir was telling the truth, he had deliberately skipped sending the announcement to their party." “That can’t be it." No matter how much you dislike each other, he wouldn’t take such drastic steps." ”

“I believe the same, professor." ”

Brigitte paused and pursed her lips." “Wait a moment." I have to check on something." ” She opened the door and left, pulling out her Pad to call somebody." In the office, there was an eerie silence setting in, like the calm before a storm."

“Excuse me!” Brigitte shouted." “Contact…not even… can’t… responsible… error? I… good… person… so… hurt… don’t hang up… don’t…”

‘Bad news." ’ He could tell from the tone of her voice." Brigitte clambered back in a moment later, breathing heavily." Her cheeks were flush."

“They said they weren’t able to deliver the announcement." An ‘administrative error’, he says." ”

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**Translator: Notalk
Rewriter: Wynn**

Brigitte pulled her chair forward and clenched her fist." “If this wasn’t intentional… there’s no way." ” The calm and collected Professor was nowhere to be found." Her voice was trembling with anger." “Of course." The reason why he insisted on taking charge of the Tower of Magic sponsorship." I thought something was fishy, but this is just despicable! To think he’d be this cheap!”

In truth, Desir hadn’t expected Professor Nifleka to go to such means." For a professor to blatantly show such bias was unthinkable." ‘Was it because I defeated his Blue Moon Party?’ Desir couldn’t determine why the professor would go to such lengths." In any case, the buffoon’s motives didn’t matter." What did was the current situation—the deadline had passed." There was no point in complaining."

Seeing the look of loss on Desir’s face, Brigitte immediately reassured him." “I’ll look for anything I can do to fix this." For now, go and rest." ”

Desir nodded at his teacher, and returned to his office." He didn’t have much hope that her intervention would solve the situation."

‘On top of all that, the Tower of Magic has a very rigid schedule." ’

As Desir traipsed back to his papers, he came to the conclusion why Nifleka acted so brashly." At the realization, Desir felt an uncharacteristic anger boiling up inside of him." He laughed bitterly." ‘So you’ve decided to act first." ’ His eyes gleamed as he hatched a plan." ‘Two can play that game." ’

Now seated in front of his mountain of paper again, he flipped open the piece of paper in his pocket." It was the timeline of events he had written down prior." Skimming down the list, he traced his finger until he got to what he was looking for." A smile tugged at the corners of his mouth." ‘I can be just as cheap." ’

…
3 Points." Attack on Tower of Magic’s Aeurelli Branch – July 7th
…

It was a late summer night, and the air was brisk." A man with a handsome mustache dressed in neat clothes took long strides along the street engulfed by the night fog." His name was Criken." Criken was extremely tall, with a well-built frame." His eyes peered up into the night sky, before falling on a boy running toward him with a bag full of rye bread." His shabby appearance gave Criken more than enough information about this child." The hard rye bread in his arms was precious food for his family."

Criken moved aside as the boy continued to run, but they still bumped shoulders." The bread bag flew into the air, and a look of panic showed on the boy’s face." Suddenly, something strange happened—the bag stopped in mid air, as if somebody were holding it." Criken grabbed the bag out of the air, and peered at the fallen boy."

“Sorry, sir." ” The boy’s eyes were downtrodden at his mistake."

“It’s alright." Are you hurt?” Criken offered his outstretched hand to the boy and helped him up." After he stood back up, Criken wiped away the soot on the child’s face." “Where are you headed?”

“I’m heading home to my family, sir." ” The boy gave a quiet smile to the man who helped him up."

“With this bread?” Criken asked."

“It’s for my little sister, sir." She isn’t able to come out of the house,” said the boy." His eyes looked earnestly up at the towering man in front of him."

Criken’s intuition was correct, and he nodded in understanding." “Don’t walk around outside so late." Your sister will worry." ”

The boy nodded his head fiercely." “Yes." Thank you, sir." ” He stared at the bag of bread in Criken’s hands."

As Criken moved the bag to and fro, the boy’s eyes were mesmerized by it." He smirked." “Right." I should give this back." ” Criken held out the bag to the boy."

“Thank you, sir!” the boy exclaimed." Just as the boy’s hands touched the bag, Criken suddenly turned it upside down and emptied its contents onto the floor."

In shock, the boy asked what he was doing." Criken responded by crushing the bread underneath his feet." They broke apart into crumbs and mixed into the dirt, completely inedible." A faint look of amusement appeared in Criken’s eyes as he wandered past the bewildered boy." He was feeling quite cheerful—whenever he was about to do something important, he would have a bit of fun with things like this."

As the moonlight faded away and the darkness grew deeper, the street lights flickered and the shadows disappeared." He rounded a third corner until he could no longer see any lit street lights." Surrounded by pitch black darkness, he stopped in his tracks." In front of him laid a giant metal door embossed with the words Tower of Magic, Aeurelli Branch in an elegant cursive." At this point, he tossed his fedora aside, revealing a mask shaped like a shark with horns." In the dead of night, he said a single word."

“Assemble." ”

Restless shadows stirred from the seedy underbelly of the city, and 80 silhouettes stood behind him." Each of them wore masks adorned with skulls and dark black cloaks, merging with the darkness." The masquerade began channeling all manners of spells." Waves of mana rippled through the air as a menagerie of spells clashed with the gate." A powerful magic barrier activated, nullifying the slew of magic that struck the metal gate."

‘As expected of the Tower of Magic." ’

Criken gestured forward with his chin, and a number of heavy-set men stepped forward to pound and grind down the gate." The door began to yield in reaction to the overwhelming force." “Keep going,” said Criken." “We can’t let it adapt." ”

Additional clangs rang out from the door, as the enchantment weakened." As the mana could only flow in one direction, it could only activate one spell at a time." The enchantment could only augment its physical or magical durability—even with the greatest source of mana in the world, it wouldn’t matter." Criken smirked as the door opened with a boom."

An ear-splitting alarm rang out—the intruders entered the Tower of Magic." Security guards and mages poured out from the Tower of Magic and formed ranks, with the defensive towers manned and sights readied on the incoming masked foes." Criken was taken aback at their quick response time, but that didn’t deter him." He signaled his subordinates to charge."

The masked marauders let out a war cry as they engaged the incoming forces." Sounds of steel clashing, roars of triumph, and explosions echoed throughout the battlefield." In the chaos, Criken quietly left the battlefield, with 6 of his subordinates in tow."

[Invisibility." ]

The high-level spell refracted light to make one disappear from sight." They tore away from the fight as the security guards continued to flood onto the war zone." “They really came!”

Criken and his men skirted off to one side." He glanced at the guards as they went down the stairs, and then smiled to himself." Everything was perfect." With the Tower of Magic’s forces gathered on the lower floors, they wouldn’t be able to prevent him from accomplishing his goal." The only thing which bothered him was how quickly they reacted." ‘No matter." Everything is according to plan." ’

The 80 men were merely a distraction." The main forces had dispersed from the upper floors, and he leisurely walked up the stairs."

Tower of Magic—20th Floor."

Compared to the floors below, the 20th floor was rather small." As he entered the top floor, his eyes were drawn toward a safe." Criken, wary of additional traps, conjured a magic formula in front of him as he took careful steps toward his prize."

[Earth Rage." ]

3rd circle attack spell." The barriers layered on top of the safe were expelled by the tide of mana exerted by Criken." The safe was laid waste to and inside, a strange object illuminated the surrounding area." 2nd tier magic crystal—Ruigenell’s Tear." The brilliant blue light danced across Criken’s palm, and the crystalline object pulsed like a beating heart." His eyes shined with greed and he reached out to grab the magic crystal—

“That’s enough." ” A young boy’s voice rang out."

Startled, Criken turned around." It was an incredibly beautiful boy—no." He was so beautiful that it was difficult to tell if it was a boy or a girl." His voice was firm." “Please surrender, Outer." ”

This was outside of expectations." “You were hiding forces in reserve? Interesting." ” Criken’s voice wavered as he tried to determine how they figured his plan out." “This means that you had to have known our plans, our identity, and even our objective…” His voice trailed off." “Who are you?” His eyes narrowed as he tried to read his opponent."

Pram Schneizer raised his sword with his eyes trained on his target, and said “With the authority of Hebrion’s Single Ranker, I place you under arrest." You would do best to surrender." ”

“I refuse." ” With that, Criken snapped his fingers and his companions lined up in front of him."

[Elan’s strength resides in me." ]

[Wave of Flame." ]

The mages created their constructs and aimed their sights at Pram." In response, Pram likewise used the time spent casting to analyze the enemy’s strength."

‘4 mages, 2 swordsmen." Based on the spells being cast and the reactions of the swordsmen, these guys can’t be much stronger than 2nd Circle and Pawn-rank." ’

[Fireball." ]

[Ice Spear." ]

With the first two spells completed, the mages sent them careening toward the lone swordsman." A glint in Pram’s eye shined as he swung his sword toward the incoming blasts of elemental energy." His Blanchume rapier bisected the Fireball and the Ice Spear left nary a scratch on Pram’s head as they shattered into fragments of mana."

“He cut the magic?”

“Anti-magic sword!”

Seeing the change in atmosphere, Pram leaped forward to subdue the mages." In response, the knights stood in an ironclad formation preventing Pram from making it to his quarry." The mages began casting a new salvo of spells with everybody back in position." The morale was high for the intruders, getting ready for Pram’s execution, but—

“It’s useless." ”

Pram disappeared in an instant." The swordsmen quickly frantically looked around, trying to find the blue-haired boy, only to discover he was already on top of their mages." This was the difference of rank: these Pawn-rank soldiers had no hope of matching up with the Knight-rank prodigy." A dull smack sounded and the first mage crumpled to the ground." Their expressions turned grave as Pram moved onto his next target." As he neared, a pulse rose from the ground and caught his foot."

[Entangle]

2nd circle snaring spell." Pram’s battle senses were hardy, but he was in disbelief." ‘No way." There weren’t any mages casting spells…’

He had missed it." There was a mage just outside of his vision, and now he would pay the price."

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**Translator: NaturalRice
Rewriter: Wynn**

Pram had the wind knocked out of his sails by the covert mage. Getting a better look, he realized that the mage was Criken. He had used his subordinates to shield himself and now, his second spell landed square on Pram’s back.

[Doom Fist.]

Soil coagulated into the shape of a fist and struck Pram’s exposed back. “Augh!” Pram screamed from the searing pain. Fresh blood dripped out of his lips, and he stumbled from the stock. Clenching his teeth, he calmed his rough breathing and fixed his posture. With the entrance of the Criken, he had to be more careful with his approach against the veteran mage.

The latter, however, was at ease. “Your skills are impressive, but…”

[Bind.]

“Your experience is lacking.” 1st circle snaring spell. Shackles of mana shot towards Pram. They were sluggish in their pursuit of Pram allowing him to dodge, but they led him straight into Criken’s trap.

“Hehe.”

[Raise Wall.]

The Bind spell was a feint to lure Pram into the trap. A barrier on 3 sides rose from the ground to surround the boy and wall off his attempts to avoid the flurry of spells being pelted at him. Dozens of spells rained down relentlessly at him, and with nowhere to go, he was forced to parry.

“Hah!” Pram swung his Blanchume rapier without pause at the torrent of magic being blasted at his location. Burning flames, sharpened icicles, and biting gales were torn to shreds by the silvery blade, and the slightest moment of hesitation would take him down. Even with his highest speed, he could only deflect and disperse magic—the mages would never leave him to opportunity to make an escape.

Criken’s eyes narrowed at the sight of this unknown boy holding out against his contingent of mages. ‘I’ll get rid of that kid myself in one shot.’ He gathered his mana and formed a 3rd circle spell around him. The magic would eviscerate the swordsman and turn him into ash. He only needed a few more seconds—

Wham! Criken’s attention was distracted as one of his mages fell toward him and knocked him over. His casting formula dissipated as he took a good look at the man who fell down. There was a small hole in his subordinate’s chest plate. He immediately checked his surroundings in a panic. Traces of magic could be found—it was sniping magic.

A swordsman in front of him was downed.

Another two were downed behind him.

Criken bit his lip. If he didn’t fight back now, he would lose the chance. His men were dropping like flies. The tireless barrage of magic on Pram was loosening up and he was gaining momentum. The victory was slipping from his grasp right in front of his eyes. ‘Shit.’

“Lose? Me?” He silently cursed. “I won’t let it end here!”

“Ugh!” One of the swordsman took a hit—Criken saw a chance. The fallen subordinate was wailing, but when he looked carefully, the attack didn’t pierce the armor. ‘The spell couldn’t even pierce the armor—is it a 2nd circle mage?’

“All of you! Protect me!” commanded Criken.

“Yes, sir!”

He immediately began to prepare a spell. The magic formula manifested rapidly around him and drained an enormous amount of mana from his body. Without the spare mana available, his previous constructs were deteriorating. With the walls out of Pram’s way, the swordsmen sent to suppress him felt a shiver down their spine. Without the wall, it wasn’t even a fight. It was a slaughter.

“He’s coming!” They trembled in preparation for their fight with the Knight-rank swordsman. But nothing came.

Pram dashed past the swordsmen and instead, wreaked havoc on the mages, now at the complete mercy of a silver flash. The swordsmen found themselves dispatched by formless bolts of sniping magic from outside of their vision. Soon, all that remained was Criken and a lone swordsman.

“C-commander?” The swordsman’s face paled as his sword met the weightless blade. It didn’t even last a second before his sword was slashed through. “Help me, sir!”

Criken did not pay him any mind. His magic swirled around him, and completed the spell. A platform of stone fractured and rose into the air with Criken at the epicenter. A wide smile and show of relief appeared on the swordsman’s face, with the utmost faith that his commander would turn the fight on its head. “As expected, commander! You always have something up your sleeve!”

“No… it’s not that. This is…” Pram grew anxious as he watched Criken weave together this magic. The stone fragments circling Criken began to condense around him and cover him with a sturdy shell. The entire floor had been uprooted, and Pram backed away to safety.

“Huh?” The soldier was different. He couldn’t escape from the spell and was raised alongside the floor. “Wait, command—” Suddenly, the ground compressed together with him in tow. A bloody crunch echoed out.

A bone-chilling shiver ran down Pram’s spine. He was shocked that this commander would sacrifice his men without batting an eye. Even so, he couldn’t approach due to the magical field else he would suffer the same fate. Once the rock’s reconstruction finished itself, a hexahedron appeared, smooth and refined.

[Bindell of Earth.]

Defensive magic of the highest tier. This was a 4th circle escape spell. The floor that had been used for the spell could no longer hold its own weight and crumbled. Pram managed to barely avoid falling by grabbing onto the rails, but unlike him, the hexahedron began free falling and disappeared into the abyss. He looked helplessly at the location where the hexahedron was just seconds ago.

A location not so far away from the Tower of Magic, the stone floor began to move as if it were breathing. The place reeked of musty and dank smells, and rats skittered away from the tremors. A hexahedron shot out of the ground and found itself in a place away from prying eyes. The hexahedron fell back into dirt as the tall figure emerged from within, holding a magic crystal that shimmered in the darkness of the sewers. Criken sighed. “Phew.”

His forehead was lined with sweat. “Really, I don’t get it. Even if it was the Tower of Magic, there is no way that they have such an expansive information network…” He wiped his brow and once again put on his shark faced mask. “In any case, our current objective is complete.”

2nd tier magic crystal, Ruigenell’s Tear.

His eyes got lost in the luminescent blue light and he smiled.

“That would be correct if you can make it out of here.”

Criken jumped and stared down the corridor towards the source of the noise. “How did you find me?”

“I marked you with my mana. It lets me find you in real-time.” Footsteps rang in the hall as a young boy emerged from the shadows. Criken recognized the face—it was the boy who had left with the bread.

“Ha…” Criken sighed. Relief washed over his face. “You played me. The situation took so many turns and it nearly flew out of my control. But only for a moment.” He could clearly feel that the boy in front of him only had enough mana to be a 1st circle mage. He extended his hand to construct the magic formula to murder this pesky boy and then—

The formula fell apart. “W-what is going on?”

He tried again, but the results were the same. It didn’t take long for him to realize that his sequence had been hijacked.

“Do you really plan on completing a spell with such a simple formula?” The boy standing in front of him was hijacking his spell. The spell of a 4thcircle mage! If Pram or Romantica were here, they would recognize him: Hebrion’s Single Ranker, Desir Arman.

‘Just how is he overpowering me?’ He could feel that the boy in front of him only had the capacity for 1st circle magic. It was impossible for him to overpower his magic with sheer force—that was reality. If he didn’t see it right before his eyes, he wouldn’t believe it either. His defeat was looming before him.

“We have a bit of debt to settle, don’t we? Do you remember that bread that you stomped on?” Desir casually strode towards him, but Criken maintained his distance. He was backed into a corner despite his pride as a 4th circle mage. He was at his wit’s end.

“D-don’t come any closer!” Criken held out the shining treasure in his palm and threatened Desir. “I’ll shatter it! I’ll shatter it into pieces!” He shouted as if he was on his last legs.

“Try it.” Desir sighed with a pitiful gaze, and shook his head as he spoke.

“What?”

“I said ‘Try it’.” Desir reiterated the words again.

“…You bastard.” Criken felt heat blow across his face.

Desir inched closer. “You won’t do it. In the end, you’ve lost so many of your men to get it.” With each sentence, he drew towards Criken. “What will you have left after you’ve lost even this?”

“Don’t get any closer!”

Desir paid no heed to his threats and stood with him face to face. He treated him like a scarecrow.

‘This idiot!’ The look of helplessness on Criken’s face transformed into cunning. A faint smile formed on his lips. Despite the overconfidence of the boy in front of him, he didn’t expect him to come so close. If they fought through magic, he believed that Desir would be able to disarm his spells, but in a battle of pure strength, he could defeat him in a physical altercation. Without another word, he swung his fist at the boy.

[Gravity Control.]

4th circle control spell.

Unfortunately for him, Desir’s casting was much faster than the speed of Criken’s fist. His magic formula unfolded rapidly and activated in point-blank range of Criken. Before the man could blink, a massive weight pressed down on him and left him prone on his knees.

“Argh…argh!” Criken struggled with as much as he could under the growing gravitational forces sandwiching him to the floor.

Not long after, the gravity forced him onto the ground. He was completely suppressed. Gravity Control had placed him under 8 times the normal pressure. A hard thud sounded out as Criken was adhered to the ground. Criken’s eyes watered as the stench of the inky sewage water stung his nose.

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**Translator: Billy Stevens
Rewriter: Aster0x**

“ARGGH!” Criken screamed in impotent rage as he struggled against the crushing force. It was useless. Sharp cracks accompanied blinding pain as the intolerable gravity began rending its terrible toll on his body. He howled in pain as he felt his bones crack.

He let his body slump to the ground in defeat. His magic had been rendered powerless and his body was now incapacitated. Criken looked up at Desir with blurry eyes. It still made no sense. How could a boy who was barely even a 1st circle mage cast a 4th circle spell? It should’ve been impossible!

“Alright, let me take this back now.” Desir’s voice was incredibly relaxed in contrast. On the edge of passing out from exhaustion, Criken could offer little resistance as Desir pried the crystal from his fingers.

Shock ran through Criken as he saw the magic crystal in Desir’s hand. The stone glowed with a fierce blue light. Beneath the translucent exterior, the crystal’s interior mana swirled violently. Criken felt numb. ‘He’s using the crystal’s mana? How? This should be impossible!’ No known technology existed to utilize the interior mana of a magic crystal before it was enchanted. What Criken was seeing went against everything he knew.

The crystal wasn’t enchanted. This much was obvious. But, as if he was laughing in the face of common sense, the boy was using the crystal’s mana like it was nothing.

As if Desir could read Criken’s thoughts, he shrugged. “It’s a fascinating technique, don’t you think? I felt the same way when I saw it for the first time.” Desir lowered himself to his knees, and took Criken’s mask off. Their eyes met. [1] “Are you curious? I could tell you, if you’d like.”

Criken shivered weakly. Of course he was curious. How could he not me? It was an achievement that defied everything everyone knew about magic crystals! A technique decades ahead of its time! If he had this technique, he could take all the riches of the Tower of Magic for himself! And the boy was offering to tell him this secret?

Desir calmly asked again. “Do you want to know?”

Criken nodded quickly. The outcome of this fight was irrelevant. His pride was irrelevant. This ‘technique’ was worth that much.

Desir smiled brightly. “Then, you should pay up for that bread first.” The gravitational pressure increased again, to 12 times. [2]

Criken howled for a moment as pain wracked his body, before he fell unconscious.

Just like that, the Outers’ attack on the Tower of Magic on July 7th ended.

“I don’t know how to thank you,” Dr. Prelude gushed to Desir’s party as they sat around the Tower of Magic’s reception hall. “Truly,” he continued, “we would have suffered a serious, no, perhaps even catastrophic loss had it not been for your party, Mr. Desir. I don’t even want to imagine what would have happened had the Outers succeeded in taking that magic crystal.” Prelude bowed his head in gratitude. “Thank you, Mr. Desir. Your party as well.”

Pram barely kept a giggle down as he watched Dr. Prelude speak to Desir from across the table. Not even a half day prior, this person had been treating Desir like he was insane. He’d agreed to listen to Desir because Desir had known about Ruigenell’s Tear, and only on the provision that had the Outers not shown, Desir would’ve had to shoulder all the cost of the defensive preparation. Even then, he hadn’t completely trusted Desir. The looks Desir’s party had caught glances of, right up until the Outers appeared, were truly terrible.

‘Although, it’s not like I don’t understand his perspective…’ Pram silently decided. In honesty, even he had doubts. The Outers would attack the Tower of Magic out of nowhere? That was considered nothing short of insanity. What kind of crazy idiot would attack the Tower of Magic, the greatest, most powerful corporation in the world? And yet…Pram gulped. ‘Mr. Desir’s words turned out to be true…’ Just as Desir had said, the Outers had come. And, just as he’d planned, they had been tidily, cleanly swept up. Their leader, Criken, had been arrested, and the 2nd tier magic crystal, Ruigenell’s Tear, had been recovered and placed back under security. In short, Desir’s party had made a miracle happen.

‘I’m sorry for ever doubting you, Mr. Desir.’ Silently, Pram resolved to himself to always trust Desir from now on. Pram would never again doubt any of Desir’s decisions, no matter how absurd, how baseless they might seem. He turned to Desir, staring in admiration, boundless faith in his eyes.

Desir, of course, remained oblivious, and continued to talk to Dr. Prelude. “I’m glad we could be of help. Moving on, I’d like to talk about the compensation.”

“Ah, of course, the compensation.” Cause and effect. Work and compensation. Perfectly natural, perfectly understandable. Prelude continued. “Our Tower of Magic will offer you 120 gold in compensation.”

Romantica nearly jumped out of her seat, startled. “1—120 gold? Are you serious?” Her tone was incredulous.

“I’m serious, Miss Romantica,” Prelude responded smoothly. “Considering what you’ve done for us, at least this much is fair.”

Romantica poked Desir’s side impatiently. “Hey, hey, what are you doing! You were complaining about our party’s budget not being sufficient right? If we have this amount of money, we could easily run the party for a year – no, 6 years!”

Pram eagerly nodded in agreement. “Right. And we won’t need the Tower of Magic’s sponsorship anymore. We’ll have more than enough money.”

Prelude nodded very slightly. Desir had wanted the Tower of Magic’s sponsorship – Prelude had remembered that very well. “We’d originally been planning to offer 100 gold,” he began explaining, “but, unfortunately, it seems that your party hadn’t been able to apply for the sponsorship. So I pulled some strings and got the extra 20 gold. It’s not much compared to the Tower of Magic’s sponsorship, but it’s still a good sum.” The coins inside clinked as Prelude set the leather pouch on the table.

Desir didn’t even glance at it as he spoke. “Dr. Prelude.”

“Yes?”

“Do you remember what I said at the beginning of our conversation?”

“Ah, yes. I do remember.” Prelude nodded, recalling the conversation they’d had earlier this morning.

“Are you perhaps requesting a sponsorship from the Tower of Magic?”

“It’s a similar request.”

Desir’s voice interrupted Prelude’s memory. “Thank you for the offer, but I’ll have to refuse.”

“Wha~!” Beside him, two voices erupted in protest, and angry interjections filled the room. Pram and Romantica, naturally.

Desir ignored their voices, seemingly unfazed. “I don’t want money. Instead, I have a request.”

Dr. Prelude pushed his crooked glasses up. “Bu – but Mr. Desir, the sponsorship application deadline was July 4th. I know how sincerely you want the Tower of Magic’s support, and I know how much you regret not being able to apply. However, this is a rule that not even Zod himself could change.” Indeed, that had been the practical motivation behind raising the compensation to 120 gold. It had been consolation, of a sort, but, more importantly, it ensured that their party would not be discontent.

Desir sighed in disappointment. “You misunderstand me again, Dr. Prelude. I have no intention of asking you to pull any strings for the sponsorship. I know very well how much important the Tower of Magic places on timeliness, and how troublesome this would be for you.”

Now Prelude was utterly confused. “Then…then what is your request?” he asked incredulously. His expectations had been shattered, and his offers all refused.

When Desir responded, Prelude was surprised at how simple the request was. It was concise, and of course, easily satisfied. It was just that, no matter how much he thought about it, he couldn’t understand why.

“Please let me play chess with the Master of the Tower of Magic.”

[Altaea, the heart of magic engineering.]

Roads spread across the city like spider webs, and magic-powered cars zipped across them. Around them, titanic buildings soared into the air. It was here that the Tower of Magic, famed as the greatest corporation in the world, had its headquarters.

Across its spacious, elegant hallway strode two figures. Some smiled and greeted as they passed the two, others did a quick double-take in confusion. The two seemed not to mind, and quickly entered an elevator on the far side of the lobby.

“Is this really alright, Mr. Desir?” Prelude ventured. With experienced motions, he sent the cylindrical elevator soaring upwards. He turned to the enigmatic child, puzzled. Pram and Romantica had gone sightseeing, so it was simply Desir and Prelude in the elevator.

“What do you mean?” replied Desir.

“Chess. I’m talking about chess. [3] You did, truthfully, something incredible, and yet, you’re only asking to play chess…”

Desir shrugged. “Everyone wants something different.”

“Even so, it’s 120 gold, you know?” Prelude sighed in resignation. “And to top it off, what was the Tower Master thinking when he accepted such a bizarre request…”

Desir answered, nonchalantly, as the elevator doors opened. “He was probably interested just by how out of the ordinary the request was.”

They stepped into a room, with enormous bookshelves lining each of its long walls. Neat lines of textbooks ran, unbroken, across each row, top to bottom, and further countless stacks of books were laid out all over the floor. At the front stood a blackboard with formulas crammed into every corner and blank space, enough to give even a casual reader a headache. Around them, the windows’ curtains had all been drawn, and lamps, containing magic crystals enchanted with light magic, were placed around the room, filling the room with bright light.

‘They even use magic crystals for their lamps.’ Desir noted. In the middle of this room sat a man with long lashes and a high nose. Pink lips contrasted his pure white skin, unmarked by blemishes. He had a strong charm with his distinct features. Even by the most pessimistic estimate, he couldn’t have been older than 30.

As he saw Desir enter the room, he smiled, and pushed his glasses up nonchalantly. Desir chuckled to himself. ‘He still looks the same, huh?’

He was Zod Exarion. In past, present, and Desir’s future, he was the greatest mage in the world, the man who had singled-handedly revived interest in magic. Listing all of his accomplishments was an unenviable feat. They could’ve filled an entire book – in fact, there was actually a book that detailed all of his accomplishments. It had come out earlier this year. It was thicker than most encyclopedias.

“I’ve brought the student,” said Prelude.

“Good work. You may take your leave,” replied Zod. There was an archaic feeling to his words. He gestured in front of him, to an ivory-colored chess board laid atop a black, circular table. “Sit.”

Desir sat across from Zod, who peered at the boy through his glasses. “If I had the time, I would have at least offered you tea, so that we could play a leisurely game together. But, alas, I have a meeting in exactly 27 minutes, and I cannot afford the time.”

“No, I’m thankful enough that you listened to my impudent request,” replied Desir smoothly.

“Thank you for understanding. Now, let us begin the game.” Zod’s tone almost betrayed the slightest impatience.

There were no other pleasantries to be explained. Chess was the purpose of the meeting, so it was all they talked about.

Zod placed the pieces on the board, and gestured to Desir. “Which rules would you like to play by? Imperial, or Western Kingdoms?”

“I’ll choose North Sea style.”

Zod’s eyes twinkled for a moment.

Aster0x’s Notes:

[1] ( ͡◉ ͜ʖ ͡◉)

[2] 12 times? Maybe if it was 12 hundred times, you might have the advantage. But this? I don’t even feel it.

[3] We’re talking about chess. We ain’t talking about magic. We’re talking about chess, man.

Notalk’s Notes:

Small terminology change:

Head of the Tower of Magic → Master of the Tower of Magic / Tower Master

The man is referred to by this title constantly, so we wanted a short form that sounded good. So it was a toss-up between “Tower Head” and “Tower Master”, and we decided “Master” sounded better.

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**Translator: Notalk
Rewriter: MrScaryMuffin**

“Are you from the North Sea region?” asked Zod."

“No,” Desir replied, “but I used to have an acquaintance from that region." It’s thanks to them that I mastered the North Sea rules." ”

“Sounds like you had no choice but to learn it." ”

“That was indeed the case." ”

“It must have been rough." The North Sea rules are difficult." ”

“It certainly was." ”

Zod’s body language seemed to relax." And it wasn’t just wishful thinking on Desir’s part." Compared to just moments prior, Zod’s sense of urgency had eased off significantly." This was no doubt due to Desir mentioning the ruleset that originated from Zod’s homeland."

“Very well,” said Zod, “we shall play with the North Sea rules." ”

Zod flipped the chessboard over, then widened the board on both sides." The usual square board was now lengthened horizontally."

The North Sea rules differed from regular chess in several ways." There were five more rows and columns, which came with additional pieces for each added column." As a result, there are four bishops and knights on each side." Furthermore, there were two warship pieces instead of the queen, referencing the naval background of the North Sea region." In fact, the ruleset included many characteristics meant to emulate actual warfare."

For example, if a pawn does not move for a turn, it may establish a supply line." Supply lines allow pieces within it to move twice in one turn." It was a different take on chess, to the extent that one could say that it was a completely different game that just happened to use chess pieces."

“Good luck." ”

“Same, let’s have a good game." ”

The clock struck four o’clock as the chess match between Tower Master Zod and Desir began."

Both contenders were evenly matched through the opening." Zod carefully surveyed the chessboard, his eyes calmly analyzing the position." Zod’s pieces were perfectly synchronized." The bishops was on the offensive, supported by the knights, making room for a pawn push." Meanwhile, the rooks anchored the formation, defending the sides of the warships." It was a sophisticated defensive position with no gaps in sight."

In stark contrast, Desir’s pieces had no organization at all." The warships were in the back, the pawns interfered with the knight’s movements, and the arrangement of the rooks were in disarray." Dysfunctionality was the theme that permeated on Desir’s side of the board."

Despite this disparity, the match was in a deadlock." However, Desir would be the one to contest that deadlock." Pushing a pawn forward, he challenged Zod’s own pawn."

‘!?’

Without hesitation, Desir’s pawn cut down its opponent, threatening Zod’s defensive position and earning some praise from Zod."

“I must compliment you on your bold strategy,” commented Zod as he used a knight to knock off Desir’s pawn from the board." Unfazed, Desir continued the exchange using his rook to retake the knight."

“However,” continued Zod, “I’m afraid you are too hasty." ” Following his calculated moves, Zod took a bishop from the opposite side of the board and knocked off Desir’s rook, ending the first major exchange of the game."

In this war of attrition, Desir’s side was considerably more battered." Early on, he had lost a knight and was now even further down on the exchange." However, the piece sacrifices were not in vain." The western side of the board, where Zod’s bishop originated, was no longer impenetrable."

Desir advanced his pawn, taking advantage of the defensive gap." Zod attempted a response, but Desir had already positioned his warship early on to take advantage of that gap." Thus, Desir’s mighty warship broke through Zod’s defenses." In an instant, the defense was overrun and the western side of the board was in shambles."

Zod looked at Desir in surprise."

‘He’s pretty good." He’s skilled for sure, but he’s still just a student." ’

From the ruined defensive formation, Zod had positioned a knight near some pawns for a special tactic." Desir had positioned his pieces to quickly penetrate through Zod’s defenses, but left himself open to a counterattack as a consequence." With a decisive move, Zod tore apart Desir’s supply lines, preventing him from moving quickly and allowing Zod to calmly and efficiently capture isolated pieces."

Try as he might, Desir was unable to stop the counterattack." His warship was surrounded by pawns and ultimately fell to Zod’s bishop."

It was a successful counter-offensive." Desir had lost many pieces and would need to regroup before he could make another play." It was the perfect time for Zod to go on full offense."

In North Sea rules, when a player sinks a warship, they are granted another turn." Zod utilized this extra move to advance his front line, taking advantage of the supply lines created by his pawns." Desir tried to disrupt the supply lines with his own pieces, but were blocked by the opposing knight."

Zod advanced his pieces methodically." With his supply line securely defended, his army was able to move forward in a tight formation." In just five short turns, there was a huge supply line that was stretched diagonally across the playing field."

“Hmm…” Desir paused to think." He was definitely at a disadvantage." Zod’s supply line was particularly bothersome." Through this supply line, Zod’s pieces were able to maneuver nimbly through Desir’s front line." It was a fierce match."

Without missing a beat, Desir repelled Zod’s invasion with his own pieces." Sparks flew as the front lines clashed and held their ground." Desir’s positioning neither focused on offense or defense." It was almost nonsensical."

Zod, on the other hand, was focused on his attack." He concentrated his pieces on a single square and broke past Desir’s defenses, successfully penetrating the formation." The casualty of this attack was a bishop and disruption of Desir’s pawn formation." Zod then followed up by capturing two of Desir’s remaining three knights." Victory did not seem far away."

Desir made an attempt to halt the advance, but it was not sufficient." Zod’s pieces moved in sync, preventing any counter play." His rook supported his pawns as they invaded and established a new supply line, further increasing his advantage." Zod’s play was methodical, calmly creating a siege line while simultaneously pressuring with an attack."

Ignoring the danger posed to his other pieces, Desir chose to retreat his warship first." Even then, it was horribly outnumbered."

‘It’s over,‘ thought Zod." Desir’s initial attack was strong, but that was all he offered this game." As the Tower Master expected, the young student was no match for him." Though the game was enjoyable, it was time to finish the match."

As Zod was about to reach for a piece, Desir, who had not said a word throughout the entire game, finally spoke."

“Would you like to make a wager?”

“A wager?”

“That’s correct." If something was at stake, we would try our hardest, right?”

Zod immediately understood Desir’s intent." A normal person would not refuse a reward of 120 gold pieces and ask for a chess game instead." There were definitely ulterior motives at work."

Zod’s lip curled into a smile." Building up expectations for Desir’s request, Zod asked, “What sort of wager did you have in mind?”

“Let’s keep it simple." How about if the loser has to fulfill one request from the winner?”

It was a simple wager." However, the stakes were outrageous."

“What exactly could I request from you?” bemused Zod, “what could a student like yourself offer to me, the Tower Master?”

“You could have me work in the Tower of Magic? Despite appearances, I am first among the Single Rankers, even though I am a first year student." When it comes to magic, I am confident that I am second to none." ’

“That’s fair." In that case, my request to you will be that you come work for the Magic Engineering Department immediately after graduation." ” Zod, knowing Desir’s background, decided his request without hesitation."

“Isn’t a guaranteed job more beneficial to me?” asked Desir."

“You’re still a first year student and you’re already talented enough to be a Single Ranker." For the Tower of Magic to acquire such a talent without needing to invest in scouting is beneficial enough for us, don’t you think?”

“I see." I guess it’s my turn to state my request." ”

“Hold on." Before I hear your request, I must say one thing." ” Zod held up a hand, anticipating Desir’s request, “I refuse to provide sponsorship." ”

“You are being very thorough, I see." ”

“Of course." Rules are rules, there will be no exceptions." The application period has already passed and I can’t give you an exception." Rules are important." ”

“I agree wholeheartedly that rules are important." So there is no need for you to be concerned with such matters." I’ve said this many times already, but I have no intention of seeking sponsorship." ”

“Is that so? Then I am very curious as to what your request is." ” Zod could not hide the fact that his interest was piqued." “You somehow obtained information on an Outers raid and were instrumental in stopping them." Then, you refused the reward of 120 gold and asked for a chess game with me instead." Finally, you elected to play with the North Sea rules, which you must have known somehow was from my homeland." What kind of request is worth all that effort? Aside from sponsorship, I have no idea." ”

It was more of a statement than a question." A declaration that Zod was fully aware of Desir’s every action thus far." Unfazed, Desir continued."

“I didn’t think that you would be that curious about my request." Since that is the case, how about I keep it to myself for now so that you can savor the moment? After all, the most anticipated gift is the one you unwrap last." ”

“That’s a good analogy." I like it." I’ll entertain your offer then." ”

Confident in his victory, Zod didn’t see the need to continue questioning Desir." Zod wasn’t being conceited." Anyone looking at the state of the chessboard would say that the game was clearly in Zod’s favor." Desir only had six pawns, two rooks, one bishop, and one king remaining." All of his knights were eliminated." It would not have been unusual for a player to resign at this point."

Desir himself knew this, but he was not ready to throw in the towel."

‘As expected, a genius is a genius,’ admired Desir." ‘This position is no joke." What’s scary is that, even though he’s ahead, he’s not letting up one bit." ’

In terms of skill, Zod was definitely the better player." This was true in the current moment as well as in Desir’s past." In his past life, Desir had already played chess against Zod many times."

The survivors of the Shadow Labyrinth all had their own hobbies." It was something required to help them hold onto their sanity on that brutal battlefield." For Pram, it was cooking, though the choice of ingredients was slim." For Romantica, it was singing." For Saintess Priscilla, prayer."

And for Desir and Zod, it was chess."

The two of them carved out chess pieces from rocks and a chessboard from a boulder." When it came to the ruleset, Desir wanted to use the Hebrion rules, but Zod insisted on the North Sea rules." In the end, Zod had his way and Desir bitterly learnt the North Sea ruleset."

‘It truly was rough." ’

He had to learn and adapt to the extra pieces, the new warship piece, and a slew of special rules." How many days did it take before the unfamiliar rules felt natural? Desir could not recall." Eventually, however, Desir did master the ruleset and was able to play against Zod in earnest."

And was defeated."

Absolutely crushed."

Like a toddler, who just learned to walk, having a race against a professional sprinter, the difference in skill and ability was large." It was a scenario where a more sympathetic player may let the newer player win a game now and then in order to encourage them." However, despite the disparity in skill and experience, not once did Zod allow Desir to win." Not a single game in six years."

Naturally, playing against the same opponent repeatedly for six years would result in familiar positions and patterns emerging." Over time, Desir saw every strategy Zod had to offer and eventually got to the point where he was no longer being crushed and could barely hold on against him."

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**Translator: Notalk
Rewriter: MrScaryMuffin**

The sound of Zod making his move brought Desir’s attention back to the present."

While he was reminiscing about his previous life that happened in the future, he was driven into a corner in less than 100 moves by the Zod in front of him who existed 13 years in the past."

This was to be expected, as Zod’s skill did not change much between the two timeframes." However, for Desir, the bigger reason he was struggling was Zod’s mentality." As the future Zod had lived through a harsh battlefield, his moves tended to be more aggressive and domineering as a result." The current Zod, on the other hand, was more reserved and focused on counterplay."

Desir, who was expecting the future Zod’s style of play, found himself unable to read the opponent in front of him." So instead, Desir offered one piece after another in order to analyze the current Zod." As a result, he was close to losing."

The pieces were not thrown away wastefully, however." He had sacrificed pieces to test Zod’s reactions while making sure to keep enough pieces on the board to mount a comeback." This had been Desir’s plan all along." It was a playstyle that was unique to him."

The current Zod must have some habits that were shared with his future counterpart." Desir gladly sacrificed his pieces in order to find these habits." Discovering them meant that he would be able to predict Zod’s next moves."

‘I did manage to figure him out, but…’ with his last knight captured, Desir was barely able to stay half a step ahead of Zod, ‘if I’m at this much of a disadvantage, I won’t be able to make a comeback even if I could predict his moves." ’

That would definitely have been the case if the situation was normal." However, there was a variable in this match that was out of the ordinary."

“It’s your turn,” Zod prompted him and Desir made a move in reply, using his warship to block off the only path to his king." Zod finally understood why Desir pulled his warship all the way back and sacrificed his other pieces." The warship’s defense was the best out of all the pieces." If it was a frontal attack, the warship could thwart it completely simply by existing."

“How persistent." The match is already decided." ”

“Even so, I’d like to play it out and hold on with all I have." ”

“…But I don’t think anything you do can affect the outcome." ”

“You never know what will happen until the end." ”

“So you say." ”

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It was Zod’s turn." His fingers idly played with the pile of pieces that he’d captured from Desir."

‘First move the knights back, then regroup to slowly corner him,’ thought Zod." ‘That should break his defense, even if he has a warship." Take out the warship and the game is over." ’

The only issue was, he would need at least 30 turns to execute this plan." 30 turns was an issue."

‘There is no time,’ Zod glanced at his watch and fiddled with his pieces anxiously." The time was 4:22." The meeting was starting at 4:27, meaning he had less than five minutes left." Not enough time for 30 turns." ‘In that case, I need to end this quickly." ’

Desir’s king was right in front of the knight, less than three spaces away." If Zod was able to advance and take down the king, the game would be over."

‘I could go for the win with just my knights,’ Zod was confident that he didn’t need 30 turns to win." ‘First, attack the warship with my knight and then use the other knights to mate the king." ’

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Desir smiled with satisfaction as Zod advanced his knight."

‘He got greedy, as expected." ’

Zod was feeling the pressure of the time constraints and had made the worst move possible." It was exactly what Desir was waiting for."

‘The winner was decided the moment you told me that you only had 27 minutes to play." ’

Desir’s following moves would have seemed confusing to spectators, as he repositioned his pieces without concern for the danger posed to his king." However, Zod was able to figure out Desir’s intent unbelievably quickly."

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‘He’s changing formations,’ Zod thought."

Up until now, Desir had not fully committed to either offense or defense." His pieces were scattered across the board, almost randomly." It was the main reason why Zod had been able to break Desir’s defenses."

‘Changing formation is definitely the correct play, but…’ Having already pinned Desir as a weaker player, Zod was unperturbed." Shaking his head, he thought, ‘It’s too late now to try changing formations." ’

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At the same time, Desir was thinking, ‘He’s thinking that it’s too late." That’s a big mistake." ’

With a few quick moves, Desir regrouped his knights and rooks in the center of the board, blocking in Zod’s knights from three sides." The scattered formation had transformed into an encirclement and a tight defensive line was created in an instant."

Desir’s aimless-looking positioning was in fact deliberate and calculated, ready to switch to offense or defense in response to Zod’s play."

“Hm?” Zod watched as Desir created a concentrated attack using a pawn and a rook, with the warship as their lead." Despite being cornered, Desir poured all his available resources into attacking the knight." There was no way Zod could stop all these pieces with only a knight."

“This…what!?”

The comeback had begun." Desir’s pawns easily thwarted the knight’s attack and pushed toward Zod’s warship." His rook joined the fight and crushed the supply lines." In a blink of an eye, every one of Zod’s knights were destroyed."

‘It’s too late now even if he’s realized his mistake." ’ Desir reorganized his pieces again." Within three turns, his formation flipped from defense to offense." All of Desir’s pieces rushed to invade Zod’s territory."

Zod maneuvered his pieces to the center to defend, intending to clash head on with Desir’s forces."

‘He should be reeling from losing his knights, but he still has enough pieces remaining to push me back." ’

As if he was mocking Zod’s efforts, Desir turned his pieces west just before the two sides collided." Their new target was…Zod’s isolated warship."

‘Zod doesn’t like using his warships to attack." The fact that he never used them, even when he had the lead, proves this." ’

Zod’s warship sunk under the concentrated attack." As noted before, a player gains an extra turn after destroying a warship." Desir used this extra turn to seize Zod’s supply line." The supply line that Zod had so carefully built up was now in Desir’s hands."

‘I’ll focus my attacks on the weakened western front." ’ Following the destruction of the warship, Desir’s pieces flanked Zod from the west." Zod attempted to turn his pieces around, but without his knights, he was too slow to respond." As a result, Zod’s left side was routed."

Zod pulled pieces away from his eastern front to strike at Desir’s supply line." However, Desir’s warship, which was no longer needed to defend his king, was already in position to repel the attack." Desir was already familiar with Zod’s habit of targeting supply lines."

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‘He’s got me." ’ A chill ran down Zod’s spine." He tried to pull back his soldiers from the supply line attack, but it was too late." He had already committed too many moves to the attack." In the meanwhile, Desir had taken all of Zod’s pawns, which were vital for maneuvering his troops."

There were too many fires to put out." In a last ditch move, Zod pushed in all of his pieces, not just the center ones, toward Desir’s king."

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Seeing Zod’s tactic, Desir was now certain of his win."

‘Too hasty." Such a quick push leaves many of your pieces hanging." ’ It was rare to see Zod, who had always strived for perfection, panic and lose his composure."

Desir could see the path to victory." One by one, he picked off Zod’s scattered pieces." The material advantage that Zod held throughout the game was lost in the blink of an eye." Finally, Zod’s other warship fell."

“Check." ”

It was 4:25."

The Master of the Tower of Magic tipped over his king."

“It’s my loss." ”

Zod’s Pad vibrated." He glanced at the screen and told Desir, “My secretary." ”

“Ah, please take the call then." Don’t mind me." ”

“Thank you." ” Zod pushed a button and a gentle female voice spoke."

— “Sir, the meeting begins in three minutes." You should come out soon." ”

“Ah, I will be there shortly." Please wait a moment." ”

Zod ended his conversation with the push of another button on the Pad." He tapped the chessboard with his bejeweled fingers."

“I didn’t think I would lose,” Zod said, with a hint of satisfaction in his voice."

“You would have won if there was no time limit, sir." ”

“Spare me your sympathy." ” Zod pushed the chessboard aside." “Now let’s hear it." What is your request?”

“My request is a deal." An equal exchange." ”

“A deal?”

“Yes, a deal." ”

“A deal…and what would be the specifics of this deal?”

“I have an idea that I can give you in exchange for support on the level of the Tower of Magic’s sponsorship." ”

Zod arched an eyebrow."

“So not an unconditional support." I suppose it doesn’t violate our agreement if it’s an equal exchange…” Zod thought for a moment before shaking his head, “How troublesome." I find this request disagreeable." ”

“You lost the wager, sir." ”

“That I did." So I must honor a request from you." But what you’re requesting here is a deal." An equal exchange." How is this equal?” Zod spoke calmly, “Think about it, Desir." It’s equal if both parties gauge the things being exchanged to have the same value." An idea from a single student versus the backing of the greatest corporation? This is not a deal." ”

“Even if there is a bit of difference in value, you’re obligated to honor my request." ”

“The difference in value here is not trivial." You’re asking to exchange a bar of gold for a peanut." You cannot call that a deal." Though we would be using a loophole, it is basically the same as an unconditional sponsorship, which we agreed is off the table."

“You can say that I’m being cheap." I know you want the Tower of Magic’s sponsorship, but this is too unreasonable." I’d ask you to make a different request." ” The Tower Master continued after a moment of silence, “If you can’t think of anything, I’ll make a suggestion." Request for a bigger reward for fending off the Outers’ raid." I can accept that." If you make that request, I’ll offer you funds equal in value to the 2nd tier magic crystal you recovered." From now until your graduation, I’ll donate 120 gold to your party every month." ”

Editor’s Rant: Can I just say how disappointed I am? As a chess enthusiast, I was happy to tackle chapter 30 and 31." I was hoping for a description of a game that I could imagine and follow along in my head, even with its nonsensical ruleset (apparently it matters which way your pieces are facing in North Sea chess? That’s not going to be problematic :p)." Instead, author-nim denied me of this pleasure by putting in zero effort to create an actual coherent series of events."

How is it that Desir is reduced to “six pawns, two rooks, one bishop, and one king” and then suddenly has a warship available to defend? How can you say that all of Desir’s knights were destroyed and then give at least two back to him for his counterattack? Is Desir cheating? Did he decide to promote a pawn into a knight? Desir can’t be \*that\* big of an idiot…

Of course, we could hand wave this a bit and say that the inconsistencies are a result of some unknown aspect of the North Sea ruleset, but that would be giving too much credit to author-nim." At the end of the day, I was just a bit disappointed in the perceived laziness on display in these two chapters." If anyone out there wants to play some chess, send me (MrScaryMuffin) a challenge on lichess." org."

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**Translator: Notalk
Rewriter: Wynn**

It was an incredible offer." With the 28 months to Desir’s graduation, the total amount of money he would receive was…

“3360 gold, by my calculations—that should be sufficient to show that your efforts haven’t been in vain." By winning a chess game, you have increased your reward 28 times over." With that, I wouldn’t be going against my word, and you would more or less have a sponsorship." ” Zod stared firmly at Desir, awaiting his approval."

“Those are very favorable terms." I almost want to accept immediately,” said Desir, shaking his head." “But that won’t change my request." I want to make a deal." ”

Zod expressed disdain at the boy’s choice." “I expected you to choose more wisely." You’ve rejected my offer, and I can’t accept your deal." With that, the negotiations are over." ” The man rose to get up from his seat."

“No, Tower Master." Let’s clear this up first." It’s not that you can’t accept the deal—it’s that you can’t accept the deal at a loss." ” At face value, this was evidently the case." “However, this means you would accept the deal if it is equivalent exchange." ”

“So you think this is a fair deal." ” The Tower Master was audibly upset by Desir’s words."

Desir saw the flaws." There’s no way that anybody from the outside looking in would see this as fair." It was preposterous." He immediately went to appease his old colleague."

“I understand completely where you’re coming from, Mister Exarion." A mere student’s idea versus the Tower of Magic’s sponsorship." Logically speaking, there is no way that anybody would see this as fair." ”

Desir rose from his seat and toyed with the warship piece from the chess board." “But you of all people should know better than anybody else that there are plenty of things outside the realm of logic." For instance, a 20-year-old man becoming the Tower Master after developing the Enchant technique." Or maybe even less likely, a student of Hebrion Academy defeating the Tower Master in a game of chess." ”

“What are you trying to say, then?” Zod was not impressed, and waited for Desir to quickly get to the point."

“Regardless of how illogical it may seem, this deal is quite fair." If I must, I can prove it right now." Would you like to stay awhile and listen?” Desir placed the warship directly in front of Zod as he waited for an answer."

“…Prove it." ” Zod crossed his arms, and gave him one chance to explain himself."

Desir took in his surroundings." Bookshelves lined the walls of the entire room." The chess board they just played with lied on top of the desk, illuminated by a lamp as well as various magic crystals strewn about." He walked toward the desk and picked up one of the magic crystals." None of the crystals were enchanted, which left them unusable." Desir surrounded the magic crystal in a cocoon of his mana, and it began pulsating."

A sound rang out from the crystal, like a musical chord." Desir began vibrating his mana particles one by one, and displayed his unique control over mana." ‘Slowly, lock on to the frequency." ’ Second by second, Desir slowly raised the mana’s frequency bit by bit until the whirring sound from the magic crystal began to vibrate more fiercely than before, and it reverberated back and forth."

A look of shock appeared on Zod’s face." ‘He influenced the crystal’s internal mana without using the Enchant method?’ Based on his theory, this was impossible." If he didn’t see if in front of his eyes, he wouldn’t believe it himself."

Desir paid him no heed." The internal mana continued whirling around violently, growing exponentially stronger." It spun vigorously, forming a perfect circle." As soon as Desir felt it reach its peak, he said two simple words." “It’s over." ”

The Tower Master’s mouth was still agape." “It’s over?”

“Yes." That’s all." ” Desir threw the magic crystal at Zod."

Zod caught the magic crystal, still having difficulty wrapping his head around what just ensued." The magic crystal looked exactly the same, aside from the internal mana perpetually looping." Bewildered, he looked at Desir and asked, “What did you do?”

The answer he was looking for didn’t come from Desir, but from the magic crystal."

— “Sir? Is there an issue?”

Zod nearly dropped the crystal upon hearing his secretary’s voice."

— “More importantly, there is less than one minute until your meeting." ”

The voice continued speaking."

“It can also be used as a transmitter,” explained Desir nonchalantly."

Zod stood in a daze at the news." The 7th circle magician chose his next words very carefully." His voice trembled as he said, “I’ll call you back in a moment." ” Gently placing the magic crystal on the table, he turned back to Desir." “I’m going to need an explanation." ”

“As you can see, I placed a communication spell on the magic crystal." When you took her call earlier, I confirmed your secretary’s number—“

“I can tell that much." I’m asking how you placed the spell on the crystal without enchanting it." ” Zod’s eyes were intent, searching for any clues he could find from this student who just blew his theory wide open."

“Each and every mana particle has something called a unique frequency." If you can tune these frequencies with that of other mana particles, you can make them harmonize with each other, creating a mana resonance." ”

And it was that unique phenomenon that hadn’t been discovered yet in this age."

“This mana resonance can be applied to a myriad of objects—a magic crystal is no exception." If you vibrate its surroundings at the same frequency as the mana, the vibration allows it to travel out through the exterior mana shell, creating this kind of mana resonance." ” Desir took the crystal back from Zod, and once again displayed how it worked." “If you spin the surrounding mana, the stored mana spins with it." Once the rotations reach a critical point, the interior mana settles into a circular form." This form is often referred to as ‘Circles’, and with this—“

“You can activate as many spells as you want, even without the enchanting process." ”

“Exactly." ” Desir clenched the activated magic crystal in his hand." “The applications are endless." As long as the mana allows, you can activate dozens of spells at once." This means that we don’t have to pointlessly deplete our magic crystals, and does away with the Enchant method’s greatest flaw."

“With this technology, the Outers would have had no chance of breaking through your front gates." The Enchant method leaves you with the vulnerability of needing to choose between a physical and magical barrier, but this opens up a range of possibilities." Even if your circle is low, this method allows you to access the full breadth of magic as long as you have a magic crystal powerful enough." ”

This was only the beginning." Using this method, countless techniques could be developed."

Zod spoke, his voice shaking." “Did you discover this?”

“I know of it." ” Desir didn’t give a straight answer; in reality, Zod was the one who created this technique in the future, not him."

3 years into the Shadow Labyrinth, Zod Exarion discovered mana resonance and it overturned his fundamental understanding of magic engineering." From there, he kept expanding on his theory, eventually allowing somebody to use a magic crystal without the Enchant method." This discovery led to humanity acquiring techniques to survive in the Shadow Labyrinth." Driven into a corner, humanity had no choice but to innovate and bring these discoveries to light."

After returning to the past, Desir thought about bringing the techniques from the future to this age." If all of the knowledge gained from their desperate struggle could be brought back to the past, maybe it would increase the chances of clearing the Shadow Labyrinth." ‘With the Tower of Magic’s ability, they would be able to bring these techniques to life." ’

That was it."

Desir wasn’t here to receive support; he was here supporting them." When the Tower Master compared the deal to exchanging a gold bar for a peanut, he was correct." However, he didn’t realize where he stood."

“This is extremely surprising—it will rewrite the history of magic engineering as we know it." ” Zod’s mind was hundreds of miles away, thinking about all of the possibilities that this could produce."

“I’m glad to hear it, Tower Master." But I just want you to know—this is only a small portion of the ideas that I have." I am willing to offer you every technique that I know of, and the Tower of Magic can use them in their products." All I ask in return is that you sponsor my party with items made using these techniques." This is my offer." ”

Zod’s snapped back into focus as he heard Desir’s words."

“A small portion…” Zod turned on his Pad without the slightest hesitation." “Secretary, cancel the meeting." ”

— “Sir? But—“

The secretary was shocked."

“No—not the meeting." Cancel everything until I say otherwise." ”

— “Sir! What are you talking about? You have over twenty appointments to attend to!”

“Tell Hephatus to take care of it." I’m going to hang up now." You likely won’t be able to contact me for the next two or so hours." ”

Beep."

“Now that the tiresome time limit is gone, we have the opportunity to discuss at length." ” Zod looked lively and ravenous for more information."

“I take it that you’re accepting the deal?” asked Desir."

“I should hope so, lest I’ve gone mad." ” The Tower Master laughed mockingly at himself and held his outstretched hand to Desir."

“This way, Mr." Desir!” Pram called out to the party leader and waved enthusiastically."

Desir joined them at the table and looked around." This was a rare sight even in the capital." “So you managed to find a place like this." An ice cream store, huh." ”

“Hmph." Country bumpkin." ” said Romantica with a haughty expression." “Baskin-Rise 79 is a must-see if you ever visit Altaea! You can’t leave the city without trying Very Berry Strawberry and Cotton Candy! They’re to die for!”

Desir had a little chuckle at Romantica’s words." “So you’re telling me to order those, right?” He waved down the waiter and made his order as Pram asked him about his meeting."

“Did it go well, Mr." Desir?”

“Of course, It’s all sorted out." ” Desir chuckled and thought to himself how cute Pram was."

“Phew." That’s a relief." ”

“A relief to be sure, but…” Romantica took a big breath." “Could you explain?”

“What do you want me to explain?”

“The reason you refused the 120 gold reward." In all honesty, I can’t possibly imagine why you gave up 120 gold to play chess." ”

“Ah, that." The main objective wasn’t to play chess with the Tower Master, but an excuse to meet him." My real objective was to ask for support, and as I said before, everything is sorted out." For now, we have support on the level of a sponsorship." ”

“Wow!” Pram jumped up in the air in celebration." To think that the lofty Tower Master had given them his support!

Romantica looked at Desir, suspicious." There was no way that he did this legitimately." “Did you figure out his weakness or something? Is he corrupt, or experimenting with living creatures? Knowing you, you must have blackmailed him…” She shivered, thinking of what the Tower Master might have gone through."

“Just what kind of person do you think I am!?” exclaimed Desir."

Romantica grimaced at Desir." “A complete sadist." I’m definitely not the only one who thinks so." Pram, tell him." ”

“M-mister Desir, you sh-shouldn’t bl-blackmail people." It’s not good…”

“Et tu, Pram?” Desir fell to his knees."

“Heheh." It’s a joke, Mister Desir." I believe in you." ” Pram stuck his tongue out, smiling playfully." He looked so cute that the other two couldn’t help but smile."

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**Translator: Billy Stevens
Rewriter: Wynn**

The mood to interrogate Desir evaporated away." Romantica finally came to realize what Pram had said." “Hey Pram—that’s a betrayal!”

“But Mr." Desir isn’t like that." ” His gaze shifted from to his party leader, and Desir nodded in response."

“That’s right." Pram is completely correct." I didn’t get this for free—I made a deal with the Tower Master." ” Desir then began to explain the sequence of events that had occurred." In order to hide the fact that he had returned, he mixed truth and lies to fabricate a story."

As Desir finished telling his anecdote, Romantica still seemed to be deep in thought." It looked like she still had some reservations." Right at that moment, the ice cream they had ordered arrived." Desir grabbed a spoon of ice cream, and offered it to Romantica." “How about we eat the ice cream before it melts?”

“I guess it could be worse." ” Realizing that nothing could be done, Romantica took the ice cream from Desir, and it softly melted away in her mouth." “Sweet." ”

Pram nodded enthusiastically in agreement." “It’s tasty!”

“While I was in the Tower of Magic, I guess you two have been exploring the city?”

“Yup." It’s been good." As you’d expect from a tourist city, the shopping is great but in the rush to get here, I forgot to bring my money with me." ” Romantica clenched her fists in frustration."

‘Is it that upsetting? She didn’t make any sense to him."

“How about you, Pram?”

“There are so many fun looking rides! The gondola ride that follows the river! The pendulum ride! Mm… and there was this place… it was called a themepork?”

“Theme park." ”

“Ah yes! The theme park place! That place was amazing, and I definitely want to go see it! It’s too bad that we didn’t have any money for the entry fee." ” Pram slumped at the thought."

Desir lowered his spoon and spoke to his party members." “Well, after we finish eating, let’s head out to do some shopping and go to the theme park." ”

“What about the money?” asked Romantica."

Desir smiled as he reached inside his jacket and pulled out a black card rimmed with gold." “You don’t have to worry about that." The Tower Master gave me his credit card." It looks since we came all the way here, he wanted us to have a good time." ”

Pram and Romantica hugged each other in joy." At times like these, they acted like the closest of friends."

“The clothing store first!” demanded Romantica."

“No! The theme park!” rebutted Pram."

Pram and Romantica fought over where the party was going to go first, and their voices kept clamoring as Desir tried to pacify them." “Firstly, let’s finish eating the ice cream be—“

Before he could finish his sentence, the two of them immediately jumped on the ice cream like a swarm of locusts." As soon as they finished, they got ready to go in an instant, and threw open the doors on their way out." The two of them were waiting by the door expectantly for Desir." Romantica was tapping her foot impatiently and Pram was bouncing off the walls."

“Come on! What are you doing, Desir? Let’s go!” complained Romantica."

“I’ll pay for the ice cream and meet you guys outside." ”

“Hurry up!” Pram and Romantica stepped outside with their last words trailing behind them." Seeing their smiling faces made Desir smile." It was the greatest reward he could ask for."

At that moment, the store clerk tapped Desir on the shoulder." “Sir, how will you be paying today?”

Desir handed the clerk the credit card and the transaction was handled quickly." Before he left, he asked the store clerk to borrow a pen." With it, he pulled out a piece of paper from his pocket and crossed two lines out: the Tower of Magic incident and the sponsorship."

4 Points." Tower of Magic Sponsorship Announcement – July 5th

3 Points." Attack on Tower of Magic’s Aeurelli Branch – July 7th

“And the most important event…” Desir’s eyes were fixed, and underlined the event to emphasize it."

6 Points." Emergence of the Shadow World – July 20th

Today was July 7th—exactly two weeks left until the Emergence of the Shadow World."

“Based on how much time we have left, we need to start training…” His voice trailed off as he looked outside." Romantica and Pram were chatting and laughing with each other." “Well, I suppose we can take one day off." ”

For today, he would show them mercy—for the next two weeks, they better be ready to go through hell."

While Desir’s party enjoyed their time off, a ball was being held in the main hall of Hebrion Academy." The corridors were beautifully illuminated, and an endless stream of exotic dishes were ushered out into the ballroom."

“Today is a joyous day,” said Professor Nifleka."

About a hundred people were gathered in the hall, ranging from officials from the Tower of Magic, professors close to Nifleka, and the higher ups of the Blue Moon party." The ball was in celebration of the Blue Moon party’s third consecutive sponsorship from the Tower of Magic." Nifleka gestured towards the Tower of Magic as he spoke to the group."

“Our party has once again acquired the support of the Tower." I can confidently say that our party is the strongest party in all of history." Despite the recent unfortunate events, the Blue Moon party has always stood on top." ”

Nifleka raised his golden goblet." “But this is only the beginning." In Hebrion’s history, we stand at the top." The finest party consisting of only nobles." A party that no commoner would dare even look up to!”

Fanatical cheers and roaring applause filled the room in response to his words." Nifleka was one of the most influential professors at Hebrion Academy." He stepped away from values such as equality like Professor Brigitte." Instead, he prioritized lineage and ostracized commoners, almost violently." As a result, he was heavily disliked by the Beta Class students, but a vast majority of the Alpha Class students supported him." Hebrion Academy did not advocate against equality and education, but Nifleka had a lot of sway—not even the academy could do as they wished when he was in the mix."

Ajest Kingscrown’s eyes turned cold as she observed the infamous Professor Pugman Nifleka."

“Now rejoice! Drink to your heart’s content! For the nobles!” exclaimed Professor Nifleka."

Enthusiastic cheers erupted from the crowd." The sound of glasses clinking toasting the Blue Moon party and their advisor rang across the hall." Ajest closed her eyes and did her best to ignore the ruckus." Her head throbbed—frankly, falling asleep right now wouldn’t be too bad." At the very least, it would mean she didn’t have to listen to his spiel."

“My, my." If it isn’t Miss Ajest." ”

Of course that didn’t happen." A young man recognized her and politely greeted her." Like moths to a flame, soon a large gathering of people assembled around the prodigal spellsword."

“By the grace of God above, what an opportunity it is to meet you!”

“The future of the Blue Moon party lies within your hands." ”

At first, there were just one or two, but soon enough, nearly a dozen people crowded around her clamoring for her attention." Their words were a typhoon, their words rising like a tidal wave and threatening to submerge her completely." Ajest, irritated and aloof, offered no response."

“I wish to go out for a second." Please excuse me." ” Her words were drowned out by the wealth of praise she was being showered with." With every moment, she was getting more and more fed up with the group of people besieging her." As she was about to burst, a man attracted the crowd’s attention with a few simple words."

“A lone lady surrounded by so many people." How terribly rude of you." ”

In response to the new stranger’s jab, somebody from the crowd demanded to know who they were."

“Elheim Triquincy, at your service." I had a previous engagement with Miss Kingscrown, and was wondering where she was." ”

Elheim Triquincy—4th Circle ice mage, mentor of Ajest Kingscrown."

Ajest raised her head, and their eyes met."

“Remember? We were supposed to meet on the terrace as mentor and student,” asked Elheim." He certainly had tact, in planning the escape path for his student without causing any misunderstandings." Ajest nodded her head in agreement."

“The terrace is this way,” said Elheim as he led Ajest away from the party, to her relief."

The atmosphere here was much more relaxed, with the music fading to the background and in lieu of the fervor and hubbub of the party, a breeze indicating a lazy summer night was blowing." Finally away from the party, Ajest relaxed."

“You didn’t enjoy the party?” asked Elheim."

Ajest shook her head in response, and Elheim agreed." “Truthfully, I am the same." I do enjoy parties, but this kind of party is a bit unpleasant." ” The powerful ice mage downed his drink."

“I’m surprised." I know that you don’t like commoners very much,” admitted Ajest."

“That’s right." As it is, my family is in support of the Crown." However, I keep these thoughts to myself—I don’t express it in such a public manner." ” explained Elheim." The Triquincy family supports the Crown, and were not fond of commoners, but even so, Nifleka was too radical." “As far as I’m concerned, I have no idea what Professor Nifleka is thinking." ”

“He has his own agenda and plans for giving that speech." ” said Ajest."

“What do you mean by his own agenda?”

“That overwhelming sense of superiority as a noble, and the fear that you may one day be overthrown." The slightest bit of stimulation, and they immediately go crazy." That’s what Nifleka’s making use of." ” Ajest glanced back in the direction of the party." For instance, there was Doneta Hadun, who saw Nifleka through rose-tinted glasses." He was one of the fanatics that hung onto the professor’s every word."

Elheim just couldn’t understand one thing." “What does he have to gain from all of this?”

“If you think about who he has gathered here, it’s easy to determine." Nearly all of the students here are Alpha Class, who vehemently support him." By setting their hearts aflame, he’s assimilated them all into his fold." And if you think about the Alpha Class having the right to vote in the headmaster election, it all becomes abundantly clear." ”

Elheim’s eyes grew wide at the sudden realization." “He’s wants to become the headmaster…” To control everything at Hebrion Academy— in addition to the alumni, it was a position that manages nearly a million mages and knights, with power equal to the prime minister."

That was why the heir to the Nifleka family came to Hebrion Academy."

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**Translator: Notalkt, Naturalrice
Rewriter: Wynn**

Ajest elaborated further." “He’s almost reached his goal already." He leads Hebrion’s strongest party and is a candidate for the headmaster’s position." The majority of the Alpha Class students support him." All he’s waiting for is for the current dean to step down." ”

“You speak as if you know him very well." ”

Ajest bit her lip." “That is…”

Elheim didn’t pry any further, and sighed." “In any case, Professor Nifleka becoming headmaster will result in a slew of potential problems." He might even repeat the actions of Duke Nifleka from over a decade ago." ”

12 years ago, the Nifleka family was a mere count’s family, but during the conflict between the Republic and the monarchy, they rapidly rose in status to become a duchy."

Count Nifleka personally led a troupe of knights into the Republic-controlled capital and slaughtered all of the rebels before reclaiming the city in the name of the Crown." Afterward, he was hailed as a savior of the country and granted the title of Duke." During his crusade, 80,000 people had died under his tyranny." He would massacre any commoner suspected of aiding the Republic—man, woman, or child." Even today, the name Duke Nifleka was the subject of great fear."

Suddenly, a gruff voice called out to the pair from the direction of the party." “I’ve been looking everywhere for you two." ” Professor Nifleka showed himself from behind the door."

“I just wanted some fresh air,” said Elheim."

Nifleka smiled at Elheim’s words." “I see, but you shouldn’t vacate the party, Elheim." There are so many young ladies who have come specifically to meet you." Ah—the lady of the Redwen family was anxiously looking for you." With that in mind, I suggest you make your way back to the party." ”

“I see I have made a lady wait." It would be my pleasure to keep her company." ” agreed Elheim."

Just as he was about to pass Nifleka and return to the party, the professor grabbed his shoulder and pulled him close." “Ah—there’s one other thing I must tell you." As a professor…” Nifleka’s eyes narrowed and voice dropped to the sound of a whisper." “You should know when to keep your mouth shut, Triquincy." ”

He spoke not to Elheim, the 4th Circle Magician, but to Triquincy, a representative of his house of nobility." A warning."

“…I understand." ” Elheim nodded in response and left the terrace, leaving only Ajest and Nifleka in the brisk weather."

“It is disrespectful to speak so carelessly." You would do best to watch your words,” said Nifleka, visibly upset."

“I only spoke the truth,” responded Ajest."

“Truth or not, you should first consider our relationship." Acting like this would do no good for either of us." Our families are quite close—the savior’s family, Nifleka… the royal family, Roguepalace." ”

Ajest Kingscrown—no." Ajest Roguepalace’s eyes shook."

“Try as you might, it is impossible to separate an individual from their family, Ajest." Family is key." One’s family determines one’s life—whether it be position, status, or network." Ah, yes." Another example would be marri—”

Nifleka didn’t continue." It was because a frigid storm had filled the terrace, threatening to freeze the sweat off of his skin." Seeing her expression, he quickly switched the topic." “In any case, please watch what you say about other families." Would you be taking responsibility if the party is ruined?”

“It’d be better if this meaningless party was." ” Ajest spoke crudely."

“Meaningless? I told you." This party is—”

“This party is just a gathering meant to showcase how the Tower of Magic acknowledged your party as the strongest." But the truth is that Desir’s party, who you tried so hard to defeat, hadn’t even applied for the sponsorship." ”

As soon as he heard that, Nifleka’s raised his voice." “Hm? I hadn’t heard." But why would I have to know everything that’s going on with that commoner?”

“Are you feigning ignorance? You changed the application period at your own whim, and neglected to inform Desir’s party about it." ”

“That’s—“

“You were afraid." ” She continued, not even blinking at his half-hearted retorts." “You’ve always been outspoken against commoners, and you didn’t want to seem incompetent losing to those very people that you love to hate." ”

“F-F-First off!” Nifleka’s voice shook as he addressed Ajest." “First off, this would have never happened if you had won against Desir’s party!”

“So you’re saying that this is because of me?” asked Ajest."

Nifleka nodded fiercely." “Yes! This is all because of you! You lost to Desir’s party! How dare you have the gall to speak up against me after losing in such an unsightly fashion!” Nifleka built up his own momentum in response." “Unfair? Afraid? Ajest Roguepalace! Do you think you of all people have the right to say that to me? You’re nothing but a failure." ” His face was beet red." “If you’re trying to blame me, I want you out of this party immediately! At least I won! You lost! The Blue Moon party doesn’t need losers!”

Ajest took a good look at Nifleka as he panted heavily." ‘So all along, I’ve been in a party led by this kind of man." ’ She felt the last bit of hesitation fade away—after all, it hadn’t been her decision to join this party in the first place."

“You can’t, can you? You can’t leave, right? Quit the bullshit and return to the party, right now!”

Ajest suddenly recalled what Nifleka had said about how family decided everything." She agreed with most of it—it was true that she had originally joined the Blue Moon party to bolster the relationship between Nifleka and Roguepalace." It wasn’t strange for nobles to use their children to form bonds." But was this really a party? As Ajest asked herself this question, her fingers were already reaching for the Blue Moon badge and relinquishing it from her chest."

After Ajest left the terrace, Nifleka was still fuming over the conversation." A call came from his Pad, and he wasn’t in the mood to answer it." He had a grimace over his face at the thought of Ajest, but he straightened up immediately after seeing that the call was from the Tower of Magic."

“Ah." You’re from the Tower of Magic." How can I help you?”

— “Something urgent has come up, so we will have to take our leave." ”

“Leaving so soon? A pity, but if it is urgent, I won’t keep you." Have a good night." ” Nifleka’s voice was tinged with disappointment."

— “We shall definitely come to your next party." ”

“Thank you kindly." ” A faint smile tugged at the man’s lips."

— “Have a good night." ”

As the conversation ended and Professor Nifleka was about to end the call, he heard some faint whispers before the man spoke again."

—“Ah." Professor Nifleka." The Tower of Magic has recently appointed a new technical advisor." I was just wondering if you knew anything about the matter." ”

The Tower of Magic’s magic engineering was top class." To be a technical advisor, they would have to be one of the greatest minds in the world." Nifleka made some casual remarks about the matter." “How could I possibly know about the inner workings of an illustrious place like the Tower of Magic? Surely, you would know more than I." ”

— “Ah—it’s because the new technical advisor is apparently from Hebrion Academy." ”

Professor Nifleka was delighted." “Is that so? Technical advisor for the Tower of Magic." Surely incredible." Are they an alumni of Hebrion Academy? What year did they graduate?”

— “Based on my sources, they say he’s still attending Hebrion Academy." ”

“Attending? That’s astonishing! To think that a student could become a technical advisor for the Tower of Magic." Who could he be?” Nifleka pressed on, unable to control himself." He needed to recruit this child into his party as soon as possible."

— “This is… His name is… Give me a second." ”

“Stop beating around the bush!”

— “…There we go." His name is written here." Desir Arman." 1st year at Hebrion Academy, Desir Arman." ”

July 8th." 13 days until the Emergence of the Shadow World."

Desir spoke to his two party members in the training room." “Both of you should have grasped your weaknesses while fighting against the Outers at the Tower of Magic." ”

“Weaknesses?” asked Pram."

“That’s right." Weaknesses." First, Pram." Your experience is lacking." ” Experience—time spent in combat, and their ability to fluidly adapt to a situation." Pram had the fundamentals, but he was caught off guard by veterans on the battlefield."

“During our defense, there was a high-circle mage in the fight, but you were so distracted by the enemies in front of you that you failed to pinpoint both his location and his magic." Thus, you failed." Without Romantica watching your back, you would have definitely been in danger." ”

“…You’re right." I had no idea what to do." ” Pram understood his weaknesses, which was a good sign." This meant that he just needed to fix them."

From there, Desir turned to face his second party member." “And now, Romantica." ”

“Mhm." ” Romantica hunched herself over, bracing herself for a slew of criticism."

“You did everything that you possibly could,” said Desir."

This caught Romantica off guard, as she was expecting a lot of harsh critique." She immediately straightened herself, and haughtily looked at Desir." “Haha! Of course! How hard do you think I was working?”

Desir continued." “It’s not a compliment." What I’m saying is that you did well for your level." Your circle." To be specific, the level of a 2nd circle mage." As a sniper, you must aim for the enemy’s weakness, but 2nd circle is too low." As a Single Ranker now, you have to climb higher." ”

“You can’t just reach 3rd circle that easily…” complained Romantica." A 3rd circle mage was officially called a ‘battle mage’— recognized as a true mage at the level of Hebrion Academy’s graduates."

“Now that we’ve pointed out our weaknesses, it’s time for some questions." ” Desir smiled playfully." “If you have a weakness, you should remedy it: yes or no?”

“Of course you… should." ” A chill ran down Romantica’s spine as she answered Desir." Was it deja vu? She could swear that this had happened before…

“So, in order to remedy that weakness, you should train: yes or no?”

“You—you should,” Pram gulped." The way Desir was asking questions was unnerving."

And of course, their greatest fears came to life." “Perfect! I’m glad to see that you agree! From now on, we’ll be starting our Hell training." Assemble at the office every day before and after classes!”

“You monster! Exams are right around the corner!” shrieked Romantica." Her complaints fell on deaf ears, and her screams echoed out into the halls."

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**Translator: Notalk
Rewriters: Aster0x and Wynn**

And with that, their train-every-day schedule began."

Each morning, at 6 o’clock, they would wake up to train." Once they finished their morning training, they’d immediately head off to class; they wouldn’t forego classes just because of their training (in fact, from Desir’s perspective, acquiring knowledge was training in and of itself)." This carried on for a number of weeks, until –

“I’m gonna die! Please, let us skip the evening training, I’m begging you!” Romantica protested." She felt exhausted from the workload, but Desir was relentless."

“No, sorry." ”

It was futile."

Evening training began after their classes ended." Unlike the morning sessions, which were a form of basic training, the evening sessions were a more personalized training, specifically tailored to Pram and Romantica." They trained separately, and Desir would teach both of them individually."

Romantica’s personal training sessions began in the Alpha Class’s wind mage training grounds." The roof had been left open that evening, leaving the clouds in full view."

Desir opened the session with a simple question, one that any mage could answer." “What would you say are the characteristics of a wind mage?”

“Their casting speed is extremely quick, and their magic has good range,” Romantica answered."

“Correct,” said Desir, nodding." “This is why wind mages make better snipers than any other type of mage." Their sniping ability is irreplaceable."

“But, like I said, there’s a limit to your impact as a 2nd circle mage." You should have realized this yourself, correct?”

Reluctantly, Romantica nodded in agreement." As she had quickly discovered, she was, truthfully, excruciatingly weak." Her sniping spells, paired with chantless casting, were indeed remarkable, but no amount of speed and surprise could make up for her lack of power." Her sniping had been rendered totally useless as soon as that 4th circle mage had appeared, leaving her unable to do anything but watch."

“You need to become a 3rd circle mage,” stated Desir simply." “Moreover, you need to strengthen the power of your attack to the point that you can penetrate 4th circle defensive magic at the very least." ”

“Wha-? 4th circle?” Romantica nearly fell backwards in shock." A 4th circle mage was a high mage: they numbered only in the hundreds, across the entire continent." She quickly began arguing back." “Hey, I’m telling you, achieving 3rd circle isn’t that easy! You have to cast countless spells and slowly perfect your fine control over your mana, until you can perfect your 2nd circle techniques, and then -”

Desir cut her off before she could finish." “Sure, that’s the normal way to reach 3rd circle." I’m gonna teach you a different method." ”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’ll teach you a shortcut to reach 3rd circle in a very short amount of time." ”

“…I’m surprised you know of such a method." You’re only a 1st circle mage." ” By now, Romantica had moved past bewilderment and was solidly annoyed." Everything he said was utterly absurd."

“So you’re not going to do it?” asked Desir innocently."

She almost sighed before she answered." “No, I will." ” At the end of the day, Romantica believed in Desir with all her heart." If he said it was possible, it was possible."

“Good." Let’s start with this." ” He smiled as he pulled an empty coke can out of his bag, and placed it on his palm."

“What’s this for?” Romantica had returned to being puzzled."

Instead of responding, Desir simply drew a deep breath, and began exerting his mana." The can wobbled, then, with a series of slow crunches, the can began crumpling in around itself."

It wasn’t quick, or haphazard, like crushing a can between your bare hands." It felt almost methodical, deliberate." The corners of the can caved in bit by bit, and the center bent in on itself like a bow, slowly, tensely." The edges folded in neatly, and then – with one last loud crunch – the can neatly collapsed into a small marble, which fell into Desir’s palm."

He handed the marble to Romantica nonchalantly, and explained, “it’s similar to the ball movement training we did before; an upgraded version, perhaps." The difference is, instead of simply knocking the ball away, you have to carefully control the atmospheric pressure to compress the can into a sphere." Simple, right?”

Romantica looked at him, dazed." ‘What is this crazy bastard asking?’ In the basic sense, controlling atmospheric pressure wasn’t difficult at all." She simply had to control the density of the air locally." But that was really limited to creating pressure differentials; utilizing those pressure differentials to form a perfect sphere was an entirely different question." She couldn’t even begin to fathom how he precisely he had to have controlled the air density around the can to do such a thing."

“Alright, why don’t you give it a shot." ”

Romantica looked at Desir’s smiling face and sighed." ‘What an absolute bastard…’ It was going to incredibly difficult, but what could she do? Desir told her to do it as a teacher, so she had to listen as a student."

She stared at the can intensely, and began releasing her mana, concentrating on maintaining perfect control." ‘Adjust the atmospheric pressure." Adjust the air density." Lower inside, high around the corners to bend them." Compress into a sphere…’

The can began crumpling noisily, as the corners bent in on themselves and the center collapsed." Slowly but surely, as she carefully worked the air density around the can, she saw it take on the circular shape Desir had produced."

‘It’s working!’ She was almost giddy, and, perhaps because she allowed herself this momentary celebration, the concentration she had worked so hard to hold collapsed, and the air began flowing violently in one direction." In an instant, the can flattened under the pressure, collapsing into the shape of a saucer."

“Oooh…” Romantica felt her cheeks flush with embarrassment, as she stared at the ruined can."

Smiling, Desir came over and took the can out of her hands." “I’m asking just in case but -” he had a slightly mischevious smile as he waved the can in front of her." “You know the difference between a circle and a sphere right?”

“We’ll be doing combat training." ”

The sweltering evening heat bore down upon Desir and Pram." For Pram, his personal training would be in the drill hall, where students dueled each other to measure their own abilities."

“Pram, your strength is your overwhelming speed, and the terrifying power that comes with that speed,” Desir explained." “But, at the moment, you’re still weak in handling a lot of different kinds of situations; you’re inexperienced." The best way to gain experience is by fighting." ”

“Fighting? If it’s another Knight-rank…is it Percival?” Pram had fought Percival before, in the ranking tournament." They had been quite evenly matched as fellow Knight-ranks." Pram felt that he would make a good opponent."

But Desir shook his head." “You couldn’t possibly gain experience from a Knight-rank." Instead, we have someone even better." ”

Pram followed Desir’s eyes and turned around." He saw a man, in his mid-thirties, with graying hair." He wore a longsword at his hip."

“This is Mr." Kayrach,” Desir introduced." “2nd circle mage and Knight-rank." A high-level spellsword." He’s the head of security at the Tower of Magic’s Aeurelli branch." ”

“The Tower of Magic…is this also part of their support? Like the credit card?” asked Pram."

“Correct." I invited him over to train you." ” As the head of security, he was a difficult man to get a hold of." Kayrach stroked his beard in amusement at his opponent."

“Hm— this little girl is to be my opponent? It isn’t going to be much of a fight,” said Kayrach."

Pram’s smile creased at his words." “Are you judging your opponent based on appearance alone?”

At the sound of Pram’s outburst, Kayrach’s look of bemusement fell from his face." “Oh." You’re a guy? Your arms and legs were so thin I couldn’t tell." My deepest apologies." ”

Pram trembled at Kayrach’s words." He clenched his training sword and looked ready to shatter it in his hands." Turning towards Desir, he asked for permission to begin." “Can we start immediately?”

On cue, Desir nodded, but not before offering a small object to the two competitors." “Before that, please put this on." ” It was a lapel to be worn on their shoulder." “This lapel has been embedded with alarm magic." The moment the training sword makes contact with your body, the alarm will go off." The rules are simple enough: the person whose lapel goes off, loses." ” Desir paused before adding on, “Ah." And don’t worry about ties." After one has gone off, the other won’t activate." ”

“Is that it?” asked Pram."

“That’s it." If you can get it to go off even once, the training is over." ”

Kayrach broke into a smile as he sized up his opponent." “It’s too bad that’s never going to happen." ” He then tapped his sword against the ground, daring the boy to try his best."

“You don’t know that." ” He glowered his eyes at his opponent."

Pram closed his eyes and took a deep breath." The atmosphere surrounding him changed, and he was no longer as carefree as he was before." This was Pram, ready for battle."

‘He’s good at provoking his opponent,’ thought Desir." He looked at the two swordsmen, stepped back, and opened his mouth." “Begin!”

With that, the duelists launched at each other, swords clashing head on." The deafening clangs resonated across the drill hall." The training swords were becoming ragged from their intense fight."

“Huh, you’re not as bad as I thought." Figured you would’ve dropped in the first clash." ” Kayrach sent a thrust at Pram’s thigh." The boy deftly avoided the attack and responded with a horizontal slash at Kayrach’s shoulder." In terms of speed, Pram was unmatched." The torrent of attacks battered Kayrach from every angle." However, Kayrach’s skill left Pram in the dust." He wasn’t the captain of the guard for nothing." With minimal effort, he parried Pram’s attacks, and retaliated with his own moves."

“Watch yourself! You’ve left openings all over because you’re too excited." ” Kayrach tore into Pram, exposing numerous openings with his swordplay." With just one move, Pram lost the initiative and was at the mercy of Kayrach’s blade." In an instant, Pram turned his body off to the side." By a paper thin margin, Kayrach’s sword missed its target."

‘Let’s create some distance." ’ Pram backed about five paces away from the captain for a breather." “Oh?” He expected Kayrach to chase after him, but he stood in place with a frown on his face."

“As expected, you are still inexperienced." ” Kayrach raised his hand towards Pram." “Creating distance from a magician." ”

[Ice Blast]

A frigid bolt homed in on Pram." The slender boy ducked to evade, but the missile exploded in mid air as it came close." A white mist engulfed Pram and a chill encroached on his body." “You still have a long way to go." ”

The weight of a training sword rested on his shoulder, but to Pram, it was heavier than the weight of the world."

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**Translator: NaturalRice
Rewriter: MrScaryMuffin**

July 11th." 10 days before the Shadow World event."

“I’m dead tired!”

Romantica’s outburst could be heard from outside of the Hebrion Academy cafeteria, where they had just finished dinner." The food they just enjoyed was one which the Beta Class meals couldn’t even begin to compare." Yet, Romantica was still upset."

“Training." Training." Training! Are you trying to kill us?”

“Aren’t you being a bit overdramatic? I’m giving you plenty of rest,” replied Desir, “10 minute run, then 1 minute break, then run for another 15 minutes, then rest for 5 more minutes." The regiment is perfectly tuned." ”

“I’m not talking about rest,” moaned Romantica, “I’m talking about recreation! I want to go shopping, eat desserts, or go somewhere interesting!”

Romantica had a valid point." The group hadn’t had a moment’s respite since they started training three days ago." Every day, immediately after class, they would go into training or endure whatever exercise Desir had concocted that day." For a young girl of 16 years, it was unbearable."

Desir truly felt bad about it, but he wasn’t going to change anything."

‘There isn’t much time until we go into the Shadow World." ’ Of course Desir couldn’t say that, so he offered a compromise, “Just endure it for a little longer." Once we address our weaknesses, I’ll definitely make sure we get a proper break." ”

“You promise?”

“Of course." ”

For the next few minutes, Romantica pressed for more reassurances, making Desir double and triple swear."

“Miss Ajest!”

“Why do you want to sit with those people?”

Different outbursts were heard around the cafeteria, trailing after someone who was heading in their direction." It was Ajest Kingscrown." With her platinum gold hair contrasting glamorously against her all-black uniform, she placed her food tray next to Desir’s."

“Strange, there is no one sitting near your party,” said Ajest."

“We’re commoners,” replied Desir, “that stigma didn’t seem to disappear just because we became Rankers." ”

“Is that so?”

“We’re still trying though, as you can see." ”

The fact that a commoner like Desir managed to become a Single Ranker had gained him quite a bit of reverence among the Beta Class, but the behavior of the Alpha Class was largely unchanged." As if to acknowledge this fact, Ajest nodded."

“In any case, what brings you here?” said Romantica with a cautious, hushed voice."

“Is there a problem?”

“I-it’s not like I have a problem with you sitting beside Desir, it’s all the attention you’re attracting! Everyone is staring, good luck eating under the spotlight!”

“I am sorry about that, but what can I do about it?”

“Easy." Go to another table." ”

“Romantica!” Despite Desir’s scolding, Romantica did not rescind her comment."

“Desir! Did you forget what she did to our party?” Romantica could not forget that Professor Nifleka had intentionally withheld information about the Magic Tower sponsorship from them."

“Fine." I’ll go elsewhere,” conceded Ajest, “However, I do have something to say to you Desir…." ”

Ajest let her words linger while glancing over to see Romantica’s reaction." Romantica was glaring back at her openly, already hostile towards whatever she might say." In this powderkeg situation, Ajest’s next words were like striking an entire box of matches simultaneously."

“Desir, can I visit your room after you finish eating? That way, we can speak alone without attracting undesirable attention from people who dislike me." ”

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“It’s a bit shabby, but come in." ”

Desir’s room was well organized, unlike the rooms of similar boys his age." Ajest entered and sat on a wooden chair in the guest room." The wooden backrest felt stiff, but not enough to be uncomfortable."

Desir opened the windows to let fresh air in before heading into the kitchen." After a brief moment, he re-emerged from the kitchen with two cups of tea." Faint lines of steam rose from the reddish liquid in the cups."

“This is tea made from something called plums." ”

“What a pleasant aroma." ”

It was Pram’s recipe." As the pair enjoyed the fragrant tea, light from the setting sun pierced through the open window." The room was filled with a color similar to the tea that they were drinking." The midsummer breeze swept into the room, providing a pleasant cooling sensation."

“Why did you have to phrase your request in a way that is easily misunderstood?”

“What about it? It wasn’t a complete lie." ”

“If you put it that way, I guess there’s nothing more I can say…” Desir relented and switched topics."

“So, what did you want to speak to me about?”

“I have a question." Could you answer it for me?”

“I can answer to the best of my ability." ”

Ajest lowered her teacup." “How did you apply the Grease spell to a three-dimensional surface?”

“So you were curious about that." ”

Ajest was referring back to the Entrance Exam, when Desir applied Grease onto his body." It appeared simple, but that wasn’t the case in reality." Grease was a type of field magic that couldn’t be manipulated." Rather, the spell enveloped whatever surface it was casted upon." It was simple to cast Grease onto a flat surface, but it was almost impossible to cast it perfectly onto an irregular shape." This is why Grease is most commonly used on the floor."

“Can you teach me?”

“There is nothing stopping me." ”

Desir stood up and produced two sheets of paper from a nearby shelf and laid one flat on the table."

[Grease]

After casting the spell onto the paper, Desir flicked it with his finger, causing the paper to slide smoothly off the table." The paper continued on, beyond the door and into the living room."

“This is how Grease is normally used." ”

Ajest nodded, having known this already." Desir continued, placing the second sheet of paper onto the table." This time, after casting Grease onto the paper, he lifted it into the air." Ajest observed with curiosity in her eyes." She watched as Desir held the two top corners of the paper and began slowly ripping them apart." He continued to tear the paper apart until he was left with pieces no bigger than her fingernail." With the paper fully shredded, Desir dipped his thumb in his tea and used the moisture to adhere the pieces of ripped paper to his teacup." Once he was satisfied, he tapped the cup, causing it to slide smoothly across the table before stopping in front of Ajest."

“This is the answer you are looking for." ”

“You break down the three-dimensional surface into polygons and calculate each polygon separately?”

Ajest understood the theory almost immediately."

“That’s right." Just so you know, the hexagon is the most convenient shape to use." What you have to be cautious of is…”

Ajest suddenly rose from her seat and casted a spell."

[Grease]

Just as Desir had shown her, Ajest calculated polygons to cover her body." Doing so required several times more effort than casting the basic form of the spell." Grease enveloped her like a piece of clothing." Ajest tested moving her foot." It moved as though it faced no air resistance." It also felt awkward." Her body’s movement and sensations had changed." Ajest felt like she wasn’t quite in her own body." It was because movement had become too easy and, despite being an outstanding fighter, she could not maintain her balance." She tried to use her other foot to counterbalance, but it was a mistake to move at all." Her entire body tilted, causing her center of balance to shift…

Ajest landed with a loud thud." She thought briefly that the floor was strangely soft but, when she opened her eyes, she saw that Desir had acted swiftly to catch her after noticing that she was falling."

His eyes met hers as he gently chided, “What you have to be cautious of is the change in sensation as friction will no longer apply as normal." ”

“Apparently." It means that training is needed." ” Ajest nodded understandingly." She then noticed that Desir’s cheeks were flushed." “I’m sorry Desir, are you hurt anywhere?”

“No, it’s just that…,” Ajest tilted her head quizzically as Desir found his words, “can you stand now?”

“Hm?”

The pair were in a strange position." Ajest was on top of Desir, who had his arms securely wrapped around her waist in order to prevent her fall." Ajest gave a sly smile." Instead of moving off, she pressed down on Desir’s body with her thumb."

“A-ajest?”

While in this compromising position, Ajest announced something with a voice of indifference, as if what she was saying had nothing to do with her."

“I left the Blue Moon Party." ”

“Huh?”

“I think it’s a good thing." ”

“No, wait!” Desir immediately stood up."

What did I just hear?’ There was an uneasy feeling in his heart." Desir closed his eyes and gathered his thoughts." He then calmly repeated what Ajest said."

“Are you telling me that you’re not in the Blue Moon Party anymore?”

“That’s right." I can’t stand being with that kind of a Professor”

The sun had long since set and the room was filled with darkness, but Desir didn’t even noticed." Ajest’s words half-confirmed the uneasy feeling, causing it weigh heavily on his chest like a lead weight."

“You…discovered what happened." Is that why you left the party?”

“There is no need for you to get worked up Desir." It was a personal…”

“Answer me, Ajest." ”

“Well, let’s say that’s the case for now." ”

Desir bit his lip, drawing some blood." ‘Did the timeline change this much?’

By walking a different path than he did in the past, Desir was expecting to see differences in the timeline, but this was unprecedented."

‘I changed someone’s life." ’

In Desir’s original timeline, Ajest was the ace of the Blue Moon Party." Even in the Shadow Labyrinth, she participated as their member." Desir’s actions had caused that ace to leave the party!

‘It’s my fault…’

A lot of things had changed since Desir had become a Single Ranker." While Ajest leaving her party could not be traced back to him, Desir knew that his actions directly resulted in Ajest’s withdrawal."

‘How did i not foresee this?’

Desir re-analyzed his actions several times in his head and knew that he had caused this change in the timeline."

“I’m sorry, Ajest." ”

“Why are you sorry?”

Ajest did not understand." She couldn’t understand, but Desir felt a great remorse." He felt responsible for the situation and a desire to make things right."

There was an audible click as Ajest found a lantern." Instantly, the dark room was illuminated."

“Look at me Desir,” Ajest pointed to her eyes, her face clearly visible, “do I look sad? Do you see any resentment towards you? If not, then you don’t have a reason to feel sorry for me." It’s that simple." You are a victim here." I was only able to see the Professor’s true personality because of you." That’s all there is to it." ”

Ajest guided Desir to a chair."

“I didn’t come to you to make you feel uncomfortable around me,” Ajest followed Desir’s gaze to the paper on the floor and gave an uncharacteristic chuckle, “of course, one of the reasons was to ask you about something that I couldn’t figure out." ”

Ajest leaned forward, the light of the lantern reflected in her eyes."

“I believe a party must be righteous." When in a competition, a party must overcome their opponent, not with underhanded schemes, but through skill." And after doing so, they must remain humble." When I think about the parties that meet this criteria, there was only one that came to mind." ”

“Ajest, you…”

“Desir, will you accept me into your party?”

Note : Please download the sponsor's game to support us!

**Translator: Naturalrice
Rewriter: Wynn**

By the time Romantica’s efforts began to bear fruit, a full week had passed." ‘This time, I’ll do it!’ Romantica focused on the can in front of her eyes." Atmospheric pressure wasn’t easy to control with magic, let alone using it to compress a can into a smooth sphere."

‘I think I know why Desir told me to do this." ’

Romantica had been training for an entire week, and she had failed countless times because she was lacking in fundamentals— controlling her mana intensity and minute manipulation." As she became more familiar with the process of making the sphere, she gained a clearer understanding of how important it was to master these skills."

With a crunch, the can in her hand crumpled and started to condense into a single point." ‘This is enough." I just have to keep this up!’ Romantica focused with renewed vigor, and the can continued its rate of compression." There was a bit of variance in its speed— sometimes a hint faster or slower, but it was largely steady."

After about 10 seconds, the can went from its original cylindrical shape into a perfect sphere." Romantica broke out into a smile." “Look! I did it!”

Desir applauded at Romantica’s achievements." “Amazing." ”

“Hmph." Something like this is just the basics for somebody like me." ” Romantica crossed her arms and sneered at Desir." Her overconfidence was justified— the mana manipulation that she displayed was incredible progress." “So… training is over, right?” Her eyes shined in anticipation as she waited for permission to leave from Desir."

“Nope." The goal of training is for you to build the third circle." We’ll take a short break and then go for it." ” Desir turned around and motioned towards the exit."

“Isn’t that too sudden? It’s not so easy to get to the third circle." ” Romantica looked unconvinced."

Desir smiled." “I can help you with the finer details." There won’t be any issues." ”

“How is that even possible?”

“I have confidence in mana manipulation." So long as you’re okay with it, I can use your mana to build the third circle—with your permission, of course." ”

“Well, I suppose there is no reason for me to refuse." ” Romantica nodded in approval at Desir."

“…Ah." We may not be on the same page." Reaching the third circle requires very fine tuning, and in order to accomplish that level of precision, we’ll need direct contact." For that to happen, I’ll need to touch—“

“Touch where?!” She flinched back, covering her chest." She immediately recalled that the circle was located at the centre of the body’s cardiovascular system—the heart." Romantica’s face immedately grew hot as she pointed her finger accusatorily at Desir." “S-shameless!”

“That’s why I’m asking for consent beforehand! It’s something that has to be done in order to build the third circle." ”

“Wha—you think this is the sort of thing you can fix with consent? That’s just an excuse, you creep!” Romantica bore her teeth at Desir’s approaching hand." He pulled his hand back to show that he had no intention of doing what she was insinuating."

“It won’t be easy, but in order to build the third circle…” Desir gestured towards a certain part of Romantica’s body."

Romantica stared dumbly at him." “The back?” The other end of a person’s heart and stomach." Whilst unpleasant to show a bare back to others, the alternative was far worse." “W-well, if that’s the case… The back, huh… I guess that wouldn’t really be an issue." ” Her face was downcast, with her face still blushing."

“Weren’t you adamantly against it just a second ago? Why the sudden change of heart? Did you misunderstand that I was talking about, and you thought I was referring to th—“

“Shut up! I don’t know! Stupid!”

He paused for a moment before giving her a nod." “It sounds like you did, but that’s perfectly understandable." ” Desir snidely chuckled." “Well… it’s not completely impossible to go from the front." If you really want to—should we do it from the front?

“Don’t make such a perverted request! You did it on purpose, didn’t you?” Her eyes glared reproachfully at Desir."

In any case, they eventually reached an agreement on the construction of Romantica’s third circle." Once Romantica had a moment to recover, they would begin preparations to start."

All of the entrances were locked, curtains were closed, and all of the lights were extinguished." Romantica slowly loosened her dress and uncovered her torso, before covering her front and putting her back toward Desir." She could feel the warmth from Desir as he laid her hands on her back."

“Then I’ll get started, Romantica." ”

Romantica trembled at his touch, and frowned before looking back at Desir." “Do you think I can do it?”

“You have plenty of mana to reach the third circle." You just don’t know how to do it yet." Just close your eyes and focus." Take a deep breath—good." Now start circulating your mana." ” Romantica was calm, and as she let all of her tension fall away, her mana began to circulate through her circles one by one."

“Good." Now slowly draw out your mana." ” Romantica obediently followed his orders, and pure mana began to exude from her second circle."

“It feels like it’s going to dissipate!” Romantica’s face was fraught with worry at the thought."

“Don’t worry—I’ll keep it steady." Don’t be scared, and bring out all of the mana that you need." ” Desir caught a hold of her mana and held it together." In the meantime, Romantica brought out all of the mana needed for Desir to form the third circle." “Now slowly circulate it into the form of a circle." ”

A soft sound emanated from the mana as it rotated and formed the circle." “Just like making the can into a sphere,” said Desir as he coaxed the mana out of Romantica."

“I know,” said Romantica." As evidence that her training didn’t go to waste, Romantica brilliantly morphed her mana to wrap around the circle in a sphere." Romantica grit her teeth—the mana control she was exhibiting was taking its toll on her, and she was sweating profusely." “Now what?”

“Now, we’re going to start on the smaller details." Maintain the sphere and I will focus on the task." ” Desir began to move the mana from within her body." He refined the mana condensed into the sphere by separating them into section and carving them, then rotating the sculpted mana." As the thousands of small spheres of mana began to rotate, the circle overheated."

“Argh! It hurts!” yelped Romantica."

“You have to endure!” responded Desir." It was a very fine process— mana had to be sculpted a precise form and then rotated one-by-one." As the rotating mana began to gain momentum, it would pull the surrounding mana towards itself."

‘The source mana." ’

This resource, so long as it wasn’t consumed past a certain point, would recover by itself." This mana needed to reach an optimum size." If it was too small, the magic produced would be weaker." If it was too large, the source mana needed to maintain the container of mana would crumble." ‘I can’t get this wrong— there is no margin for error." ’ Desir had to calculate the outer limits of her source mana, and use that to create the foundation of her third circle."

As the engine was formed, the pain would drastically increase." Romantica did her best to endure, but cries of pain leaked from her lips." Despite all of this, Romantica did not falter." She endured purely with her force of will." Desir, however, became hurried as he continued work amidst her screams." As they worked, Romantica’s breathing became labored." Desir bit his lip and he endeavored to work faster." He had to stack each ring of mana perfectly."

“Any more is too much…” Romantica practically coughed out the words to Desir." Her focus was hazy, and the binding force of the mana became weaker." She was on the cusp of blackout."

“Endure." ” Desir knew there was nothing else he could tell her." As time passed on, Desir’s responsibility grew weightier as he had to maintain the mana’s form, but had to pick up speed once more." He materialized the entirety of her mana and began to form the circle." With out any other options in front of him, he had to to complete the task before Romantica reached her limits."

The third circle expanded at a furious pace, and—

Thud."

Romantica collapsed like a rock, and her limbs quivered in time with her ragged breath." She wanted to cover herself up, as her back was in full view of Desir, but she couldn’t muster the energy." All Romantica could do was close her eyes, as she focused on her breathing." Desir, likewise, fell back onto the floor."

“We did it." ”

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**Translator: Billy Stevens
Rewriter: Wynn**

The two swords clashed at a breakneck pace as the two swordsmen stormed across the battlefield." Kayrach and Pram were almost evenly matched." Countless exchanges happened in an instant; it was a meticulous sword dance, equal parts elegant and deadly."

Kayrach pulled his sword back and lunged towards his foe." It was a perfect display of his refined and unrelenting nature of his swordsmanship; his sword had been honed to the utmost limit." Pram was aware that attempting to block his strike would be reckless." After parrying the blow, Pram closed the gap and began his counterattack." Slash, thrust, slash." Pram used his overwhelming speed to force Kayrach back." Without any time to retaliate, the captain could only parry and interrupt the surging tidal wave of attacks."

“You’ve certainly improved, boy— however…” Kayrach crossed swords with his opponent and shoved him off balance." As a result of Pram’s unsteady footing, there was no way for him to follow the snaking sword; with its path changing like a willow tree in the wind." Any time Pram tried to trace its trajectory, its direction would change."

‘Free-form Sword!’ Pram had never faced this kind of swordsmanship before."

“A strong sword is weak against a fast sword; a fast sword is weak against an ever-changing sword." ”Over the course of the fight, Pram maintained his trademark speed, but it had become repetitive and easy to read." In contrast, Kayrach adapted his style over the course of the fight, surmounting the difference in speed and taking control of the fight once more." No matter what Pram did, Kayrach held the upper hand." It would be impossible to persist at this rate, let alone win the duel." Pram retreated two steps." Without missing a beat, magic began to manifest around Kayrach."

[Ground Hole]

The ground underneath Pram began to sink, wrapping around his ankles and dragging him into the earth." “Your speed is quite annoying— I suppose most of the people you’ve faced have been focused on restricting your movements." ” Simultaneously, Kayrach leaped towards Pram." “It’s over, boy." ”

In that moment, the ground beneath Pram shattered." The clash of the two swords rang out, and Pram disappeared from his gaze." “What?”

Kayrach was a step too slow." As he looked over his shoulder, he found Pram directly behind him with a grin on his face." A split second later, his lapel fell off." In that brief moment, he had been unable to track Pram’s movement." This was Pram’s peak performance."

“You allowed yourself to get caught to create a diversion." ” Kayrach reflected on the fight and lauded Pram for his decision making."

Pram scratched the back of his head bashfully." “I got lucky." ” As always, Pram was humble to a fault."

“No." That was no accident." That last attack… it was a good strike." It’s the first time I’ve ever seen such a technique." ”

“I was just thinking about whether it was possible to attack and evade at the same time and had to give it a try." I haven’t even decided on a name for it yet." ”

Off to the side of the battlefield, a voice called out to the victorious student." “You won." ” Pram turned his head over in the direction of the voice." There, Desir was seated on a bench." Pram’s face glowed and he called out to his party leader." “I finally did it! I managed to win against Mr." Kayrach!” As he bragged about his exploits, he stuck out his head in anticipation."

Desir smiled." “I know." I was watching." ” He reached out and patted Pram’s head, who closed his eyes as he snuggled up to his touch." Desir truly thought that Pram did an amazing job." ‘I thought if he was lucky, he’d be able to fight Kayrach to a draw, but I didn’t think he’d actually pull through with a win." ’ Under Desir’s guidance, Pram was developing rapidly." To win against a 2nd Circle spellsword, Pram will soon be sitting at the top of the Knight-rank swordsmen." This level of growth was several times faster than his previous life."

Kayrach spoke up." “Well, does this mean that training is over?”

“Thank you very much for all of your hard work, Sir Kayrach." ” Desir bowed to the captain."

“Haha— it was nothing." I, too, learned something from the experience." I have a long ways to go." ” Kayrach turned to Pram and lowered his head in apology." “You’ve done well, boy." I want to apologize for my harsh language when we initially met." Can you forgive me?”

“Of course, sir! Provocation during battle is natural,” said Pram."

“Thank you." Before I leave, I have one last thing to ask you." Boy, are you… are you really a guy?”

“…”

July 17th— 3 days until the Shadow World occurrence."

A message was broadcast to the entire academy."

| Ahem." To all students: Please pay attention and listen to this broadcast." The current time is July 16th, 6:20am." A Shadow World has been detected, expected occurrence: 3 days."

| Hebrion Academy will be deploying onto the battlefield." A call order will be issued to parties in accordance with Section 21 of the school’s rules and regulations." Please follow the instructions of your party leader."

| All classes will be postponed for a week." During this time, you will be trained to participate in the Shadow World." Runegear will be issued to your party leader." If you are a 1st year who has not been given a uniform, please ensure that you receive one."

Desir entered the office carrying three sets of clothes." Runegear— magical equipment embedded with shielding magic to protect the students from harm." The use of Runegear was a staple for everybody who entered the Shadow World." The Runegear itself looked like a tailored coat." A single blue jeweled badge adorned the lapel."

As he distributed the Runegear to the rest of his party, he explained to them the usage of their new uniform." “For lack of a better word, this is Runegear for Single Rankers." Speaking in terms of defensive capabilities, it’s about on par with what other students wear." However, this specific Runegear that we’ve received have been tailored to address some of our weaknesses."

Desir went to the kitchen and grabbed an egg that he placed within his Runegear." “Previous models of Runegear could only be tuned to protect from either physical or magical attacks due to the nature of Magic Crystals." However, with recent technological breakthroughs, the Tower of Magic has synthesized a new material that protects from both types of attacks simultaneously." ” To demonstrate this, Desir smashed the egg and deployed a fireball at the same time." The Runegear shimmered in response to the incoming threats." “With these new developments, the defensive magic will only fail when the attacks exceed the maximum output of the Magic Crystal." ” He unfolded the Runegear and took out the egg in perfect condition."

Pram applauded enthusiastically and spoke excitedly." “That’s amazing, Mr." Desir!”

“Haha— you’re impressed much too quickly, Pram." If you think this is impressive, you’re going to faint when you see this." Can you put your Runegear on?” As Pram grabbed the bracelet from the table, he donned his uniform and stood at attention in front of Desir." “Now draw your sword and imagine putting it away." ”

As Pram imagined putting his sword away, his sword instantly disappeared in a flash of light." “Mr." Desir?!” His rapier had disappeared and he was getting anxious at the thought of losing it for a second time."

“Don’t worry, you’ve stored your sword in a subspace pocket." In order to bring it back, you just have to do the same thing you did before: imagine unsheathing your sword." ” Following Desir’s instructions, a flock of lights gathered around Pram before his beloved sword appeared in his hands once again." “The weight of a Blanksum sword is nigh zero, but one cannot say the same for the scabbard." In order to maximize your speed, you should try to reduce your overall weight as much as possible." ”

Next up was Romantica." Desir offered her a long stick in the shape of a flat iron rod." Romantica was puzzled at what she was being offered, but she took a hold of it anyway." As she put her hands on the rod, her badge gave off a blue glow and the shape of the rod started to change." The interlocking iron components clicked into place, and a peculiar shape began to emerge in her hands."

“What is this?”

“It’s called a sniper rifle." ”

In the Shadow Labyrinth, this was Romantica’s weapon of choice." Using his knowhow from working with Zod in the past, he had taught the engineer the idea behind the sniper rifle and ended up commissioning Zod to make it." ‘It’s weaker than her previous weapon, but she’ll have to get used to using this one first." ’ Her previous weapon used a 2nd Class Magic Crystal that offered significantly higher firepower."

Desir went into broad explanations as to how to use the rifle: which end to point at the enemy, how to steady herself when preparing to fire, and the best positions from which to use the rifle." “The rifle will integrate with the Runegear in order to operate." Its uses are primarily to amplify your magic and extend the radius of your detection magic." With the use of the rifle, you’ll be as powerful as a 4th Circle magician."

“4th Circle Magician?” questioned Romantica." She stared at the weapon in her hands in disbelief."

“With your casting speed and ample cover, you’ll become the rock that supports the rest of our party." ”

Romantica blushed at Desir’s words and promised to do her best."

“I’m just doing whatever I can for my party." I’m sure you guys would do the same for me." ”

The performance of the magical equipment developed by Zod was beyond Desir’s imagination." The quality of the items were far higher than he had expected." ‘That’s a genius for you." ’ He silently thanked Zod, and then turned his gaze back towards his two party members." Fully equipped in their Runegear, the two stood at attention in front of Desir." He felt a thrum of pride looking at his two party members, and vowed to help them exceed their past selves."

“Now all that’s left is suppressing the Shadow World." ”

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**Translator: N/A
Rewriter: Wynn**

July 20th." D-Day."

In the auditorium, nobles from the Empire and the Western Kingdom Union were present." Freshmen and seniors students alike filled the auditorium to capacity." All of the students wore their Runegears; their profession was denoted by the color of their attire: blue for the magicians and red for the swordsmen." Their uniform appearance and orderly fashion gave the nobles the impression of a veteran military corps."

In front of the sizable audience, the Dean started speaking:

“Everyone— it has been many years since the Shadow World began threatening humanity." During that time, God’s Shield – the Empire of Artemis – has fallen and other nearby countries have met their end in similar fashions." We have lost substantial territory to the Shadow World, and loved ones who will never come back." ”

“As they fade away to our memories, humanity has remained divided even in our dire straits! There are knights who fight only in service of the King; nobility who wage war amongst themselves instead of protecting society against the Shadow Worlds; mages who stood to the side and became bystanders to the conflict." With the way things were looking, the end was inevitable." ”

“In the past, the Shadow World represented the inevitable end of days: an irreversible calamity."

With the world in such desperate times, we needed a beacon of hope to shine down on humanity." The Empire’s solution was the Hebrion Academy; the continent’s most prestigious school intended to raise a generation of students who could fight back against the Shadow Worlds." Since its foundation, Hebrion Academy has produced countless knights and mages: people who fought for humanity." And after years and years of hard work…”

The Dean clenched his fist and raised it above his head in pride."

“The Shadow World was conquered in its entirety." Subjugated into submission." The ones that appear this year will be no different." ” As if on cue, an announcement echoed through the auditorium."

– Detecting Dimensional Crack." Based on its magical sequence, the requisite Shadow Gates will be opening."

“A long time ago, Shadow Worlds could only be accessed via Teleportation Gate exactly where the Shadow World spawned." With the technological advancements over the past 30 years, we are now able to enter the Shadow World from anywhere using 5th Circle Space Manipulation magic." In order to participate, all you have to do is select your preferred Shadow World and enter the gate." ” Something mechanical clicked behind the Dean and a quiet hum whirred as the mana in the atmosphere began to move." The Shadow Gate had activated."

– Currently, there are 4,728 Shadow Worlds accessible."

Shadow Worlds didn’t disappear until they were cleared." As time went on, the existing Shadow Worlds would continue to pollute and encroach on their territory." With the thousands of Shadow Worlds available, they were split between Hebrion Academy and the Western Kingdom Union." The most difficult instances were given to Hebrion Academy graduate students, whilst the actively enrolled students would often find themselves in low class Shadow Worlds to build experience."

Now that humanity had stabilized the Shadow Worlds, the tasks that the students had to take were relatively minor." The time that the students spent in the Shadow World was a rite of passage, and also the first steps they took towards becoming fully fledged heroes."

“From now on, your devices will be made aware of all Shadow Worlds that appear." Please work in teams at all times, and remember that points will be distributed based on the difficulty of the Shadow World." More important than anything else, please ensure that you know your limits and enter Shadow Worlds appropriate for your level." Your safety is paramount." Once you have selected a Shadow World, consult our historians for more information." If you need anything else, speak with the Support Team." Our Hebrion Academy offers its full support." ” Finally, students started to move around with their teams." The Alpha students leisurely browsed their options in groups of two or three." In contrast, the Beta Class students were restricted in their options; they were not allowed to enter Shadow Worlds above Class 5."

In a different location, 27 students stood at attention and received a briefing from the academy’s commander-in-chief, Tashid." “For the rest of you, you are Hebrion’s finest." The Shadow Worlds you will be sent to are vastly different from that of other people." In terms of difficulty, Shadow Worlds Class 6 and below are fairly easy— just about anybody can clear them." The best corollary would be… Professor Nefan’s exam, I suppose." ” The students laughed."

“However, as Hebrion’s elite, the Shadow Worlds that you will be entering are vastly different." Above Class 5, you will be exposed to war and murder." Death is a very real possibility." ” The laughter stopped." Regardless, nobody shrunk away in fear— they were Single Rankers." They were prepared to die."

Seeing their reaction, Tashid had a satisfied grin on his face." This was what Hebrion had to offer." “Alright." While it’s true that you’ll be exposed to Shadow Worlds many times more difficult than your peers, the rewards are likewise that much greater." ” The rewards for clearing Shadow Worlds were magic crystals based on the difficulty." “As always, remember that the people in the Shadow World are not real." They are imaginary and only exist in the confines of the Shadow World." Do not feel guilty about killing them." ”

All students were reminded of this year after year, but there were always those who couldn’t make the distinction." For them, therapy and psychological treatment were available at the academy." “The introductions have been a little too long." Let’s dive right into the Shadow Worlds you will all enter." ” As soon as Tashid finished speaking, a prompt showed up on his communications device." On the display, it showcased the Shadow Worlds exclusive to Single Rankers:

Expected Difficulty: Class 4

Location: Keyhole Desert

There are 1 related case[s] to this Shadow World."

Consult the historians for more details."

Expected Difficulty: Class 4

Location: Bitlugu Town

There are 3 related case[s] to this Shadow World."

Consult the historians for more details."

Expected Difficulty: Class 3 ~ Class 5 (unknown)

Location: North Sea

There are 48 related case[s] to this Shadow world."

Consult the historians for more details."

“Select a Shadow World and notify the Central Committee." They will evaluate your skills and determine if you are fit to enter the Shadow World." Without approval, entrance into the Shadow World is strictly prohibited." ” Tashid paused and took a deep breath." “As for the Magic Crystal received from the Shadow World, it will be distributed based on your contribution points after taking into account shipping and taxes." Anything that you receive will be free for your use." However, other objects that are found must be reported to the Academic Department." Failure to report will result in severe punishments as per the 13th Tax Amendment." With that, I wish you the best of luck in your travels." ”

As soon as Tashid left the room, a noisy murmur from the students began to thrum in the room." Everybody was discussing the Shadow World selection and their plans moving forward."

“I heard that for a 1st year Single Ranker, it’s normal to enter a Class 5 Shadow World." ” Pram overheard another party’s conversation and looked over to Desir to gauge his reaction."

“No need to guess, Pram." I think I know which one Desir will choose…”

“…Which one is it?” Pram asked Romantica."

“Knowing him, he’s obviously going to pick the most difficult one: The Class 3." ”

“Romantica, I would love to do that one if we could, but we currently lack the strength,” explained Desir." Up until now, there were no reported incidents of Class 2 or higher Shadow Worlds." Class 3, for all intents and purposes, was the highest difficulty." “If we were looking to do a Class 3 Shadow World, we would have to be like them to even get approval." ” Desir pointed over at two famous parties: the Red Dragon Party led by Radoria, and the Blue Moon Party led by Elheim." In the vicinity, there were three 4th Circle mages, two Bishop-Rank knights, and five Rook-rank knights." Not a single 1st year could be found, and each of the members was a veteran."

Don’t overdo it." That was Desir’s rule on tackling Shadow Worlds."

“I’ve already decided which Shadow World we will be entering." It’ll be perfect for us." ” He showed his device to his party members."

Expected Difficulty: Class 4

Location: Orrane Province
[…]

Reading over the information displayed, Romantica’s face paled." “Uh— I don’t think we can do this one." Read the last part." It says we need at least four people." Between you, me, and Pram, we only have three." ”

“You’re wrong, Romantica." Didn’t I tell you?”

Seeing Desir’s carefree expression, Romantica felt uneasy."

“Ajest joined our party,” said Desir candidly."

“What?”

A ding from Desir’s pad interrupted Romanica’s thoughts."

Request Confirmed." Entry approved."

Party Members: Desir Arman." Pram Schneizer." Romantica Eru." Ajest Kingscrown."

Please head towards Shadow Gate #2."

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**Translator: Naturalrice
Rewriter: MrScaryMuffin**

As Desir made his way towards the Shadow Gate, Ajest fell in step with the party as though it was the most natural thing in the world."

There was an uncomfortable amount of tension between Ajest and Romantica." Romantica was still displeased with the fact that Ajest had joined their party." It was hard for her to accept Ajest as their recent confrontation was still fresh in her mind."

“So you completely left the Blue Moon Party?” Pram asked."

“That’s right." ”

Romantica pouted as the conversation went on." Desir sighed, it seemed that great effort would be required before Ajest could be fully integrated into their party." Unlike Romantica, Desir greatly welcomed Ajest’s inclusion." They needed one more member in order to participate in the Shadow World that he had set as their next goal and there was no one more capable than Ajest."

‘She came at a good time." ’

They were able to attempt the Orrane province’s Shadow World." This was a Shadow World that Desir had been planning on tackling for a long time due to the rewards that could be acquired by clearing it."

‘They say that Toa’s Armaments can be acquired in this Shadow World." ’

Toa’s Armaments." It was an artifact that increased a magician’s mana pool, allowing them to reach a much higher proficiency." In the future Shadow Labyrinth that Desir came from, he was soul-linked to this artifact." It was the reason he was able to reach the Third Circle." However, Desir was not the first possessor of Toa’s Armaments." It was originally owned by some magician from Hebrion Academy and that magician was able to reach the Fifth Circle." Despite this, that magician had died in the Shadow Labyrinth and, due to his expedition group’s policy, it was given to the most appropriate successor, who turned out to be Desir."

There were two reasons why Desir was deemed the most appropriate to inherit the artifact." Firstly, Toa’s Armaments’ ability to increase one’s mana pool was greater for magicians of the lower Circles and, secondly, Desir’s analysis ability had gain notoriety within the expedition group." With the larger mana pool backing up his analysis ability, Desir’s contribution to the expedition was deemed irreplaceable to the extent that the plan executed nine years later would be impossible without him."

‘In order to become as strong as I was before, I need to get my hands on that Artifact." ’

Knowing that his biggest weakness was his mana pool, Desir sought out information about the Artifact." Even though he would naturally come to acquire the Artifact due to his predecessor’s death, he performed extensive research and planning in order to reach the Artifact first." Thankfully, he had already knew a bit about the Artifact even before he was bound to it, which is how he knew about this Shadow World."

Deep in thought, Desir arrived in front of the Shadow Gate before he knew it."

“Desir Arman, Romantica Eru, Pram Schneizer, Ajest Kingscrown." These are the members attempting to take on the Shadow World of the Northern Province, Orrane?” asked the Gatekeeper in a professional sounding tone."

“That’s correct,” replied Desir who, as the Party Leader, acted as their representative."

“Do you agree with all the terms and conditions accompanying the participation in a Shadow World?”

“We agree." ”

“Then I’ll open the Shadow Gate." The connected area will be the Orrane Province." There may be some disorientation following the spatial transfer, so please be careful." ”

Once the preliminary checks were completed, the Gatekeeper opened the Shadow Gate and a blinding light enveloped the party."

[You have entered the Shadow World]

As Desir opened his eyes and looked around him, all he could see were walls made of stone." The room was spacious and hot." There was a massive pot of soup boiling above a crackling, blazing fire." Cooking utensils, such as kitchen knives and ladles, were strewn about here and there." There were vegetables, freshly prepared sauce, and wheat bread, glistening with oil."

‘This must be a kitchen." ’ [1]

Desir took a second glance around the room, but found nothing else of note." Ajest, Pram, Romantica, the rest of his party, were nowhere to be found."

‘This must be what they meant when they said we’d be assigned different roles." ’

The sound of a door opening drew Desir’s attention." An overtly plump man walked in." He appeared to be very angry, Desir was surprised that a man of such stature could appear so hostile."

[You have met Jefran Eastwood, Veteran Chef." A stubborn professional with a lot of pride and confidence." ]

“What are you doing, you stupid oaf!?” Before Desir could react, the chef pointed at the ingredients in front of Desir and smacked him."

Desir was caught off-guard by the blow but, drawing from his experience as a veteran who had cleared multiple Shadow Worlds already, he remained calm as he lowered his head."

“I’m sorry." ”

“Scram! You’re just in the way, you useless idiot!”

Desir’s response had the intended effect of not provoking the chef further." Jefran simply pushed past Desir and moved to the cutting board to prepare the vegetables." His knife angrily slammed into the cutting board, loud enough to startle people outside."

Desir watched idly as he tried to comprehend the scenario around him." The chef shot him a wrathful look."

“What are you standing around like an idiot? Did you become a statue? I told you we don’t have any time! Damnit! Help me with the cooking, moron!”

‘Cooking?’

Just as Desir was beginning to understand his role, the chef smacked Desir on the back of the head in frustration."

“Are you an idiot sandwich? I told you we need to serve a distinguished guest today! Don’t tell me you forgot the menu too?” [2]

[Dinner Service Quest has begun." You are the chef’s assistant and must prepare a meal for all 13 honored guests visiting the castle." The food that the kitchen must prepare are as follows:

Help the Chef successfully prepare the Dinner Service." Outcome of this quest will affect the overall quest." ]

“I did not forget Chef,” responded Desir in a calm voice."

“Repeat it back to me." ”

“2 Black Olive Salad, 4 Herb Marinated Scallops and Shrimps, and 7 Cream of Lamb Soup." These are the appetizers." ”

“That’s right." Did you wake up a little? Go prepare the vegetables!”

“Ok." ”

[Jefran has noticed your determined expression and elevated his affection towards you to ‘Good’." His affection will affect the progression of the quest henceforth." ]

“How many times do I have to repeat this? Always address me as ‘Chef’ at the end of your sentences!”

“Yes, chef!”

The carrots were caked with dirt, the onions were unpeeled, and the lettuce had snails crawling over them at the bottom of the barrel." Desir shook off some dirt and began washing the vegetables."

‘Was his name Jefran?’

The sound of Jefran’s knife resumed and continued on without rest." From the corner of his eye, Desir glanced at the chef."

‘That man…’

Desir watched as Jefran opened the tightly sealed scallops with the edge of his knife and perfectly peel away the mollusk, leaving nothing behind." In a display of blinding speed, all four scallops were soon removed from their shells in similar fashion."

‘He talks like a sailor, but he is really skilled!’

Preparation of the shrimp had already been completed." Jefran oiled his frying pan and placed the scallop and shrimp on it."

‘This quest is not that difficult." I just have to match his rhythm as an assistant." ’

Desir prepared the olives and brought over the vegetables for the salad." He had shook off the water and made sure everything was ready before bringing them over to Jefran."

“Stir the soup so it doesn’t stick to the pot!” Jefran pointed towards the hearth."

“Yes, chef!”

The soup was boiling in the pot over the hearth." Desir grabbed the wooden ladle and got to work." Unwittingly, Desir let out a groan as he began to stir." The soup was so stick that it was exceedingly difficult to stir." Desir grasped the ladle with both hands and stirred with all his might."

‘Hot!’

The heat of the stove made it feel as though all of his body was burning up." It was hot and difficult, but Desir endured without stopping his stirring motion."

[Jefran rates your determination highly]

The chef must have been watching Desir stubbornly stir the soup in the hot environment." While Desir stirred, Jefran completed the salad and the seafood appetizers."

“Pour the soup into their bowls." You remember how many, right?”

“Yes, chef!”

The food was finally ready." Jefran rang a bell in the kitchen and several people entered to carry out the appetizers." Now it was time to prepare the main dish." All 13 guests were having Beef Tenderloin with sides of mashed potatoes, carrots, eggplants, and other things."

“Hurry and cook the potatoes." It takes a while to cook them,” said Jefran, who had already started preparing the carrots and eggplants."

“I am already cooking them chef." ”

“…What? Since when?” Jefran’s eyes widened has the crisp aroma of cooked potatoes filled the kitchen."

“I noticed the speed of your cooking and thought we might need them soon so I prepared them ahead of time." I’m a proficient assistant." ”

Desir had adjusted quickly to his role in the kitchen."

“Damn kid getting all smart on me." ”

[Master Chef Jefran acknowledges your foresight." ]

In spite the actual words he used, Jefran’s tone sounded affectionate."

Editor’s Notes:

[1] ‘This must be a kitchen’ — Nicholas Cage rage face T\_T

[2] “Idiot sandwich” — original text was “F#$%-ing donkey”

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**Translator: SAOlover69
Rewriter: Wynn**

As the potatoes simmered in in the oven, Jefran swapped over to the steaks." He grabbed a slab of beef from the pantry and tossed it onto the table." “What’s the order?”

“Three well done, five medium, three medium rare, and two rare, chef!”

Acknowledging Desir by giving him a curt nod, he turned his attention to the tenderloin." Jefran sliced the beef into generous portions, displaying his culinary mastery." In the middle of his cutting, he glanced back at the potatoes." “They should be cooked by now." Take them out of the oven, then peel the skin and crush them." ”

“Yes, chef!”

While Desir went to plate the dishes, Jefran placed his tenderloin steaks onto a skillet and mentored his protegee in his expertise." “When cooking steaks, focus on the well done and medium steaks first." That way, we can match the cooking time for all of the dishes while they are still hot." ” Unlike before, the head chef was passing on his cooking knowledge instead of berating him." Desir listened attentively, looking for any clues and details that might help him solve the Shadow World."

As soon as all of the steaks finished, Jefran put the final touches to the plating." Everything had to be served before it got cold."

“Now, with the worcestershire sauce and the onions!”

A brilliant rhythmic knocking rapped on the counter; it was Jefran lightly cooking the vegetables and chopping them up into a garnish to accent the dish." He then plated the mashed potatoes and garnish elegantly and rung the bell, calling the servers to take the exquisite meal out to his guests." As they were arriving, Jefran started to explain each dish and give them pinpoint instructions." As they took their dishes out, Desir asked the head chef what to do next."

After the main course, it was time for dessert."

“There’s no need to prepare dessert,” said Jefran flatly."

Desir was flabbergasted." “I’m sorry?”

“It takes quite a bit of time to make a cake, so I made it in advance." You know— I’m a prepared chef." All that’s left to do is slice the cake." Go sit down and take a break." Chef’s orders." ” He gave Desir a smile and went back to his work."

Desir sat down in a chair at the corner of the room." After looking around and taking in the room, he started to notice a few smaller details that he overlooked in the rush." Specifically, one thing caught his eye."

A couple of plump, oval-shaped green fruit sat in a basket on the table." Not a single one was used in the entire meal." Desir turned to ask Jefran a question." “Chef, do you like plums?”

“Hm— you mean these? Yeah, that’s what they’re called, isn’t it." You sure know your stuff, boy." The higher ups sent them over saying I should try to use ‘em, but they taste bitter." It’s such a shame, what with the nice fragrance." I was about to throw ‘em away." ”

‘I see… so that’s what it is." ’ Jefran inadvertently answered his question; Desir checked the plums to ensure that they were still fresh and fragrant." ‘This fruit must be related to the quest." ’

If there was an object related to the Shadow World, quests would promptly pop up." Desir thought carefully about the plum." It was just a leftover ingredient in the kitchen, something left there because the chef didn’t know what to do with it." ‘He even gave me a hint." ’

Jefran commented about how it had a nice fragrance, but a bitter taste— meaning, the hint was to utilize its fragrance." Casual remarks like these would become hints that led to clearing the Shadow World." ‘Now that humanity can clear Shadow Worlds consistently, it’s offering an opportunity to exceed expectations and finish side quests." ’ As soon as he finished his thought, an announcement rung:

| Hidden Quest: ‘Dinner Service-EX’ found."

| Head Chef Jefran does not know anything about plums, and they do not grow locally." You must lead him with your culinary expertise." Find a way to use the plums."

| If the Earl likes your cooking, additional rewards will be offered."

| If the Earl dislikes your cooking, there may be consequences."

“Chef, do you have any plans to serve tea with the dessert?”

Jefran looked at Desir and stopped slicing the cake." “I need to prepare it." Unfortunately, the guests don’t seem to like my choice of tea, so I have to think about what to do with it." ”

“Why don’t we use this?” Desir gestured towards the plums."

“The plums? You know how to use this? Hmm…” The head chef looked concerned."

| Jefran’s impression of you is currently [favorable]." Due to this, Jefran will make a positive decision."

Jefran inhaled a deep breath." “Alright." I’ll leave this one to you." Tell me what other ingredients you need to prepare the tea." ”

“Yes chef! Thank you chef!” Desir recalled the ingredients needed for plum tea using the recipe that Pram gave him." ‘After we clear the Shadow World, I’ll get Pram something tasty." ’

| You have successfully served the dinner service, as well as displaying a personal dish."

| EX Quest Unlocked!

| The Earl knows your name." The following sub-quests will be skipped:

Cooking Quest

Cleaning Quest 1

Cleaning Quest 2

Dish Washing Quest

Later that night, Desir stayed in the kitchen to wash the dishes." The assistant chef was responsible for cleaning up, and the clanking of the dishes emanated throughout the silent kitchen." Jefran was also there confirming stock of the ingredients to be used for tomorrow’s dinner." He abruptly asked Desir if the tea was an original dish."

“No." I learned it from a friend." ”

“Regardless, can you make that tea again, so long as you have the ingredients?”

“Yes chef, but why are you asking about this? Did the Earl fall in love with my tea, unable to part from it?” asked Desir with a teasing voice."

“Quit running your mouth." ” Jefran smacked Desir’s head." Seeing his protegee rub his head in pain, Jefran chuckled and told Desir to sit down." “You’re right." The Earl liked your tea and requested more." ”

| Success! For clearing the EX quest, you have been granted the position of [Assistant]." As an [Assistant], you will receive hints for future quests."

“Will I still be able to work here if I served him full time?”

“You probably wouldn’t have the time." I’ll have to find somebody else." ”

“That’s a relief." I don’t want to get hit again." ”

With his large palm, Jefram smacked Desir’s back and gave a hearty laugh."

| Jefran liked your joke." Relationship with Jefran increased to [Trustworthy]."

“I’m telling you this so you don’t get the wrong idea." You’re not being hired because the tea was amazing." It was fairly standard, but the Earl liked the novelty." He’s never tasted anything like it before." If that’s the case, what should you be doing?”

“I will try my best to serve the best tea, chef!”

“That’s right." Always remember that." ”

“Yes, chef." ”

Jefran stood up." “Good." Don’t worry about the dishes and go to bed." You’ll need to wake up early tomorrow." That merchant that stocks up on plums is leaving tomorrow morning." It’s only natural to personally select ingredients for your dish." ”

| Due to [Head Chef] Jefran’s high opinion of you, he has recommended you to the Earl, stressing your honesty and talent for the [Assistant] position." Your occupation has changed to [Assistant]." The quality of food provided to you will improve." You can freely move around the castle."

The next morning, the two chefs rode in the carriage out of the castle, following the winding path." Autumn was nearing its end and frost began to creep up on the ends of the greenery." Leaning towards the shaking window, Desir looked outside."

From the chimney, white smoke billowed out from the roof." The streets were well kept and after passing the drawbridge, a city came into view." Under the current governing system, the city was flourishing and there was a lively hustle and bustle everywhere they went." While Desir and the Earl had never met, he was convinced that the Earl must be a splendid ruler."

As they traveled, Desir began noticing something odd… the smiles on the faces of the people faded the further they got from the city center." After traveling past the residential district, they passed the plains with small huts made of wood." The livelihood of the city disappeared in an instant." The people here looked exhausted, their faces laced with dirt and grime."

“Mr." Jefran, what is this place?”

Jefran clicked his tongue." “A village for wanderers." Recently, we have been taking in wanderers who don’t have a place to stay." ”

“That’s peculiar." I’ve never seen an Earl accept so many wanderers." ” They were people from all walks of life; some had circumstances which caused them to lose their homes, others had been exiled." The only thing that bound them together was this: they didn’t have any place to stay." Typically, nobody in the right mind would accept so many nomads— there were almost as much of them as residents of the inner city."

“Our Earl is generous." At first, there were only a few and his Lordship offered them sanctuary." Soon after, rumors spread across the land and here we are now." Regardless of the cautionary tales of his advisors, he’s insistent on supporting them until the end of Winter." As you know, the Winter’s brutal." If we kick them out now, it’s no different from sending them to their graves." ” Jefran shivered and rubbed his palms together." He took a parting glance at the men and women huddling together for warmth outside."

“I get it." Nobody wants blood on their hands." But I don’t like it." We’re short enough on food as it is, and these guys do nothing but steal our food." Eh… you know what I mean." There’s plenty of people around here who feel the same." ” Jefran hacked out some spit."

“I see." ” Desir let out a heavy sigh." ‘It’s just like the Academy— the civilians and nomads are just like the Alpha and Beta students." ’

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**TL: N/A
RW: Wynn
KOR Check: Naturalrice**

The carriage rattled as it carried along its path." Leaning towards the window, Desir admired the scenery." The large tracts of land set for farming stuck out in his mind." ‘With so much abundant and fertile farmland, it’s no wonder they’re able to produce so much food." The Earl didn’t make this decision on a whim." ’

Upon reaching the city borders, the carriage stopped outside of a shabby inn." The wood was worn and the door was creaky, but it stood the test of time and didn’t smell of mould." That was enough."

“Stay here and wait for me." ” Jefran walked into the inn and proceeded to secure accommodations for the two of them." Desir agreed and gave him a curt nod before noticing how sore he was from the carriage ride here." Once Desir got out of the carriage, he started to stretch." He felt much better after getting out of the cramped carriage." Suddenly, he felt something prodding him."

He turned around, but couldn’t find anybody there." As he was beginning to believe that nobody was there, he looked down to find an emaciated child with cracked lips." The vagrant girl cupped her hands in front of Desir and pleaded “Sir, could you spare some change? Please?” The look in her eyes was desperate, and she couldn’t disguise her exhaustion that was either from fatigue or starvation— or both."

Desir rummaged through his pockets for something, anything to give to the little girl, but he didn’t have a single coin to give her." “I’m sorry." I don’t have any money either." ”

The little girl’s eyes drooped; she looked like a tree one breeze from falling over." “Sigh… it can’t be helped then." ” She turned around and wearily stumbled away from Desir." As she began departing, Desir called out to her and offered her four dried plums in an outstretched hand." “If it’s food you want, I do have this." ”

Her face brightened and her eyes looked up at Desir, as if asking for permission." He smiled back and nodded approvingly at the little girl before handing her one of the dried plums." She devoured it ravenously, before eyeing the other dried plums avariciously."

“Do you want more?” The little girl nodded furiously in response." “There’s a lot of things that I don’t know." Would you be okay if I asked you some questions in exchange for these plums?” There was no hesitation as she nodded again."

“Do you live there?” Desir pointed at the shantytown where the wanderers stayed."

The little girl nodded." “Yep." I live with my mom and little brother." Just the three of us." ”

“Where’s your dad?”

“Dunno." Mom won’t tell me." ”

Desir gave the little girl another plum." She ate it just as quickly as the first." “I heard that they give you free food here." Isn’t that true?”

“They do." Every morning, they come from over there." ” She pointed over at the plaza." “If you wait in line, they give you food." ”

“If so, then why—“ Desir’s words were cut short as he saw the little girl search for something in her pockets." She pulled it out as though she was handling a precious treasure: it was a piece of bread."

“They give us a piece of bread to eat every day, but it isn’t enough." That’s why Lilica is always hungry." ”

“Who is Lilica?” asked Desir." The little girl pointed at herself, and her stomach growled in hunger." In response, Desir handed her another dried plum." Like every other time, it disappeared within a matter of seconds."

“Sir, and your name?”

“You can call me Desir." ”

“Alright, Desiiiir." Since you’re so nice, I’ll give you this." ” It was a handkerchief embroidered with flower patterns; he could tell that it took years to achieve this kind of masterful needlework." “My mom made it; she’s super good at sewing." She even made my clothes!” Lilica twirled around and showed off her dress."

Desir was surprised that she gave him this." “This is beautiful." Are you sure that you don’t want to sell this at the market? With your mom’s workmanship, it should go for a good price." ”

“People told us not to come by the market." They said they’d beat my mom to death if she came." ” She frowned as she recalled the memory." “They said we’re thieves that steal everything." Besides Joffrey, they said that the other people who lived with us stole stuff from them." Even though we didn’t steal anything, they keep calling us thieves." My mom told me to hold it in." She said that since we’re not from here, it’s natural for them to act like this." ”

“Hey Desir! Get over here! Now!” Jefran’s voice rang out as he called for his assistant." It was time to go." Desir needed to hurry back, so he handed the little girl the last dried plum." “Lilica, do you see that sun? When it’s set about halfway, come to the castle’s backdoor and I’ll give you more food, okay?”

“Wow— really? Okay!”

“Make sure that nobody sees you." ” After making sure she understood, Desir left and jogged back towards Jefran." Soon after, an notification rang out."

| You have found the Problem #2: [Vagrants], one of the two problems within the Evernatten Domain."

Lord Evernatten’s Castle, 11:00am."

After steam rose from the kettle and its aroma wafted through the office, Desir poured the tea into a silver teacup and then placed it onto a silver platter." Opening the chamber doors, he gently put the silver tray down in front of his Lordship, who was going through a stack of paperwork." He was a gruff older man with a face riddled with battle scars that was carved out by the countless seasons he has survived through." Working in silence, an air of intensity surrounded him."

| You have encountered Unique Hero [Wilhelm Evernation]." This is a key figure in the main scenario."

| Become close with him." Once the Earl’s impression of you reaches [trustworthy], the main quest will begin." Currently, his impression of you is [favorable]."

‘If this person is a key figure in the Shadow World, then the main quest must be helping him solve the problems of the Evernation Domain." ’ Desir gently placed the teacup on top of the Earl’s desk." Clearing the [Dinner Service-EX] quest, Desir was rewarded with the position of the Earl’s assistant." The Earl’s quill moved without rest, while his eyes remained fixed on the paperwork in front of him." He took a few casual sips of the tea, but otherwise remained taciturn."

‘In order to trigger the main quest as soon as possible, I have to persuade the Earl that he can trust me; I have to solve the vagrant problem as soon as possible." ’ Desir tactfully observed the Earl." Aside from the quiet scratches on parchment and sips of tea, not a sound was present."

“Ahem." ” Desir cleared his throat." He wanted to start a casual conversation with the Earl." It was the best way to become friendly with him in a short time." “It’s really cold today." ”

“I see." ” The Earl answered back without looking up."

“Should I close the window for you?”

“Leave it be." ” The Earl looked at Desir." A spectacular failure." This time, Desir tried to change the topic instead of making small talk." Looking at the paperwork piled on top of the Earl’s desk, he concluded that there was so much paperwork that couldn’t possibly be finished by one person."

“My lord, there appears to be a substantial amount of work to be done." Should you wish it, I would be happy to assist you with your work." ”

Wilhelm put down his tea and turned his attention over to Desir." “Do you know how to read?”

“Yes, my lord." ”

Earl Evernation put down his quill pen." “Then I’ll have you do one thing for me." ” Desir leaned closer to ensure that he caught every single word."

“Don’t talk to me while I am busy working." It’s distracting." ”

| Earl Wilhelm’s impression of you has decreased from [favorable] to [neutral]."

‘I can’t approach him using normal means." I need to look at this from a different direction." ’

Desir came to this conclusion after a few days in his new position as the Earl’s assistant." After a disappointing first meeting, Desir tried his best to offer a good impression to the Earl: offering desserts, bringing various exotic teas, and cleaning the Earl’s room ahead of time." Unfortunately, none of these had any affect on the Earl’s temperament." Four days into the mission while Desir was thinking about how to earn the Earl’s trust, the scenario began to split off into a new development."

Castle Kitchen."

To help Jefran whilst he was looking for a new assistant, Desir was preparing the onions in the kitchen by himself." With the door slightly ajar, a cute and mischievous eye appeared to ensure that the coast was clear." When he saw Desir, his pupils dilated before he popped out of the door and it flew wide open." The speedy shadow dashed straight at Desir and jumped, arms outstretched ready to envelop him." “Mr." Desir, guess who?”

Desir was startled and turned around to see his nimble party member in the flesh." “Pram? How did you get here? Ouch! Hold on!”

“Sorry! I couldn’t help myself after finding you." ” Pram let go of his tight embrace and took a step back."

Seeing Pram’s appearance, he noticed that his party member was wearing the uniform of the Evernatten guards." “So you started off as a guard, huh?”

“Yes, sir! As a guard, I was able to roam around the castle." That’s why it was easy to find you." Besides that, do you know how long I’ve been looking for you?!” Pram’s distressed face was extremely close to Desir’s face." Desir took a step back and apologized."

“Sorry, there’s been a lot going on." ” He briefed Pram on what had transpired so far in the Orrane region." He mentioned the wanderers living outside of the city, and the disparate treatment that they were receiving from the townsfolk." Desir also mentioned Lilica, the young girl he met outside the walls."

After catching up with Desir, Pram forgave him and the two of them huddled together to discuss the Shadow World." “So… it seems like this Shadow World is based on the Holy Empire?”

In response to Pram’s question, Desir nodded." “I’ve confirmed it." A few days ago, I took a moment to leave the castle." I found that the city’s architecture resembles that of the Holy Empire." ”

“But Desir, wasn’t the Holy Empire—“

“Right." The entire territory was swallowed up by the Shadow World, short of the Orrane region where we currently reside." ”

“But it’s weird: it feels out of place to be in a country that’s already met its end." It’s completely different from where we’re from." ”

“Well, it is your first time in a Shadow World." ” Desir smiled at Pram, reminiscing of his first time."

“Isn’t it the same for you too?” Being caught off-guard, Desir rose from his seat."

“…Just wait here for a moment." I’ll bring you something to eat." ”

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**Translator: Naturalrice
Rewriter: Aster0x**

Soon after, Desir returned with some warm tea and dried fruit." He wrapped up his story and urged Pram to tell his own in return." As they ate, Pram explained how the Shadow World had gone for him: initially, he had been quite hesitant." He had been left all alone, but worked diligently on his assigned quest." Despite his many mistakes and the complications they created, he ultimately completed his first quest." “I’m now on a quest to perform a meritorious deed in the annual battle against the barbarians, and to receive an ordination of knighthood,” he concluded."

“Barbarians?” Desir asked in response."

“Yes." There’s nothing to eat in the frozen tundra of the north." As a result, they raid this region’s fertile territory every year,” explained Pram."

As he finished his explanation, a notification appeared in front of Desir."

[You have learned about the ‘Barbarians’ problem, one of the two problems facing the Evernation Territory." ]

‘So the barbarians problem was the other one." ’ Desir surmised wordlessly." He bit into one of the dried fruits he had brought along." “How’s your progress on the quest?”

“Well… about that…” Pram sighed." “I’m in the same situation you’re in, Mr." Desir." I haven’t even seen a single barbarian." ”

“What do you mean?”

“According to the scouting parties, nobody has seen any signs of a barbarian raid." The Order of the Knights has already declared that the barbarians have given up on raiding this year." ”

“The barbarians have given up?” Laughter mixed with incredulity seeped into Desir’s voice." “That cannot possibly be true." ”

“It’s not a baseless claim, Mr." Desir." Ever since Wilhelm became the lord, the barbarians haven’t been able to break through the wall even once." They’ve failed for five straight years; don’t you think it’s about time they gave up?”

“Do you remember the barbarian you met before?” asked Desir suddenly."

Pram nodded." He remembered the barbarian he met at the Uzuken Marketplace."

Desir continued his questions." “And what kind of feeling did you get from him?”

“…like they were the physical embodiment of the spirit of war,” Pram reluctantly conceded."

“So what do you think they’ll be like when they gather into a group? Normal logic doesn’t work on these barbarians." An impregnable fortress? The very idea will only embolden them to try harder." ” Desir’s voice had an authoritative edge to it, as if he knew a great deal about the barbarians." He did, in truth: he had fought with the King of the Barbarians for 10 years inside the Shadow Labyrinth." He had learned a great deal about them by simply watching Donaif lead his people into battle." “On top of that,” Desir continued, “They’re starving, and the fertile land is sitting in front of their eyes." Give that up? No." They’ll give everything to break through." ”

Desir lowered his voice an octave." “It might even be the case that they haven’t shown their true strength yet, to make Evernatten underestimate them." ”

“But that doesn’t make sense, Mr." Desir." Why would they try what they think is an underhanded trick, when they’re so hawkish and love testing their strength?”

Desir nodded at Pram’s objection, in partial agreement." “You’re correct Pram, but they’re already behaving quite irregularly because they haven’t revealed themselves yet." That means we have to consider another important factor, outside of the unique traits of the barbarians." ”

“What’s that?”

“The existence of an Opponent." Almost all Narrative Shadow World instances deal with a historical incident involving two opposing forces." In that case, there must be another key character who acts as the antagonist to Lord Evernation." He must be the one leading the barbarians, and the one who set up this new strategy." ” Desir fell into deep thought, and continued, half mumbling, “their objective is food…they haven’t revealed themselves yet however…that’s right." If they’re trying to plunder some food, they don’t need a large number of troops." ” Therefore, Desir emphatically concluded, “They plan on ambushing the guards of the food storage warehouse and raiding it with a small strike force." ”

This could be described as the “secret problem” facing Evernatten." Understanding it hinged on a deep understanding of the barbarians."

A message appeared in front of Desir as soon as he finished his voicing his thought."

[Your surprisingly high insight has discerned the plans of the barbarians from a very small hint." ] [The hidden quest ‘Raid’ has begun." ]

[The barbarians will infiltrate the castle in 3 days." Their goal is the rations within the food storage warehouse." Stop the raid!]

[The soldiers’ morale will plummet if they run out of food." ]

[People living in Evernation and the surrounding territories will starve in a cold winter." ]

[Tension between people living here and the barbarians will increase." ]

[There are currently 4 months worth of food stored." ]

—————————————————————————————————————————-

The fire from the brazier crackled noisily, casting long, pale shadows over the stones as Desir and Pram climbed up the castle walls to survey the region." As they walked along the wall, they made a simple sketch of the key features of the area, and estimated the locations of the guard posts."

Desir had taken a quarter of a day to look over the entire region, and picked out the three most likely locations from which the barbarians would attempt to infiltrate the castle." First was the space behind the watermill, where the wall was relatively low, due to the hill beyond the wall." Next, the southern wall, where the distance between the guard posts was relatively long, leaving the region sparsely manned in comparison." Third, the west gate, the closest gate to where the food storage warehouse was located."

As the territory of Evernation was relatively wide, it was, unsurprisingly, difficult to keep up adequate patrols; opportunity for the barbarians most definitely existed." Desir turned to Pram." “How did asking your fellow soldiers to increase the density of their patrols go?”

Pram sighed." “No good." Nobody believes me, no matter how much I try." ”

“How’s your relationship with the other soldiers?” Desir asked."

“I’m not sure,” responded Pram." “I haven’t been mindful of their affection level, so I don’t really know." ”

“They’re probably skeptical because their affection level for you isn’t high enough." ” Desir explained." They continued their walk, and Desir continued his explanation." “You said the Knight’s Order already claimed that the barbarians wouldn’t invade right? You would probably need an affection level of ‘Trusting’ at the minimum for them to believe you over the Knight’s Order." ”

Pram sighed again." “To think that affection level had that kind of effect…”

“It’s too late do anything about it now." We’ll have to come up with a plan on our own." ”

In the intervening time, Desir and Pram had cut their own sleeping hours short in order to patrol the tops of the castle walls." Immediately after their regular work ended, they would climb the walls to patrol the areas that Desir determined were the most likely staging points for the attack."

They had discovered, unfortunately, that the situation was even worse than they initially thought." The soldiers guarding the walls were completely unprepared for an ambush." They lacked any discipline, and spent most of their time dozing off or chatting with one another."

Desir sighed." “Without any tangible enemies, they feel no urgency." ”

“It’s hard enough doing this work with three people…if even the soldiers are like this…” Pram’s voice was uneasy."

It soon became the job of Desir’s patrol group to wake the soldiers during their own patrols."

On the second day of their patrols, it began to snow." It was the first time it had snowed since Desir had arrived, and it was heavy." By the time their patrol of the first area, the watermill, had concluded, the snow had piled up several inches." Their steps left deep imprints as they moved forward."

“Our visibility has been reduced quite substantially, thanks to this snow." We’ll have to be extra careful today." ” Desir shouted over the din of the winter storm." He gripped tightly to his clothes as they billowed in the wind." “Pram, you’re still wearing your Runegear right?”

“Always." ”

“Good." ” They continued hastily to the second point they identified, the south wall, climbing down a very lengthy set of stairs and passing through a narrow walkway, before finally arriving." The patrolmen were nowhere to be found."

It was a familiar scene." Pram sighed again." “Just where are they socializing now?”

Desir paused." He felt a strange, inexplicable uneasiness." Without warning, he broke out into a run, rushing forward along the wall, and barely recognized the shapes slumped against the wall." The guards were neither dozing off or socializing." They were dead."

“Mr." Desir?” Pram’s nerves carried in his voice."

Desir looked down at the fallen guards." The snow had begun forming a thin sheet over the dead body, which meant that very little time had passed since the man had been killed." Desir grabbed the dead guard by the shoulders." He was cold as a block of ice." As Desir turned the man over, he saw an arrow embedded halfway through his stomach, dripping blood into a thick pool underneath." The notification appeared."

[You’ve discovered the Barbarians’ infiltration." ]

The attack had already begun." They had executed the surprise attack to near perfection; Desir was certain that almost nobody else in Evernation even knew that they were under attack at the moment."

Pram reflexively turned and began heading to the tower up ahead."

“Duck!” Desir yelled, as he pulled on Pram’s scruff, sending him to the ground." A half dozen arrows zipped by overhead with a quiet, shrill whistle, before crashing against the stone walls with a crunch."

“…wha…arrows? But how can they aim through this blizzard…?” Pram’s voice was dazed."

“Wait a second Pram." ” Silently, Desir activated his magic."

[Owl Vision]." A utility spell that allowed one to see clearly in the night." Carefully, Desir peered out between the crenellations." He saw a group of barbarians with their bodies almost totally hidden in the snowstorm."

A single man, covered in the hide of a White Tiger caught his eye." He carried with one hand a great bow, nearly 2 meters long, and was at the head of the barbarians heading towards the wall."

[You have encountered the Rare Hero, Bloody Talon." He is the tribal chief of the Hawk clan, and has managed to completely unite the previously fractured southern barbarians with his brilliant intellect." He is renowned as the greatest archer of the Hawk Clan." ]

“A titan has arrived." ” Desir’s voice was surprisingly calm." He watched as hooks shot towards the wall and latched on." Ropes dangled downward and were quickly grabbed by barbarians wearing white leopard hides." By Desir’s estimate, there were about a hundred of them." It would be utter insanity to fight them." ‘It’d be nice if Ajest was here…’ He shook his head, and turned to face Pram."

Pram’s lips were pale." “We have to alert people." ”

“Correct,” agreed Desir." “But how…?” He turned his attention back to the guard tower." Guard Tower 13, as it was labeled, had a large bell attached to the top, whose purpose was to alert everyone in the event of an invasion." Unfortunately, the guard who was supposed to ring the bell had long since been turned into a porcupine thanks to the barbarians."

“Tsk." Is there no other way?”

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**Translator: Billy Stevens
Rewriter: Wynn**

Knowing that the castle wall was free of guards, the barbarians tossed grappling hooks and began to scale the walls of Evernatten Castle." Each barbarian was a hulking mass of flesh, and towered over the opposition." With inborn talents in close combat, each one was worth ten of any regular soldiers."

The barbarians let out guttural war cries as the castle walls were overrun." After becoming complacent over the long periods of peace, the soldiers had become weak." Arrows drawn from their quivers arced through the snowfall, and one soldier after another breathed their last breath." The few who escaped the flurry of arrows were forced to hide behind the wall, only to become fodder for the barbarians, who split them in two with their hefty axes."

Not a soul survived the massacre, and not a sound escaped the brutal slaughter."

Bloody Talon scanned his surroundings, squinting as he hunted for his prey." In an instant, his eyes widened; he had found it." Through the slew of buildings and the white powder draping the landscape, the food stores were nothing but prey for the barbarian horde." ‘There it is." ’

“Warriors! We move!”

The food stores were quite a ways off from their current location, but under the cover of snowfall, there was little problem." The troupe of barbarians descended the walls and plodded through the snow towards their objective." “There may be survivors." You." You…” Bloody Talon picked out ten warriors and had them keep watch."

“As you command!”

The chosen scaled the walls once again, and the rest of the barbarians began their warpath." Their wrath would be swift."

The soldiers who remained at the walls grumbled at Bloody Talon’s commands." A barbarian ornamented with feathers was agitated at being left behind."

“Our leader is too afraid." He fears that there are survivors among the guards? What kind of a warrior is he?” The other warriors agreed with his complaints." They grew more audacious without Bloody Talon around."

“We want to fight." This clumsy thievery is unbecoming of our tribe." ”

“This is an embarrassment to our lineage." ”

“I did not come here to slink around like a rat!”

At that moment, a gargantuan barbarian brandished his ax." His hair was like a lion’s mane, and he dwarfed his fellow barbarians as he glared at the squabbling meatheads and chastised them." “The tribe leader’s words are absolute." How much you like it doesn’t matter; he is smarter than everyone else." You don’t doubt him, do you?” His words were tinged with an unspoken threat."

“That’s not what we mean—“

“Then we follow his orders." Scatter." Keep a close watch over the walls." ” The barbarians reluctantly took a step back from the maned barbarian and carried out Bloody Talon’s orders."

The feathered barbarian traipsed along the pathways as he kept watch for any guards that may have survived." ‘All the soldiers are dead." Bloody Talon doesn’t miss." ’ There were a few soldiers lucky enough to hide, but they were finished off by the barbarians soon enough."

As he continued walking, his thoughts drifted back to his complaints earlier." ‘The tribe leader is a coward." He worries about nothing." ’ Just as he turned the corner, he heard a quiet shuffle." ‘Probably just the breeze, but I won’t hear the end of it." Sigh." ’ As he tried to look back, something wriggled from beneath the piled bodies, and he suddenly felt a deep pain in his chest." Looking down at his body, he found a sword piercing through his chest, bisecting his heart."

“H-how d—“

The feathered barbarian couldn’t finish his sentence before he passed." The one who stabbed him from behind, Pram Schneizer, pulled his sword from the corpse." The sword was drenched in scarlet, streaming down the length of the blade." “As Mr." Desir expected, there were enemies remaining." ”

A few moments later, Desir emerged from the pile of bodies." “Nine to go." ”

“If this is too difficult, we can head to guard post 14 to notify them." That place shouldn’t have been attacked by barbarians." ”

Taking into account the distance between post 13 and post 14, Desir knew there was no way the guards would make it here in time." On top of that, the snowfall would make it immensely more difficult to communicate." “It’s too far away." ”

With precious seconds ticking away, Desir knew that he had to make a game plan." After careful consideration, he formulated a viable strategy." “We’re going to break through and raise the bell at guard post 13." It should be possible between the two of us." ”

Pram nodded in response." “I understand." Leave the vanguard to me." ”

[Haste]

The pair of students rushed towards guard post 13, and were quickly noticed by the barbarians on the wall." “Enemies!” cried the patrolling barbarians." Soon after, the rest of the barbarians left on the wall stormed to their location." The vanguards of the two parties clashed in furious intensity: the barbarian with his massive ax, and Pram with a broadsword."

As the two of them fought blow for blow, Pram had met his match." His broadsword flew out of his hands in the first strike." He didn’t have a ghost of a chance to match the strength of a barbarian in a duel."

The barbarians laughed mockingly at Pram, as he ducked and weaved to dodge the incoming blows." The maned barbarian teased him as he tried to regain the initiative." The feathered barbarian lifted his ax above his head, swinging it down like a guillotine." ‘I have him." ’

It was at that moment, Pram dove towards the barbarian and gave him a nasty kick in his sides." Without much room to maneuver and already off balance due to his ax swing, the man hurtled off the side of the castle walls." His screams grew more distant, only to be cut off by a dull thud."

“Pram!”

“Got it!”

Pram crouched to avoid the great balls of fire sent rushing towards him by the barbarian spellcasters." The barbarians spat on the ground, disappointed at the showing of their deceased clansman." The narrow walls left little room to dodge, and Pram was in trouble— if not for Desir."

“Hacking complete." Pram, go!”

Pram kicked off the ground, and the barbarians began to conjure their magic— but nothing happened." While the bewildered barbarians continued to try again and again, Pram closed the distance." Up until the last second, their magic refused to work." In frustration, the barbarians unsheathed their swords and attacked the blue haired boy."

Regardless of the fact he was barehanded, Pram refused to back down." Small lights began to gather around his hands as he summoned his rapier in response to the unrelenting assault." The barbarians’ eyes grew wide at the sight." Pram increased his speed one notch further, now equipped with his beloved rapier." A giant gash suddenly appeared on a barbarian." His face was filled with shock as he crumpled to the ground."

“Quickly now!” Desir hurried Pram to the guard post, before stopping at the foot of the stairway." Past the stairway laid the guard post, but the remaining barbarians had grouped together and were advancing at a breakneck pace." ‘They must have gathered while we were fighting." ’ Counting seven, Pram was on edge, ready to leap into combat."

“I’ll take care of it this time, Pram." Step back." ”

Desir’s magic began to take form."

[Melting Ice]

1st Circle Utility magic." It was a magic that acted as advertised." Desir aimed the magic on the ground underneath the barbarians, and the piled snow melted into water."

[Dry]

Desir deployed a second magic as a follow up." The water surrounding Desir and Pram began to evaporate." Unlike the barbarians, their surroundings dried up." ‘Dealing with seven people at once is a bit too much for a 1st Circle magician." ’ Having made the judgement call, Desir touched the corner of his Runegear, and the mana inside began to thrum with power."

– Warning: Mana has been depleted to under 10%." Defensive capabilities will be compromised."

Multiple alarms went off as Desir drew a significant amount of mana from the Runegear." ‘The Runegear uses a 4th tier magic crystal." That should be enough for me to fight at full capacity." ’

“There he is!” The barbarians had just reached the stairway and caught sight of Desir." The readied themselves for a fight, but the sight was ridiculous." The two of them were planning to fight the seven of them outmanned and outgunned." The barbarians descended the stairs to slaughter Desir and Pram."

As they approached, water splashed in all directions." A reflection of Desir’s face could be seen in the axe that was thrown in the air." Six of the barbarians were rushing down the stairs." They may have been outnumbered, but the barbarians were outwitted."

“Close your eyes." ” Desir said."

His magic unfolded with a crash of thunder."

[Summon Lightning]

A paper thin beam stretched out, reaching to the heavens." The barbarians began to smile at the pitiful display of magic, and descended like a murder of crows." As a maned barbarian roared and slammed into the thin beam, his face dropped and his shrieks echoed across the castle walls." The dazzling flash was blinding, and for a split second the sky lit up as if it was still daytime." An intense current slammed into the barbarians and electrocuted them from the inside out." Their blood vessels popped and their skin was charred black, as if smited by divine retribution." The resulting scene brought a grimace to Pram’s face." He felt queasy at the sight of the barbarians— what was left of them, anyways."

“That isn’t… was that [Summon Lightning]?”

3rd Circle magic [Summon Lightning] called a powerful electrical current, but what Desir displayed was miles ahead of the [Summon Lightning] he was used to." Likewise, he expressed doubt if a 3rd Circle magician would even be able to take on seven barbarians with a single blow."

“I modified the formula,” explained Desir." He had broken the magic formula in order to overclock the spell." By reducing the range, he increased the strength of the current many times over." To make up for the limited range, he used the melted ice as a conductor and the result… was potent and gruesome."

Taking a moment to check the mana levels of the Runegear, Desir sighed." With only one spell, he nearly emptied out the Runegear."

‘I need to get Toa’s Armaments now, and become a 3rd Circle magician." ’

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**Translator: Naturalrice
Rewriter: Wynn**

Three arrows hurtled through the snow, each shot from a different angle." As they whistled in the wind, each arrow found their mark: skewered through the throats of the soldiers guarding the food storage." The guards died instantly, without a chance to signal the alarm." Bloody Talon callously trudged through the scarlet snow and signaled for his army of barbarians to come out of their hiding places." Bloody Talon stared at the storage with a gleam in his eye." Only a set of padlocks separated them from their goal."

One of the barbarians, with a helm ornamented with antlers, rammed straight into the door." With a single charge, the wood was already tearing at the seams." By the third impact, the hinges of the door tore out, and their goal was within their grasp."

The inside of the food storage was dark, and the humid stench of dirt wafted through the air." Once the torch was lit, the darkness faded away and the motherlode appeared no more than ten feet in front of them." A box filled to the brim with food, and dozens of others like it scattered across the storage area." The barbarians cheered with delight." Regardless of how cold and battle-worn these veterans were, at the sight of the food they too were nothing but starved warriors."

“With this, we can feed the tribe for the rest of the Winter!” The unruly barbarians eagerly awaited orders from Bloody Talon, they were salivating at the sight of the food."

“Take everything we can and burn the rest." ”

Opening the chests, their eyes lit up and as they confirmed its contents and followed Bloody Talon’s orders." As they continued to work, they discovered that there were three levels to the food storage, and began to extract as many of the chests as possible."

Once his men were laden with chests, he handed the torch to one of his subordinates." They couldn’t carry all of the rations, and anything that was leftover would only help the enemy." It had to be burned."

Bloody Talon carefully laced the remaining chests with oil, and as he was about to drop the torch and set the entire storage ablaze when he narrowed his eyes." There was something pouring out of one of the chests." He walked closer to get a better look, and discovered that it was sand." It was at this point that he realized the stench of dirt was suspicious."

‘No… it can’t be…’ With a trembling hand, Bloody Talon grabbed the dagger from his waist, he slashed open the pouches within." As the leather tore apart, sand poured out through his fingertips." The barbarian leader’s attitude soured quickly and his face paled." He barely managed to call out to his men."

“All of the boxes… open the boxes and check its contents." ”

The barbarians heeded his words and opened the leather pouches, only to be met with the same rude awakening that Bloody Talon found."

“It’s sand!”

“Do these bastards eat sand?!”

“No way!”

As dissent was sewn amongst the ranks of the barbarians, Bloody Talon confirmed that all of the chests contained nothing but sand aside from the pouches lining the top." The enemy had seen through their plans." With their blitzkrieg attack, the enemy had recognized that they would be short on time, and wouldn’t have time to check each and every chest." Bloody Talon was speechless; their strategy had been perfect." Everybody had thought they had given up; the guards’ surprise was testament to that." How did they predict it? Just…how?

“It’s divine punishment." ”

“We’re being punished for trying to obtain food without paying tribute in battle." ”

Chaos." Unrest." Disorder." The horde was beginning to splinter after news broke that their mission was a complete failure." They were all convinced that this was the end: for them, for their families, and for the tribes."

“Do not falter!”

Bloody Talon’s words snapped the barbarians out of their daze." He took deep breaths and calmed himself as he took stock of the situation." He brought his men here to save his people." Blaming himself wouldn’t change anything." Even if they couldn’t make it out with their food, they could still leave under the cover of stealth." Nobody had discovered their infiltration just yet."

As if on cue, a distant bell rang out—an ill-fated omen for the barbarians." Peals from other locations began to ring out in response." Before long, the entire city was rang with the sounds of the alarm."

Bloody Talon couldn’t hide his nervousness." He had positioned men at the guard posts specifically for this situation, but they too failed." Before long, the soldiers would arrive and his men would be overrun." His brow furrowed as he made a clear call:

“Give up on the food and start retreating." ”

As they prepared to leave the food storage, the snowfall began to fall more fiercely." For once, the barbarian leader was extremely grateful for the blizzard." With this much snow, the enemy would be unable to send out their mounts, and would have to follow on foot, if at all." They already found the most vulnerable guard post, and readied their plans for their escape."

Their destination was the north." It wasn’t far, and Bloody Talon could be assured of their safety." He would escape first, and then reflect on today’s failure." About halfway to the guard post, a sudden explosions rocked the surface and snow flew in every direction." The barbarians hesitated to move forward." “What’s going on?”

When the snow subsided, Bloody Talon saw a small girl before them, with slim arms and legs." She looked disinterested in the dozens of barbarians staring her down, as her pale blonde hair scattered in the wind." In the arms of the slender girl, a sword rested in her hands." Her beauty caused them to shudder."

“Are you… an enemy?”

The aloof ice queen drew her sword, resulting in the surrounding atmosphere beginning to freeze." Ajest radiated murderous intent and responded with a calm intensity and focused resolve." “Correct." ”

Bloody Talon needed to hear no more." He drew his bow and loosed two shots aimed for Ajest’s pupils." In response, ice rose from the ground and drew a shield surrounding her body." The barbarians answered their leader’s shot by drawing their weapons and attacking without mercy." A contingent of 90 men flooded Ajest’s gaze, but in her eyes, they could see only contempt." She slammed her sword into the ground, and a formation composed of her mana erupted from the ground."

[Frozen Palace]

Massive ice pillars rose up and surrounded the barbarians, followed by walls, a roof, and statues, composing Ajest’s grand palace of ice." As always, a throne manifested itself at the center of the palace reserved only for the ice queen herself." From her perched seat, she looked down on the insects littering her hall, and only had one thing to say: “I recommend surrender." ”

Overwhelming." Just by confronting her, they could feel a sense of overwhelming pressure crushing their bodies." The barbarians roared to shake off that feeling." As warriors, they thrived in the art of war, and their blood boiled in anticipation of this fight."

“Is that so." ” Ajest mobilized her palace in response, and countless magics flooded onto the battlefield." The temperature plummeted, and chilled everything in an instant—including their feral ferocity."

“…Ah?” Somebody managed to open their mouth, but the words never left their mouth." Instead, those hardy expressions morphed into faces of shock, followed by horror." Arrows of ice poured down on them like rain." Transparent blades shot out of the ground to tear at their flesh, and a ball formed from Ajest’s mana and shot ice balls at will." The blizzard that had originally been a boon for them was now their worst nightmare." The ice ball began absorbing the surrounding snow and manifested itself into a gigantic golem that swept through the group." The resulting scene was a complete massacre."

It was a frozen hellscape." In the hallowed halls of the Frozen Palace, only the ice queen was allowed to remain standing."

Tearing, crushing, dying." The strictly mechanical offensive magic fulfilled its objective to completion." Ajest looked at the barbarians being pitifully crushed with indifference." They had murdered the soldiers of the domain, more so, this was the Shadow World." They were an imaginary existence, so she had no reason to show them any mercy."

Sound of ice breaking could be heard." Ajest looked over to the direction of the sound."

Bloody Talon’s arrow flew and lodged itself into the golem’s core." The Golem composed of a Third Circle formation let out a loud scream before exploding." It wasn’t something that should be able to be broken by mere physical attacks." However, the mystery was soon resolved." Bloody Talon’s arrow was wrapped in a rosy glow, it was the skill that only knights above Rook rank or higher could use, Aura."

“I will handle all of the dangerous magic! All warriors, huddle together and endure!”

The Aura imbued arrow displayed oppressive destructive ability." Its might exceed the Third Circle, and could be reasoned to be at about Fourth Circle." Displaying such ability this late might have indicated that he was reaching the limits of his strength, but it might have also been a hidden weapon to be stored until now." His final struggle."

Ajest pulled out the sword embedded in the ground causing the ground to erupt simultaneously." In an instant, her eyes locked onto Bloody Talon." Bloody Talon, who recognized such hostility, turned back to look at her." He aimed an Aura imbued arrow toward her forehead and fired." She deflected it with reflexes that exceeded human limits."

A massive explosion swept through the area."

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**TL: Naturalrice
RW: MrScaryMuffin
KOR Check: Naturalrice**

Icy mist created a dense, glittering silver curtain." Bloody Talon leapt backwards, nocked an arrow in his bow, and tried to anticipate where Ajest might pop out."

[Grease]

However, Ajest burst through the smoke at an unbelievable speed." The first arrow missed hopelessly and Bloody Talon didn’t have time to fire a second." Ajest’s blade froze the air as it closed the distance between them."

A loud clang rang out in the night." As Ajest landed, she felt that something was amiss." Her opponent’s arrows were definitely made of wood, but her sword had made contact with something metal, resulting in a familiar clang."

Just as Ajest’s sword had approached him, the barbarian drew his weapon faster than she could track and savagely fended off her attack."

Bloody Talon was behind her now, holding his sword loosely." The barbarian chief pointed his weapon towards Ajest." It was a blade crafted into the shape of a wolf’s fang, overflowing with a crimson aura."

It was an Aura Blade."

Ajest calmly adjusted her grip." Her leg muscles tensed fiercely and she held her breath for a moment before launching herself towards her opponent with all of her strength." She put everything she had into a powerful strike aimed directly at Bloody Talon, but he brushed it aside casually." He continued to deflect her follow up strikes in similar fashion, moving faster than she could see." With each clash, Ajest took damage." The powerful impact created by the Aura Blade caused every muscle in her body to scream in pain each time their blades met and the damage was gradually building up."

The clash of metal continued to ring out as powerful strikes were sporadically exchanged." As Ajest’s body began to falter due to the accumulated damage, Bloody Talon began to move unpredictably." He slapped her sword aside with a powerful swipe and pressed on with his next attack before Ajest could recover her posture." The moment their blades met, he spun around and threw a kick at her abdomen." Her waist folded in brutal fashion and Bloody Talon followed up with an elbow to her spine, causing her armor to break."

Ajest barely managed to stay standing." She swung her sword in an attempted counter-sweep at the barbarian’s legs, but he evaded and brought down his Aura Blade on her head."

A strange sound filled the air as Ajest summoned the most powerful defensive spell of the Third Circle, [Sigh of Kizard], drawing from the magic circle to form a shield around her and block the Aura Blade." The spell also slowed the blade for just a brief moment, but it was barely enough to allow Ajest to retreat." Spears of ice, created by the Second Circle spell [Prison Lance], shot up from the ground around Bloody Talon as he tried to pursue."

“Graaaaa!” howled Bloody Talon as he swung the Aura Blade around to shatter all the icicles." While the attack failed to impale the barbarian, it was successful in its secondary goal, which was to create some distance between the two combatants."

Standing more than 10 meters away, Ajest spat out the blood that was welling in her mouth." Her shattered armor was barely hanging onto the leather strap around her chest and the runegear she was wearing underneath was screaming warnings at her."

[Warning: Runegear mana is below 20%." Defensive capabilities are decreased significantly]

“Monstrous bitch,” Bloody Talon looked at Ajest in disgust." As they fought, the blood-curdling screams of the other barbarians rang out endlessly from within the palace of ice." Ajest was still maintaining her Frozen Palace as she dueled with him."

She was continuously pouring her mana into the magic circle that stretched endlessly through the sky, which was used to maintain her icy barbarian trap." This allowed her to hold off the entirety of the barbarian invasion." The number of men she had felled reached 20 already."

“However, even you must have reached your limits." ”

Bloody Talon’s assumptions were correct." Ajest was not in an optimal state." She had poured an incredible amount of mana in order to maintain Frozen Palace, which was now holding 90 barbarians." Her opponent was also someone equal to a Rook-class Knight." It was difficult enough to fight such an opponent, but doing so while also maintaining a high level magical formation had pushed her past her limits." Doing anything more would be suicidal."

In reality, Ajest did not need to do anything more." It would not have mattered if she had fled." Her quest was not to eliminate every barbarian, but to simply interfere with the plundering of the rations." To that effect, it would not be wrong to say that she had already completely her quest." However, a single thought kept her from leaving."

‘If I lose here, I won’t be able to catch up to him." ’

Desir Arman." Ajest was single-mindedly focused on him."

‘He went through our battle with a smile on his face." ’

Ajest thought back to that bitter moment during the Promotional Exam."

‘I…will surpass Desir Arman—!’

Ajest tightened her grip on her sword and casted another spell, this time on the surface of her blade." An enormous amount of mana began to swell once more."

A strange sound emanated from the blade, a special characteristic of Magic Swords when they are activated." However, the timbre from her sword was off." A portion of her Frozen Palace began to crumble, the chandelier fell and pillars started to melt." With a stubbornness bordering obsession and a will that deserved respect, Ajest pushed past her limits to maintain Frozen Palace while casting an additional spell."

[Magic Sword: Ice Wave]

It was Ajest’s final gambit." The air around her sword began to chill and freeze, leaving behind a streak of frosty air with every swing." Her appearance was that of an Ice Princess, wielding her sword of judgement within her palace."

“Haaaah!” The Aura Blade clashes with the Magic Sword."

Another portion of the Frozen Palace collapsed with a thunderous boom." Bloody Talon, who possessed keen awareness, could sense that something was strange." As his sword clashed with the Magic Sword, it began to get frosty and cold." Even the handle and his hands were beginning to freeze as well."

The blade shuddered and the steel began to shriek." It was a sharp noise that dug into his ear drums, as if his weapon was a living thing that was sounding its death throes." Bloody Talon stared dumbly at his own sword as it inexplicably shattered into sharp fragments that flew towards him." Bits of frozen metal ripped into his skin, muscles, and body."

“Kyaaa!” screamed Bloody Talon as his steel-like body and his ruggedly handsome face were torn to shreds." He could not withstand the sudden pain and cried out." Drops of fresh blood dripped onto the floor." Unable to stand any longer, the barbarian chief fell backwards." He looked up towards Ajest with his remaining good eye."

“Un-unbelievable,” mumbled Bloody Talon." The words that he struggled to produce were slurred due to the sword fragments embedded in his mouth."

‘I lost?’

He could not accept his own loss." He believed that he was destined to be a great hero." He was such a powerful warrior that none in his tribe could face him." Additionally he was the wisest of all leaders [1]." He had seen a great path of glory laid out before him." He was going to become the greatest chief in history and lead his tribe to become more powerful than ever before." There was a hero’s path that was instilled in his heart and heritage."

‘And…I lost…to a girl younger than me…!’

His eyes slowly closed."

‘Betrayed…by destiny…’

It could be argued that this was not technically correct." He wasn’t betrayed by his own destiny, but instead swallowed up by a greater destiny." That is, the destiny of Ajest Kingscrown…no, Ajest Roguepalace." The destiny of one who possessed the royal blood of the Empire and who will, in the future, lead the expedition team of humanity’s greatest into the Shadow Labyrinth." Bloody Talon’s destiny was cruelly trampled by Ajest, the epic hero who would shake humanity’s history."

The news of the barbarian assault on the food storage, led by the Hawk Tribe chief Bloody Talon, spread throughout the entire region of Evernatten." The inhabitants of the region whispered tales about the incompetence of the soldiers and knights that allowed such an assault, but soon the conversation shifted to those about certain soldiers." Tales of the brave souls that faced off against Bloody Talon and rang the warning bell was popular among the people." The heroism demonstrated by these soldiers, who discovered the assault and resolved it themselves, stood in stark contrast to the sheer incompetence displayed by other soldiers."

“I don’t know who these soldiers were, but they deserve to be commended." ”

“I heard it was a maiden knight and the lord’s personal servant that rang the bell." ”

“But there is no female knight in our region?”

“Does that mean it was some attendant that did this? What a silly rumor." ”

At the same time, stories of a knight-captain that stood against the barbarians alone began to spread."

“Not only that, but I heard the knight-captain of our land faced off against the entire barbarian army alone!”

“Bull." This guy…where did you hear such a story? It’s hard enough for a veteran soldier to stand against a single barbarian warrior." ”

“That doesn’t make any sense either." ”

“You must be talking about some other Order." ”

While most of the people believed the story to be exaggerated, they still endlessly praised the three protagonists of the tale." As the rumor mill churned through the nation, the Lord of Evernatten, Wilhelm Evernatten, was reading a report in his homestead." It was a summary of last night’s events and required his guidance to tie up its loose ends."

“Lord, we are here." ”

“Did the knight-captain come as well?”

“She told me she will be delayed due to injuries." Should I tell the others to wait?”

“No, send them in." ”

The office door opened and Desir and Pram entered and kneeled before Wilhelm."

“Raise your heads." ”

They did as he asked." Wilhelm looked down at them and spoke solemnly."

“Are you the ones that rang the bell to alert everyone of the barbarian invasion?”

“Yes, we are." ”

“You have performed a great deed." Courage to stand your ground when the barbarians came and the wits to ring the bell to alert raise the alarm." These are definitely deeds that deserve merit." ”

“We are humbled by your praise." ”

They responded calmly, but snuck a peek at each other and noticed that they were both grinning." The lord was definitely looking at them favourably and, by the sound of things, rated their deeds highly." Their actions were indeed considerable." Wilhelm heard that not only was the barbarian raid suppressed but Bloody Talon, who had been the greatest thorn in his side, was captured alive." This was only possible because these two had alerted everyone to the invasion."

‘This clears Pram’s quest of performing a meritorious deed and the lord’s affection should have risen considerably,’ thought Desir." Pram’s quest had confirmed its completion during the battle against the barbarians." All that was left was to raise the lord’s trust and affection towards him." This had been one of the entry requirements for the main scenario."

Lord Evernatten opened his mouth to speak again." Desir waited for his words with anticipation."

“If I had my way, we would announce your feats to the public." ”

‘If I had my way…?’

Desir’s expression changed as the atmosphere in the room grew tense."

Editor’s notes:

[1] “He was such a powerful warrior that none in his tribe could face him." Additionally he was the wisest of all leaders” — He’s also the most humble."

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**TL: Billy Stevens
RW: Wynn**

“Desir, I heard that this isn’t your only achievement, that you were also involved in swapping out the food in the stores for sand." Is that the truth?”

“That is correct, milord." ”

“By persuading Jefran, the head chef, with access to the food stores, the three of you had swapped out all of the food for sand." I just have one simple question: how?”

It was unbelievable." The storage that the barbarians raided had enough food stockpiled to feed the entire city for a month." No matter how small the rations were, it was impossible for three people to move it all by themselves."

“Not all of the food was swapped." If their goal was the food stores, they wouldn’t be able to bring too many people inside." With limited manpower, there was an upper limit to the amount of food they could make off with." Our goal was to swap out as much as we thought they could carry."

Over the course of two days, the three of us were able to make the switch." Even if they didn’t acquire the food, allowing them to burn our supplies wouldn’t be ideal." ”

The lord’s brow furrowed at his words."

“And indeed, with that in mind, I intended to fool them into thinking the entire warehouse held nothing but sand." To maintain the illusion, we only left food in the crates nearest to the entrance." Afterwards, we drilled small holes in the bottom of the creates so that the sand would leak out." To the barbarians, it may look like a coincidence until they finally clue in." By the time they learn of the deception, the barbarians would discover that their plans were seen through, and would focus on inconspicuously leaving the city." ”

Creases appeared on the lord’s forehead as he heard Desir’s tale." “Was it necessary to leave the food in the upper part of the crates while filling the rest with sand and drilling holes underneath?

“That was to ensure that the deception would play its part— a double bluff to convince them that they were completely seen through." ” Desir’s intent was to fool the barbarians into thinking that every single box was lined with sand."

“Deliberately revealing a ruse only to nest another ruse within." They didn’t spend a single moment to check the boxes deeper in." ” Lord Evernatten nodded in approval at Desir’s methods." “I see— it was a good strategy." The barbarians would lose on both fronts: acquiring food and burning our stores." One last thing." How did you know of the barbarians’ invasion?”

“You wouldn’t understand how I predicted it." ”

“Wha—,“said the lord." The guards immediately readied their pikes to skewer Desir, if not for the lord’s intervention." He raised his hand to tell the guards to stand down, and Desir explained himself."

“It’s because there’s no evidence." I had gleaned this information by analyzing the behavior and psychology of the barbarian tribes." ”

“Expectations… you expected them to." You moved the food, the lifeblood of our city, based on a whim?”

“That is correct, milord." With the barbarians expected to invade, we took the necessary precautions to protect the city." ” Desir’s facial expression did nothing to betray his lie." The system prompt confirmed any possible suspicions that Desir may have had."

“In the event of a barbarian invasion, all food is considered military provisions." Interference with military provisions is considered treason, punishable by death." Had the barbarians not infiltrated, the three of you would have been hanged long ago." ”

A pregnant pause settled in the room as the severity of the charges set in Desir and Pram’s minds."

“Should that have been the case, we would have willingly accept it."

Milord, once upon a time, I was a vagrant and I witnessed countless deaths." Among those that passed, none fared a worse fate than those who died by starvation." Their muscles would wither away, leaving only bones visible through the skin." Without the strength to struggle, they lie still and fade." That is true starvation." ”

Desir spoke in half-truths." He was never a vagrant, but he had witnessed countless deaths."

“More than anybody else, I understand the significance of a warm meal." The love and care from a simple piece of bread." The joy that a single bowl of soup can bring." ”

He could never forget his first meal at Hebrion Academy after he returned." To Desir, the stale bread and watery soup that they served to the Beta-class was a meal fit for a king." After years of surviving on nothing but monster remains and drinking muddy water, it was more than he could ask for."

“If the barbarians had succeeded, the food in the store house would be stolen, and whatever was left would be up in smoke." Imagining the sheer number of people who would have starved, I regret nothing." To prevent that reality, I would stake my life many times over." ”

Desir glanced over at Pram." The blue haired boy nodded with a resolute gaze." Having heard the whole story, the Lord paused, deep in thought."

“…For the sake of the people." ”

Through the window, the snowfall had begun to ease up." Desir looked up at the lord, awaiting further instructions." The lord’s intense stare probed the reactions of the Desir and Pram." In the end, he sighed and lightly smiled." “You performed admirably." Rules must be upheld, but I have lost the desire to persecute you." ”

Suddenly, a loud muffled sound pressed against the door." “Out of the way!” The large bumbling sound could be heard as he tackled into the doorway and his figure could be seen: a familiar looking rowdy old man." He jostled into the room and began to tell his old friend off."

“Wilhelm! You can’t do this! They’ve done nothing wrong!” proclaimed Jefran to the court." His typical neat mustache was disheveled, and his breathing was labored in his rush to arrive."

“You cannot sentence him to death! Moving the food was his idea— it was in preparation for the barbarian invasion! If it weren’t for the boy, we would be suffering from a food crisis!” The head chef was huffing and puffing from his sprint here." “Look— I didn’t believe the boy at first, but it came true, didn’t it?” Jefran stared resolutely at the lord." “If you want to punish the boy, you’ll have to punish me too! I, too, moved the food." I too committed the crime!”

“At ease, Jefran,” said Wilhelm."

“Do I look at ease? Please! He’s too good to die! In honor of our friendship for the past 20 years, please let him live!”

“I will give you two reasons to calm down: first, you are speaking to me in public." Second, your greatest fears will not come to pass." ”

It was only at this point that Jefran got a good look at the situation." Desir awkwardly smiled at him, and Pram was in a panic— although it seemed that was largely due to Jefran’s sudden appearance." It was a little too friendly to be talking about capital punishment."

“So you—“

Pram nodded."

“Aha." Ha." ” Jefran coughed out a forced laugh and scratched the back of his head." “I see." I will excuse myself." ” Jefran backed up towards to door and closed it behind him." Behind the door, the three of them could still hear the faint sound of somebody says “My deepest apologieeeeeees!”

The lord sighed loudly as if he didn’t know how to proceed." “Jefran is an old friend of mine." Do you mind if we pretend that we never saw that?”

Shortly after Jefran’s outburst, Lord Wilhelm made up his mind." “Pram Schneizer, I hereby appoint you as a knight of Evernatten." ”

Pram kneeled in front of Wilhelm and swore fealty to him." “I, Pram Schneizer, hereby swear allegiance to the Evernatten Estate." ”

“…And Desir Arman." ” He turned to Desir and keenly observed him." “You possess intellect and courage." Those are useful qualities in a man." I apologize for disrupting your work and disregarding your opinion." ”

Desir kneeled in front of Wilhelm as well." “Not at all, milord." ”

“Previously, you spoke of assisting me with my work." From now on, please do so." Advise me on formal matters." You possess the qualifications to do so." ”

| Quest [Surprise Attack/Infiltration] Complete!

| Wilhelm Evernatten’s affection for you has increased to [Trusted]." You have been promoted to a [Personal Aide]." You will be able to learn detailed information regarding the estate." In the event of an emergency, you are able to mobilize the forces on behalf of the lord."

The rewards for the quest were generous." Desir and Pram shared a smile as they scrolled through the prompt."

“Milord, the captain of the Knights has arrived." ”

“Show them in." ”

As the door opened, a familiar streak of platinum hair brushed past Desir." The condescending beauty." “Let me introduce you all to the captain of the guards." She has also contributed greatly to the most recent battle." She is the head of the kni…”

“Ajest!”

“Miss Ajest!”

Lord Wilhelm was a little surprised that they were already acquainted, and Ajest gave them a look of acknowledgment."

| Main Quest: [Survival of Evernatten] begun."

| Solve the two issues that plague the Evernatten Estate

| Barbarians Progress: 42." 4%

| The leader of the Falcon tribe [Bloody Talon] has been captured." Without a champion to guide them, the barbarians will not be able to invade Evernatten for a long time."

| Vagrants Progress: 30." 9%

| Day to day security is stable, and crime has been reduced." With the vagrants under strict administration, crimes are not committed in Evernatten." The people of Evernatten roam the streets safely."

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**Translator: Naturalrice
Rewriter: Slimicee**

Accompanied by a loud creak, Desir opened the heavy door that lead underground." A musty stench and a gust of stale air flowed out from the stone tunnel." Surrounded by total darkness, Desir relied on the faint glow of his torch to navigate the subterranean path."

Desir, who had been wandering around the basement prison, suddenly came to a halt." Behind a set of thick metal bars was a mountain of a man in his mid-30s."

There were scars covering the man’s body, which summarized the harsh life he had lead." Chains meant to imprison massive beasts wrapped around his body tightly and a gag had been placed in his mouth." The eyes staring back at Desir seemed savage and animalistic, leaving little room for the conversation he had come for."

Desir was struck by a sense of Deja Vu as his eyes were drawn to Bloody Talon’s ears." Three golden earrings shone brightly in the torchlight." Earrings contained the entire life story of any Barbarians that wore them." For example, the hawk pattern on the first earring represented his tribe, the arrow pattern on the second earring indicated that he was an archer, and the letters etched into the third contained the names of his ancestors."

After reading over the list of Bloody Talon’s ancestors, Desir clicked his tongue."

‘Is he Khan’s progeny?’

Melgerr Kahn." His name boasted enough importance to have been recorded in history books." On top of that, those that inherited his bloodline gained all of his natural gifts." This had made his descendants famous for being massive thorns in the sides of many nations across the continent."

Bloody Talon." It would be correct to assume that he had received all of Kahn’s prowess." He would definitely have great pride in his background; the same was likely true for the rest of the Barbarians that followed him."

‘It’s good that I learned all of this before I confronted him." ’

Desir began to reorganize his plans once more." The objective of the Shadow World was to resolve both of the problems this land faced: the external threat of the Barbarians and the internal deterioration of public order caused by the vagrants."

‘And Bloody Talon is the core of the Barbarian problem." ’

Desir finally had a complete picture of the situation." The Barbarians raided the territory for food and supplies while Evernatten defend against them." Following the logic of the Shadow Worlds, if Wilhelm Evernatten was the protagonist of this scenario, then his antagonist, the chief of the Barbarians, Bloody Talon…‘would have been the final boss." ’

Desir looked down at the Barbarian Chieftain in awe."

‘She’s amazing, capturing such a man on her own." ’

When he heard that Ajest had defeated Bloody Talon and suppressed the other Barbarians alone, Desir had been struck silent from shock."

‘I heard she used her Frozen Palace and magic sword simultaneously… If that’s true, it must mean that her abilities have now reached the Fourth Circle." ’

Even accounting for the best possible outcome, Desir felt that the situation was still ludicrous." Because of Ajest, the Barbarian threat had been suppressed relatively easily compared to what he had expected."

Desir thought back to the quest update he’d received after the Chieftain’s subjugation."

[Barbarian Problem, Progress at 42." 49%]

[Bloody Talon, Chief of the Hawk Tribe, had been captured alive." Having lost their leader, the Barbarians will temporarily be unable to invade the Evernatten region." ]

‘This is a good opportunity." ’

Now that such a chance presented itself, Desir knew he couldn’t let it pass." He had to tie up any loose ends so that Ajest’s efforts wouldn’t be for naught."."

‘The progress still not being 100% means that it’s still possible for the Barbarians to invade eventually, but…’

As they had captured the chief of the Barbarians alive, the fight was as good as over." Desir, who had finished organizing his thoughts, opened the cell door and stepped toward Bloody Talon."

Desir spoke with confidence." “Bloody Talon, I wish to speak with you." ”

Bloody Talon only glared back silently with overflowing murderous intent."

With a sigh, Desir reached towards the gag covering the Barbarian’s mouth." “Please don’t bite or anything." ”

The heavy gag fell to the floor with a thud." Immediately, the Chieftain spit on him." Desir calmly wiped the saliva splattered across his cheek." He had expected such a response."

Ignoring the Barbarian’s provocations, Desir spoke." “I will let you and your 80 captured subordinates live." ”

“…?”

“Great descendent of Khan, I wish to grant Alyad to you, the eternal enemy of the Evernatten region."

Alyad." It was a mercy granted by the victorious chief of a war between tribes." When the name of an ancient tradition performed solely by the Barbarians left the lips of a foreigner, Bloody Talon’s eyes narrowed."

“Who are you?” He asked, his voice rife with suspicion."

Desir answered the Chieftain." “I am the attendant of Lord Evernatten." ”

“Attendant, I have no idea how you’ve come to know of Alyad, but you have no right to perform it." Only the blonde-haired bitch that defeated us has the right." ”

Desir smirked, “I might not have personally defeated you, but I also have the same right she does." ”

“What?” Bloody Talon asked confusedly."

“I was the one who switched the rations with sand." ”

As soon as he heard this, the chains binding Bloody Talon began to creak audibly."

“Y-you!” His voice was filled with bloodlust."

However, Bloody Talon’s anger faded away just as quickly as it had appeared." He clenched his fist and relaxed his ragged breathing, looking up at Desir after he had calmed himself."

“Fine." ”

The cold, moist air of the prison left Desir feeling chilled." Not wanting to force either of them to spend anymore time down there, Desir prepared to explain his terms to Bloody Talon." However, the Barbarian Chieftain wasn’t finished just yet."

“I refuse." You’re going to ask that we no longer invade this territory in exchange for our lives, am I wrong?”

Desir was surprised by the Barbarian’s foresight." “…You’re correct." ”

“It’s obvious the kinds of thoughts rolling around in the heads of bastards like you." ”

Alyad was an exceedingly advantageous bargain for those on the receiving end." However, to the Barbarians who valued their pride over their own well-being, this was not a difficult choice."

“But is there a good reason to deny my request?”

“You are the enemies we’ve fought for decades." The greatest wish of my people has always been to defeat you lot, and now you want us to simply give up? Without having made a single tangible gain? While the enemy stands right before our eyes? What you speak of is defeat." I cannot abandon my pride and give up the long-cherished dream of the Hawk Tribe." I cannot admit defeat by my will alone." ”

Enemy." He had called Evernatten their enemy." Invading Evernatten was no longer just about the food, it had morphed into a drawn out conflict that neither side saw an end to."

Having listened to Bloody Talon’s speech, Desir retained his calm exterior." But on the inside, an immense feeling of relief washed over him."

‘If we had just executed him, we probably would have made our problems worse." The remnants of his tribe would likely come seeking revenge for their Chieftain; a suicidal charge to the last man." ’

Desir spoke again." “You truly are an honorable warrior." Rather than beg for your life, you surrender it to keep the hopes of your tribe alive." However, that in and of itself is also a very selfish act." ”

Bloody Talon’s lips twitched." “Selfish…?”

“That’s right." You only think of your honor as a warrior, but what about the people of your tribe that follow you? Will you abandon them?”

Bloody Talon responded with confidence." “They will understand my decision." ”

“They will surely understand as warriors." ” Desir twisted the Chieftain’s words."

“But you are more than just a warrior, you are their leader." Will you not consider Alyad? Will you ignore the responsibility you bear as Chief of the tribe?

Desir finally struck Bloody Talon’s one remaining weakness, his devotion to the tribe."

“Your life was not your own as soon as you accepted the mantle of Chief." The rest of your tribe won’t survive without you at the head." As an example, would your people be able to defend themselves if the people of this region decided to seek revenge?”

At Desir’s remark, the sound of grinding teeth reverberated loudly."

“You… dare… threaten me? With the life of my people?” Bloody Talon’s voice was steeped in rage."

“Do not misunderstand." I am not the one who decides, but I have tried my best to reach a fair agreement between us”

A shift of blame." Desir redirected Bloody Talon’s anger away from himself, forcing the Chieftain to instead focus on the impact of his decision on the tribe’s well-being."

Yet, Bloody Talon still wouldn’t concede." “There are warriors other than me that can lead the tribe in my stead." ”

“Then that is a relief… but is there really someone that could lead the tribe in your stead?” Desir asked, feigning ignorance."

‘Of course not." ’

It was a question to which he already knew the answer." If there was someone that could take the Barbarian Chieftain’s place, there was no reason that Bloody Talon would have risked his own life to lead the attack in the first place."

“Remember, this is the only deal that will leave neither of us at a loss." I hope that you will make the right choice, as a leader." ”

“Mm…” Bloody Talon began to contemplate."

Rather than brushing Desir off as before, Bloody Talon began to seriously contemplate his options." He knew that the attendant would continue to press him for an answer." The Chieftain knew that this man had not come to see him for idle chat, and had surmised Desir’s true intentions almost immediately." Despite this, Bloody Talon’s heart grew heavier with each passing moment." Slowly but surely, Desir had swayed the Barbarian by using his own idealism against him." All he needed was one more small push."

It was at this moment that Desir dealt the final blow." “We will provide you with a portion of food that you were trying to take." ”

Bloody Talon’s eyes widened noticeably for a moment." The food that his tribe had been after from the start." Their original objective." Bloody Talon knew that this was no longer a deal he could let pass by…

“You’re not retreating because you’ve lost, but rather because you’ve made a truce with your rival." ”

“Ha!” Bloody Talon guffawed at Desir’s rationale."

Desir’s gaze met Bloody Talon’s, silently daring him to refuse his offer."

“You possess a crafty tongue, like a serpent slithering about in the shadows." ”

Bloody Talon tsked." Finally realizing this was his only option, he accepted Desir’s poorly disguised deception as it was."

“Fine then." On my honor as Chief, I will agree to form a truce." I swear that, from this point forth, we will leave this land be." ”

As soon as Bloody Talon put his honor on the line, Desir heard the notification."

[You have resolved the Barbarian Problem." ]

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**TL: Neria
Sponsored Content**

“So annoying!”

Romantica threw her quill pen down at the table. Ink splattered all over, drenching various sheets of paper with the black liquid.

“Why am I working as a merchant?” sighed Romantica, closing her eyes. Upon arriving in the Shadow World, she became the head of a small-sized company that was financially unstable. Her quest was to fulfill her duty as the head and revive the company.

Romantica leaned back in her chair, swaying back and forth.

‘Even if I’m used to dealing with this kind of work…’

The Eru family was originally a merchant family before they became nobles. Across the continent, they were known as famous merchants and were even acknowledged by the Frillecha Empire. It goes without saying that they have tremendous wealth and influence. They were even able to buy their way into nobility.

Romantica’s grandfather was a true merchant down to his bones. He had taught her all the skills necessary to survive as a merchant. Romantica learned economics, finance, accounting, and even the art of persuasion. She was even given funds to run her own business in order to learn the practical skills necessary to operate a company.

This was why it wasn’t difficult for her to manage a small-sized company.

Utilizing her knowledge and talent, Romantica managed to refinance and revive the company in a mere four days. The company was on the path of rapid growth under her tenure.

‘So far so good.’

While it was true that her experiences helped her progress quickly, a problem arose shortly after she revived the company.

There was no follow up quest.

Additionally, there was another issue. Her party members.

“Where did Desir and Pram go? Where did they go, leaving me behind all alone!?” Romantica slammed the table with her fist in a rage.

After entering the Shadow World, Romantica was separated from her party. At first, she wasn’t concerned, since she thought they would meet up shortly after. However, she was wrong. It had been 8 days since she entered the Shadow World and she still could not find anyone.

Currently, Romantica was located in the Kervan Territory. She had deployed people to look for her party members, hoping that they were somewhere within the territory, but they found no one that looked remotely like them, not even Ajest.

And thus, being unable to find her party members or receive a quest, Romantica was stuck.

‘How did this happen?’ Romantica slumped onto the table and let out another sigh.

Recovering a bit, she began to sway back and forth in her chair out of habit.

‘I wish I had someone who could tell me how to progress or let me know if this entire situation was normal…’

Romantica felt uneasy with all this uncertainty.

‘What am I supposed to do…This is so frustrating. If only Desir was here, I wish…’

As Romantica’s thoughts inadvertently drifted to Desir, her heart skipped a beat.

“Oh my god! What am I thinking about?” Romantica’s face became bright red.

‘Why did I think about him so suddenly? That demon!’

Romantica covered her blushing cheeks with her hands. She was fully aware of how foolish she looked at this moment. However, she still felt that it was necessary to hide her embarrassment. If someone had found out that she was blushing because of Desir…

“Boss!”

“Uwaaaaak!” Romantica lost her balance and fell off her chair with a crash.

She hit her head on the floor and a sharp pain rattled her skull. Romantica rubbed the back of her head as she slowly stood up.

“Emil! Didn’t I tell you knock before you enter!?” yelled Romantica, with tears dripping from her eyes.

“I-I’m sorry!”

“How many times have I told you to be more mindful.”

“I’m so sorry!”

Seeing the youth in front of her prostrate himself so much, she felt sorry for him. Romantica repositioned the chair and sat down.

“So? Why are you here so early in the morning?”

“Ah, you see…the price of the woven fabric you ordered us to purchase spiked today!”

“As expected. I was thinking that it was about time for that to happen.”

“H-however, I was wondering how you knew.”

“Why are you even reporting something so trivial like that. Didn’t I tell you it was going to happen?”

“You did. Even so…I couldn’t believe what I saw today.”

“It’s all about analyzing, okay? Isn’t that what I’ve been telling you guys to do? If you can properly analyze the data, it’s easy to see which products in the market will become popular.”

“But boss, that’s easier said than done.”

“That’s true. I will admit that I’m quite talented.”

“Haha boss. It sounds lame when you say it yourself…” The youth trailed off once he saw Romantica glaring at him, “I-I’m sorry! I’m so sorry!”

Romantica let out a sigh. She couldn’t find it in her to get angry.

“So? Is that all you wanted to report?

“N-no. I’m here to report on one more thing. Ahem,” said Emil, adapting a serious expression as he cleared his throat, “Boss, a few days ago, didn’t you tell us to research the Holy City?”

“Yeah, I did.”

Goatheim, the Holy City. Before it was swallowed by the Shadow World, it was the capital city of the Holy Empire of Artemis. As the capital city, Goatheim was densely populated. As such, a large amount of commodities were traded within the city.

It was common knowledge that businesses would flourish in such big cities, so Romantica had planned to enter the capital city of the Holy Empire. However, this was unrelated to her quest. It was something she was planning to do on her own accord.

“We’ve completed our research and concluded that now is not the best time to do business in the Holy City.”

“Is that so? With the volume of commodities being traded, I thought it would be the opposite.”

“Currently the tax rates are at an all time high. Additionally, people are hesitant to come out and shop because of strange rumors. As such, many companies have already left the capital.”

“Strange rumors?” asked Romantica. Emil nodded and gulped before continuing.

“There are rumors of a demon kidnapping people who are out alone at night. The demon would skin the person alive and eat them.

“Pfff.” Romantica covered her mouth as she started to laugh. Seeing her reaction, Emil’s shoulders slumped.

“I knew you would laugh boss.”

“If you have time to spread rumors, go work instead.”

“I’m serious! While it’s difficult to confirm if this demon exists, it seems like someone is really kidnapping people. There has been numerous reports of mothers asking people to help find their missing children.”

“Hm…so you’re saying that rumor is not baseless.”

“To make matters worse, the Empire is imposing a hefty tax on the populace, saying that it’s to prevent God’s punishment. They are even arresting anyone who speaks against the Pope. The situation is no laughing matter.”

“If that’s the case, wouldn’t there be a lot of people leaving the city?”

“Ah, yes. A lot of people have left the capital and are becoming vagrants.”

“Vagrants, huh?” Romantica did not miss that term. She picked up her quill pen and made a note of it, “I’m not certain about the other things you mentioned, but I should definitely follow up on this. Since our territory isn’t that far from the capital, there should be a lot of them coming here.”

“I doubt many would come into our territory. Our lord issued strict orders to not accept any vagrants.”

Romantica loosened the grip on her pen.

“Hmmm…the lord is quite cold hearted.”

“He made a wise decision. If vagrants were to flood our territory, the public order would be in disarray and a lot of problems would arise. If that’s the case, it’s better not to accept them in the first place.”

‘Hmmm…so is that how things are done in this era?’

Deep down, Romantica wanted to scold Emil. However, she did not. If this was the popular opinion of this period of time, she knew her words would not change anything.

“If so, wouldn’t all the vagrants die in this cold winter?”

“No, that’s not the case. There is a territory in the north that is accepting all vagrants.”

“What’s the name of the territory?”

“Evernatten.”

“Evernatten? I feel like I’ve heard that before.”

“Yes. It’s the frontline territory between the barbarians and us. Lord Evernatten is famous, I’m sure he’ll figure out a solution to the problem.”

“Is he that famous?”

“Of course. He’s one of those rare men of integrity that’s hard to find these days. When he was still active in the capital, he scored a victory against the Hebrion Empire, expanding our territory past the river. Sadly, he made a bad impression with the Pope and was banished to Evernatten.”

“Emil, bring me the map,” Romantica crossed her arms, her merchant’s instinct tingling. Something was fishy. Emil brought over the map and she opened it. She went over each territory’s name with her finger.

“Evernatten…Evernatten…Here it is!”

It was a small territory, just an outcropping of land bordering the northern barbarian territory. Once Romantica located Evernatten an announcement appeared with a chime.

[You have started the Main Quest: Evernatten’s Survival]

[Solve Evernatten’s two problems:

-Barbarians (Progress 100%): A peace treaty was made with the barbarian chief, Bloody Talon. The barbarians will not perceive Evernatten as an enemy anymore.

-Vagrants (Progress 30%): Public order has been restored and crime rates have fallen significantly. The residents of the territory feel secure walking around the streets. Vagrants cannot commit any crimes due to strict oversight.]

‘My instincts told me to investigate the capital city and I managed to get information on the vagrant situation. This, in turn, led to knowledge of Evernatten which showed me the Main Quest!’

Romantica shivered with excitement.

‘The quest has progressed quite a bit. They must all be there, I’m certain of it.’

Having finally found a clue, Romantica immediately stood up.

“Emil, I have an urgent job for you.”

“What is it boss?”

“Investigate the situation in Evernatten.”

“Eh?”

“We’re going to do business in Evernatten.”

“How can you decide so suddenly? Did you even consider the distance between us and Evernatten?”

“If that’s the case, pack your bags now. It’s not too late to start investigating once we arrive there.”

“…”

Emil wasn’t sure what the point of pre-investigation was if they were already going.

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**TL: Neria
Sponsored Content**

The ear-piercing cry of a crow woke Desir in the morning."

Rubbing his sleepy eyes, Desir sat up and picked up the cup of water next to his bed." The water smelled fishy and tasted bitter, but nonetheless he drank it to quench his thirst." Still groggy, he slipped out of his bed and walked into the washroom." A splash of cold water to the face helped to wake him up fully."

It had been 8 days since he had entered the Class 4 Shadow World." In real time, only 8 hours have passed." In that time, Desir had finally managed to start the Main Quest." While the difficulty was high, everything had been progressing smoothly."

When he first arrived, he was assigned the role of assistant chef." Under Jefran’s command, Desir completed the dinner service." He brilliantly incorporated the rare plum ingredient into the dinner service and earned a favourable impression with the lord." By recommendation, he successfully got appointed as the personal assistant to the lord."

However, since the lord was not a talkative person, Desir had a difficult time impressing him." Still, with the help of Pram, they managed to impress the lord by foiling the barbarian’s raid on the food supplies." Thanks to that, the Main Quest was already half completed as soon as it was revealed." This was due to the peace treaty that Desir made with the barbarian chief, solving one of the two problems that Evernatten faced."

‘Now the only problem left is the vagrant situation." ’

After his simple morning preparations, Desir headed to the lord’s office." As he was walking by the castle’s hallway, he stopped to observe outside." Someone was making a giant snowball."

“Hello Lilica." ”

“Hi big brother Desir!”

Lilica waved at Desir, looking more lively than the first time they met."

“What are you doing over there?” asked Desir."

“I’m building a snowman! Do you want to help?”

“We have to prepare food." ”

“Oh right!” Lilica looked as if she had only just remembered her job."

“I’m heading to the kitchen too, so let’s walk there together." ”

“Thank you brother Desir~!” shouted Lilica as she made her way towards Desir." In her hands there was a miniature snowman." “I’m going to decorate the kitchen with this." ”

“Are you sure mister Jefran would approve?”

The innocent child smiling at him was a vagrant that Desir had met recently." When Jefran complained about the lack of personnel, Desir jokingly recommended Lilica to him." However, it seemed like Lilica was inherently talented and easily replaced Desir as an assistant chef." Naturally, she was too small to handle any major physical work, such as transporting all the ingredients, so Desir still helped with those."

“Why are you heading to the kitchen? Didn’t we move all the ingredients last night?”

“I’m going to brew some tea." ”

“Tea? Didn’t the lord say that you don’t need to serve him tea anymore?”

“He did, but you don’t need to take him so literally." ”

When Desir and Lilica arrived at the kitchen, they were greeted by Jefran’s frowning face."

“Where were you this morning Lilica?”

“Hehe, I was making a snowman!”

“You’ll catch a cold if you play outside too long! If you get sick, who will help me in the kitchen?”

‘Was this old geezer always like this? Why is he so nice to her?’

“Hey,” said Desir, feeling a bit annoyed, “how come you treat Lilica so much better than me?”

“Unlike you, Lilica is cute." ”

Desir was at a loss for words." Rather than replying, he focused on brewing some tea and left for the lord’s office." There was now a small desk in the room just for him."

“Good morning, my lord." ”

“Good morning." ”

Desir served the tea to the lord and went to his personal desk." There was paperwork piled up on top of his desk." His job was to organize the paperwork and handle smaller tasks that didn’t require the lord’s approval." Once Desir sorted out the papers, he would present them to the lord."

Most of the paperwork were related to the management of the Evernatten territory." From them, Desir was able to learn the finer details about the overall situation of Evernatten while working." He now had access to important information that wasn’t available to him before."

For example, there was a detailed map." In the modern era, documentation about the Holy Nation was poor since it was swallowed up by the Shadow World." Additionally, magic was not well developed back then, meaning a detailed map was difficult to create." Finally, printing technology was not available, so only the affluent could afford to own a map."

Thus, most modern era maps of the Holy Nation were created through guesswork by mages that had visited related Shadow Worlds." In comparison, the map that Desir received after being appointed the role of Tactician was better than any other map he had seen before."

After studying the map, Desir concluded that Evernatten was the front line of defense for the Holy Nation." It was the nation’s shield against barbarian invasions."

‘It’s a small sized territory." ’

Compared to other territories, Desir could see that Evernatten wasn’t big at all."

‘Even so, it maintains a military force big enough for a large sized territory." ’

Evernatten’s military force was excessively large for its territory size." One might even question if the territory could financially sustain such a large militia."

‘Is it because it’s the front line of defense?’

Not only was the militia well equipped and trained, most of the units were Knight-ranked as well." They have won almost all of their battles against the barbarians." It is said that Lord Evernatten had never lost a battle that he personally led." His leadership was superb."

‘And at the same time, he is governing the territory extremely well." ’

Evernatten utilized its large militia as a source of income." Only Evernatten had enough forces to resist barbarian invasions." Whenever nearby territories were under threat of such an invasion, Wilhelm Evernatten would send his knights and receive monetary compensation which would, in turn, finance other operations." Word would spread of Evernatten repeatedly repelling the barbarians in the north and merchants, who now felt safe in the territory, began expanding their economic activities."

Five years ago, Evernatten was struggling due to barbarian raids, which left public order in disarray and merchants avoided the territory." It was during this time that Wilhelm, who was appointed lordship over Evernatten, decided to expand the military." With just that, the lord managed to reverse the situation in just five years."

‘And so, we only have one last problem persisting in the territory." ’

[Vagrants (Progress 30%): Public order has been restored and crime rates have fallen significantly." The residents of the territory feel secure walking around the streets." Vagrants cannot commit any crimes due to strict oversight." ]

‘There are so many vagrants that they even formed slum cities just for vagrants." ’

Most vagrants did not have social standing, making it easy for criminals to be mixed in with them." It was understandable that most lords would not want to accept vagrants into their territory." However, that wasn’t the case with Wilhelm Evernatten." He was more generous than any other lord and accepted every single vagrant into his territory."

‘By accepting vagrants, our food supplies and public order are directly affected." ’

Currently there were no issues with the food supply." Even if the lord continued to accept vagrants, the food supply would just barely suffice."

‘While food supplies aren’t an issue, I should take a look at the public order…’

Desir reviewed the crime rate documents for the territory." With the insurgence of vagrants, crime had also increased significantly." There were many complaints from the regular residents." Desir noticed an interesting report." Since the day his party entered the Shadow World, the crime rates had been declining sharply." The reason for this was fairly simple."

‘This is…Ajest’s work, right?’

\*\*\*

Heading out of the castle and crossing the drawbridge, Desir made his way towards the headquarters of the Knights." When he arrived, Desir gave his name to one of the guards and they welcomed him warmly."

“Hello Mr." Desir." Our captain is expecting you." ”

Desir followed the guard into the building and up to the second floor." There were many rooms on the second floor, each with a door bearing the name of the Knight that lived inside." Desir continued up one more floor and walked towards the furthest room." Hearing voices from within, he paused in front of the door."

“Why aren’t we taking any action!?” It was a female voice speaking in a harsh tone."

“That is not something that I alone can decide,” replied the voice of Ajest." Her response was cold and brunt, causing the other person to yell louder."

“Captain, if we let things go as it is, the food supplies will decline and crime rates will increase." We must take action now!”

They were clearly talking about the vagrants."

“It’s our job to prevent that from happening,” replied Ajest."

“The solution is simple." The vagrants are the root cause." After receiving the lord’s protection, they only waste Evernatten’s food supplies and do nothing in return." This all started because the lord accepted all these vagrants! We must remove them immediately!”

“Watch your mouth, Lieutenant Eyulan,” said Ajest coldly." Desir shivered." The tone was overwhelming." It wasn’t only Desir who felt it." Eyulan was also at a loss for words."

“H-however…”

“Are you suggesting that you have the authority to trample over our lord’s decision?”

“…I got too emotional and misspoke." I am truly sorry,” said Eyulan." It was certainly not something a Knight could say to a lord."

“I’ll take your words into consideration." You are dismissed." ”

“Yes ma’am." ”

Desir heard approaching footsteps and moved away from the door, making room for the conversants to pass." Eyulan opened the door and saw Desir."

“Who are you?” she asked."

“I’m Desir Arman,” replied Desir light-heartedly." As soon as she heard Desir’s name, Eyulan gave him a disdainful look, as if he was an insect."

“Wipe that smug look off your face, you damn vagrant…” whispered Eyulan as she walked past, loud enough for Desir to hear clearly." She left regretting that she could not behead Desir on the spot." As her footsteps faded in the distance, Desir entered the room." Ajest greeted him warmly."

“Welcome Desir, it’s been so long!”

“How long have you been working here?”

“Since the start." As the captain, I’ve been working on the Main Quest since day 1." ”

“What? How unfair,” said Desir." As an assistant chef, Desir had to work to his bones." However, the frown of dissatisfaction that he was showing Ajest was playful and soon turned into a smile." Ajest was also smiling gently." She motioned Desir to sit."

“I’ve heard rumours around the castle that you can brew some excellent tea." ”

“I’ll make you some tea the next time I visit." ”

“I look forward to it." I’ve been missing your tea." ” [1]

Ajest rested her chin on the table and smiled at Desir." From Desir’s perspective, it looked like a beautiful piece of artwork." Taken aback by her beauty, Desir returned the stare blankly for moment." However, he quickly recovered and changed the topic."

“How’s the quest progressing?”

“I’ve been working on it." The progression isn’t so bad." ”

“Tell me what you have been doing so far." ”

“Hm…” Ajest pondered for a moment." Then she nodded, “rather than telling you, I think it’s best to show you." ”

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**TL: Neria
RW: Wynn
KOR Check: Billy Stevens**

Even in the winter, many residents roamed the streets, basking in the sun." Ajest walked towards a street filled with vendors, stopping in front of a particular stall." As she approached, the surprised stall owner warmly greeted her." “Oh my! Isn’t that our captain? Welcome!”

“I’ve told you many times." No need to be so formal." ”

“Shh… and you don’t need to be so modest." Thank you for keeping our streets safe." ” The stall owner handed Ajest some of the cookies from her shop." Ajest tried to pay her for the treats, but the stall owner politely declined."

“How could I accept money from our protector?” Realizing that she couldn’t reject her goodwill, Ajest gladly accepted the cookies and thanked her for the trouble." The stall owner turned and called out to Desir, who was standing quite a ways behind Ajest." “And here are some for Mr." Boyfriend." ”

Desir sputtered out “B-Boyfriend?” before the shop owner had some choice words to say to him."

“At your age, it’s all over your face,” she snickered." “Please take care of our captain." She’s a kind-hearted person." ”

Desir raised his half and was ready to deny it." “Ah, I—“

“Thank you for looking after my lover." ” Ajest quickly cut in and gave the stall owner a simple thanks."

“Hah! Captain, you are more of a man than he is!” She giggled to herself as the unlikely pair departed from her stall."

“Ajest, what are you saying?!” Desir’s face was flush from embarrassment."

“I’m not heartless enough to reject their good intentions." ” As Desir opened his mouth to speak again, he was swiftly silenced by Ajest." “There’s no need to waste time explaining every little thing." ” She took off; in her mind, it was a sign that the conversation was over." She bit into the cookie and snapped it in half, offering the remaining portion to ‘her significant other’."

The cookie itself wasn’t sweet; it tasted like baked flour." It was most likely because it was hard to find sugar." Even so, it wasn’t that bad at all." As they continued down the street, they attracted attention everywhere they went." Gifts of food piled up and soon enough, it was starting to be difficult to carry it all." “Let’s take a short break,” suggested Desir."

In the central plaza, a statue of a stallion reared its head in a regal fashion." Desir and Ajest sat down on a set of benches to catch their breath." The skies were clear and the two of them glanced at each other before averting their gaze." With a bit of hesitation, Ajest asked him a question." “Desir." What is your impression of the streets?”

“It’s a good place." The people are nice and lively." ”

“That’s good to hear." ” Her golden locks framed her light red cheeks as she let out a sigh of relief." Desir thought to himself that Ajest was becoming more expressive." She turned over to meet his eyes and creases appeared on her forehead." “You asked me how the quest was progressing, right?” Desir nodded in response." “I mainly focused on resolving the issue of public safety." As you know, the vagrants were causing a lot of trouble." Due to the influx of vagrants, the morale was low." ”

“Splitting the territory into districts, I have divvied out the knights to each district to maintain order." Severe crimes were punished on the spot, while lesser criminals were transferred to a holding cell." ” Desir marveled at what Ajest managed to achieve in a short time." Her strategy was superb." With this method, each district could be policed and managed appropriately."

“But alas, I could not get to the heart of the problem." ” Ajest gazed off at the people in the streets." Evernatten residents taking a stroll through the town centre." Children having a snowball fight in the snow banks." The atmosphere was warm, and there was a thrum of life filling the air."

“While moderate crimes declined sharply, it has been difficult to prevent numerous petty crimes, such as robbery and pick-pocketing." ” Ajest directed her eyes towards a back alley, there were vagrants skulking about." “The overall progression has stalled at 30%." Even if public order improved, the quest wouldn’t proceed any further from here on out." ”

In the back alley, a vagrant man had his eyes intensely focused on a woman, marking her with his eyes." Holding his breath and blending in with the alley, he ambushed her and tried to steal her bag." The woman cried out in panic, but she couldn’t chase the young man who was already several paces away." Ajest, catching a wind of the robbery, pointed towards the youth’s foot and cast magic."

[Ice]

A coat of ice formed instantaneously, and the young man lost his balance." Windmilling his arms to maintain balance, he found it all to be futile as he slipped and dropped the woman’s bag." Moments later, knights arrived at the scene of the crime to prevent him from running away." Ajest, seeing that the criminal had been properly dealt with, turned to leave."

“If I find some clues, I’ll come to visit you again,” said Desir."

“I’ll be waiting." ” As she left him with her parting words, she descended into the dark alley and headed straight towards the vagrant that was being beaten to the floor." After confirming his arrest, Desir headed back toward the castle."

What’s is the Shadow World?

The Shadow World is a fragment of history."

Meaning, it will repeat once again what has happened in the past."

There were multiple ways to clear a quest in the Shadow World." One was to correct the wrong decisions made by the pivotal figures in the story line." They could clear the quest by leading history through its proper path." The pivotal figure in this Shadow World was Wilhelm Evernatten." He must have spent years searching for a solution to the current problems in his territory, but history proved that the end results had left something to be desired." He needed to obtain more information, and the first step was to gain a better understanding of Wilhelm himself." Not the superficial features, but the private matters that spurred him into action." Thankfully for him, he knew a person who was very familiar with Wilhelm."

That night, Desir knocked on the kitchen door." He sneaked inside and got in touch with his old master, Jefran." “Want me to tell you about the lord? Why are you asking me that?” A thunderous chop landed on the cutting board as the chef cleanly chopped large chunks of meat." Desir’s eyes grew wide with fascination at Jefran’s knife skills." They were fast and precise, slicing the pieces to the perfect size."

“I want to know more about the lord from another perspective." Please don’t play dumb with me, Jefran." ”

The head chef tried to play it off, but the moment he barged into the lord’s room resonated in his mind." “You little twerp." You should really forget about petty things like that." ” Jefran cursed under his breath at his protege’s persistence."

“Mister Jefran, the onions are done!” Lilica stood with her arms crossed triumphantly and awaited further instructions from Jefran."

Jefran smiled cheekily at Lilica’s cheerful personality." “Okay, you can leave them there." Good job!”

“Brother Desir, help me move this pot over there,” asked Lilica." Desir moved the pot filled to the brim with sauce over to where Lilica directed."

“Eugh… it’s not really something I want to talk about, but I guess it’s fine…” Jefran mumbled under his breath." “Lilica! Desir will take care of the cooking for tonight." Go get a good night’s rest." ”

“Yes, Chef!” Lilica saluted at Jefran and thanked Desir, before skipping out of the kitchen with a cheerful smile on her face." Desir had his jaw dropped at the entire exchange."

“Heh." You thought it was free? Now boy." Start stirring that soup." ”

‘D-damn it." ’ With a deep sigh, Desir began to follow Jefran’s orders." As usual, it was exhausting."

Jefran started seasoning the meat, and slowly lapsed into his story." “I’ve known Wilhelm for years; we’d first met in the Holy City." During that time, he was a cardinal." ”

Desir’s eyes bulged." “A cardinal?”

The head chef reminisced and his eyes glazed over." “Well — back then, I was running a small restaurant." After tasting my dish, Wilhelm asked me if I wanted to be his exclusive chef." What with the little money I had to spare, I immediately accepted his offer." Little did I know, I would have the same look that you’ve got on your face when I finally heard about it as well." Hey, can you go stir the soup?”

“Yes, Chef." ” Desir rolled up his sleeves and started stirring the soup." “Was he always so cold and aloof?”

“Nope." Wilhelm had a bright personality." By the time the night rolled around, he would go to the bar and drink to his heart’s content." Most people could hardly believe he was a cardinal." ” Jefran took a sip of his tea." “I can see the look on your face." You don’t believe it either, right? But I’m telling the truth." He was a very lively person who loved to drink and play." On the nicer days, you could see him practicing swordsmanship with his knights." ”

With each word that spilled out of Jefran’s mouth, you could hear regret and sorrow fill his voice." “Wilhelm’s talents extended past his knighthood, being a great leader to his men." Leading his knights, he actively fought against the Judgement." ”

Judgement." At the time, the Holy Nation referred to the Shadow Worlds as Judgement."

“Those were the golden days." He never lose a single battle, and thanks to him, the Holy Nation was able to stave off Goddess Artemis’ Judgement." ”

Unlike the modern era, who had years of history to build the foundation for fighting the Shadow Worlds, this era was forced to build their foundation from scratch." Successfully clearing a Shadow World was an amazing feat." A unique individual whose heroics staved off the Shadow World’s erosion."

“For the record, over half of the knights in the territory followed him here from the Holy City." Even after he was dismissed, their loyalty led them to follow him here." ”

“No wonder the knights are so talented… but why was his dismissed with his accolades?”

“He found himself at odds with the newly appointed royalty." ” Desir could tell from the trembling in Jefran’s voice that this is around when everything began to change." “His Majesty wanted to accept the Judgement." If you read the original text from the Church of Artemis, ‘It is proper to accept the Judgement rather than stop it." The Judgement exists due to our wrongdoing." The Goddess is in the right to punish us for our sins." ’”

“To accept it… did they mean to completely destroy the Holy Nation?”

“If that is what the Goddess desires,” lamented Jefran." Desir became stiff." He couldn’t understand how they could resign themselves to such a fate." “Of course, Wilhelm opposed the idea." He always, always, put the people first." You can tell by how he accepts the vagrants." Until the very end, Wilhelm argued that we owe it to the people to fight against the Judgement— and trust me, that ended poorly." He was stripped of his achievements and ousted from his title." His unit disbanded and he was banished from the capital." Isn’t it a strange fate?” Jefran let out a shallow laugh."

“Take good care of the lord, Desir." ”

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**TL: Neria
RW: Aster0x
KOR Check: Neria**

Desir let out a small yawn as he stretched, stiff and sore from the long hours." He glanced over at Lord Wilhelm." Unlike Desir, the lord gave no indication that he was at all tired from another long day."

Silently, Desir continued to watch Lord Wilhelm." His diligence was unsurprising; Desir had known him to be a hard worker from the very first day." But now, he saw Wilhelm in a new light." ‘To think, he was such a man…’." Indeed, Desir was certain that if the records of the Holy Nation hadn’t been lost, Wilhelm’s name would’ve found their way into the history books."

He swallowed his bitterness at the last thought." With the dearth of information about the Shadow World, humanity had been beaten badly over the last several centuries." Desir felt even more impressed by Wilhelm; given that half the continent was presently swallowed up, clearing a Shadow World this long ago must’ve been extremely difficult." ‘To think, he was able to perform such a feat without any prior knowledge or any modern technology." Incredible." ’

And yet, despite having such a singularly talented man, the Holy Nation had still been utterly destroyed." Desir stopped himself from shaking his head." ‘How stupid they are…gone because of a stupid religious ideology." ’ In the modern era, what once was the Holy Nation of Artemis was a land shrouded in a dark fog; a land swallowed by a single Shadow World, with the exception of Orrane Province, where Desir’s party was currently located."

Contemporary history knew of Class 3 and below (indeed, humanity owed its current record against the Shadow Worlds partially to the fact that no Shadow Worlds of Class 1 or 2 had appeared in recent memory), but records existed of even bigger, even more dangerous Shadow Worlds." The Holy Nation had been destroyed by one, evidently: a Class 1 Shadow World."

Desir let his thoughts wander back to the present." ‘The Church of Artemis, huh?’ While the Holy Nation had been destroyed, their religion survived, continuing to the modern Western Kingdoms." In fact, Priscilla, one of the Final Six, was a member of the Church of Artemis." ‘But their beliefs are very different from these…’

Desir’s thoughts drifted again, back to Wilhelm." Although Desir’s talk with Jefran had been enlightening, he had found no clues or hints for his current quest, the vagrant problem, and therefore, it was most likely irrelevant."

‘So Wilhelm is a man who is infinitely devoted to his people." Although he belonged to the Church of Artemis, he put the lives of his people above his religious beliefs." He possesses a powerful military here in Evernatten, and rules it with an innovative management system." ’ Desir quickly went through the positive qualities of Lord Wilhelm." ‘But something went wrong with the vagrants." So what choices did he make?’

A sharp rap on the door interrupted his thoughts." He heard the scritching of Wilhelm’s pen stop." “Come in." ”

A female knight with sharp eyes and long hair tied tightly behind her head opened the door and stepped through." It was Eyulan." Desir’s mouth tightened ever so slightly." He still vividly remembered the withering glare and harsh insults she sent his direction when he had first met her while visiting Ajest."

She stopped in front of the lord, and kneeled in a gesture of respect." A cool, sharp voice rang out." “For the honor of Evernatten!”

“Raise your head." ”

She looked up at Lord Wilhelm." “Knight Eyulan Lilistick greets you, my lord." ”

“Speak." ”

Desir noticed her eyes briefly flicker to Desir, before returning the Wilhelm." He pretended not to notice, too absorbed with paperwork."

“I am here to make my monthly crime report." Captain Ajest apologizes that she is unable to appear in person." She says she is currently too busy handling other matters, and asks forgiveness." ”

“I understand she has been working hard lately." Report back to her that it’s alright if she’s busy." ”

“Thank you for your understanding, my lord." ” From her pocket, she pulled out small stack of paper." “My lord, all the fine details are written here in this report." In the last month, we have 7 cases of murder, rape, arson, and other serious crimes, and 50 additional cases of misdemeanors." ”

Desir winced mentally." The crime rate was quite high."

“Excluding 1 serious and 12 minor offenders, the rest were vagrants." ” The subtext was clear." In her eyes, the vagrants were responsible." Wilhelm nodded." Eyulan continued." “And this." ” She pulled another document out." “This is a public statement, a request to exile all criminals." ”

Desir couldn’t stop himself from looking up." He saw the corners of Wilhelm’s lips twitch, before the lord spoke." “For what purpose are you giving me this?” His words had the slightest tone."

“My lord, I must deliver to you the will of the people." ”

Wilhelm took the documents and placed it on top of his desk." Without even glancing at them, he simply said, “As always, criminals will go through the proper legal channels, and be punished accordingly." ”

“Forgive me, my lord, but I must speak." I believe the current measures we are taking are far too soft, and therefore ineffective." We need stronger measures." ” Eyulan’s delivery showed her belief in her words." “While Captain Ajest has managed to sharply reduce the number of crimes within Evernatten, she cannot change the nature of vagrants." They are ungrateful, and cause harm to our people." In particular, many crimes have been reported from the slum city they have set up." ”

“So are you telling me to exile all the vagrants then?”

“No, my lord." However, I do believe that your grace and generosity need not extend to criminals." ”

“I will take this into consideration then." You may leave." ”

Eyulan lowered her head again, before turning around and leaving quietly." As she left, Wilhelm took the statement she had delivered and read through it."

Desir sighed internally." Exile, in this winter, especially when they had nowhere else to go, would’ve been no different from death."

“Desir, I’ve heard rumors that you’ve been working on this vagrant issue." ”

“Yes, my lord." ”

“Then you must know a lot about them." What do you think of Eyulan’s suggestions?”

“I believe her words are reasonable." ” As much as Desir did not want to admit it, reworking public safety was only a half-solution." Despite everything they had done, the progression of the main quest remained stuck at 30%."

Wilhelm paused briefly before responding." I do, however, believe it’s a bit excessive to punish them so severely." ”

“Excessive, huh…?”

The lord lightly tapped the sheet of paper." “Even I must acknowledge that the crime rates of the vagrants far exceed those of everyone else." While our knights are working hard on a solution, there are limits to what they can do." I believe, unfortunately, that I must take stronger measures."

“I’ll have a quick demonstration, that my grace and generosity have limits." I have accepted these vagrants into Evernatten, and I believe that in return they should show some respect." I cannot let my people continue to suffer because of my selfishness." ”

It pained Desir to admit, but Wilhelm was not wrong at all." “If you will do so, consider deporting those with a death penalty." I believe it would set a sufficient example." ”

“I was planning on doing so." ” The lord spoke, with a sudden conviction."

‘What!?’ As soon as he finished speaking, an announcement had rang out." It was all Desir could do to hide his panic." He had thought, if the vagrants were responsible for Evernatten’s problems, one possible solution would be simply to remove them." While he was personally opposed to this approach, he had to admit that it would likely work." However, as soon as he suggested exile, the quest progression had actually declined, which could only mean one thing."

Removing the vagrants was not the solution." He was following a path opposite to clearing the Shadow World." That meant that Wilhelm must have chosen to exile the vagrants in the past."

[It is a time of chaos." In such troubling times, the people have cried out for a hero, and they have been led to the Unique Hero: Wilhelm Evernatten." He accomplished many incredible feats, earning the nickname ‘Saladin." ’]

[But that was history." His title of Cardinal has been long forgotten, and his loyal knights long disbanded." ]

[The Fallen Hero, Wilhelm Evernatten." All he had left was his hometown and a fragment of his old blazing conviction." When he returned to Evernatten, he hoped to protect his territory from the barbarians, and accepted all vagrants, out of compassion for the people." ]

[Alas, reality would not accommodate his noble ideals of protecting everyone." At times, one must sacrifice the few to save the many." And so, as ruler of Evernatten, he made up his mind." ]

[But his decision did not address the root problem." ]

Ideals." Conviction." Barbarians and vagrants." It all began coming together for Desir."

Wilhelm Evernatten: the lord who lived for his people." He accepted any and all vagrants, but problems of public order & food stocks arose from his decision."

‘Historically, he must have not known about the barbarian invasion either…’ Desir had discovered the barbarians’ plans, and taken appropriate countermeasures, because he was familiar with their habits and mindset." But in the real history, Wilhelm must’ve been blindsided by the attack." Bloody Falcon Claw would have stolen what he wanted and burned down the rest, exactly as planned, which meant that the barbarians would have re-initiated their war with Evernatten, which would have required the whole military of Evernatten to fight against the barbarians."

‘With no food and no knights available, the vagrant problem would’ve been impossible to deal with." ’ It all made sense now." The cruel reality would’ve become apparent to Lord Wilhelm: his ideals were merely illusions." He would’ve abandoned what remained of his pride, by abandoning the vagrants."

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**TL: Naturalrice
RW: MrScaryMuffin
KOR Check: Naturalrice**

It was wintertime." The snow was knee deep and the winds were bitter cold."

Soldiers gathered in the cafeteria to receive their ready made meals." Everyone deployed to the castle gathered here to eat." The cafeteria was bustling with conversation." People were talking so loud that it was easy to eavesdrop and discern information about various parts of the castle." Desir and his friends were gathered in a corner of this raucous cafeteria."

“So it turns out, after all, that Miss Romantica isn’t in this territory,” said Pram." He, Ajest, and Desir had taken up an entire table in order to have a private conversation."

“She can handle herself,” said Desir, adding some salt to his soup."

“Aren’t you concerned at all about Miss Romantica?” asked Pram."

“I am a bit worried, but I have faith in her abilities,” replied Desir." Romantica was now a Third Circle Mage, putting her on a completely different level than an average Second Circle Mage." Third Circle Mages were considered the cornerstone of any military." She would be strong enough to handle most situations at her current level of strength."

“Anyways, I’ve felt this during the entrance exam, but Romantica is clever." I’m sure she’s progressing the quest in her own way,” continued Desir." The quest was still progressing within the Evernatten territory even though Romantica was nowhere to be found." “But just in case, I’ve asked the Lord to dispatch a rider to nearby territories." The Shadow World wouldn’t just put her somewhere random, so she’s probably somewhere nearby." ”

Desir was confident that this would be enough to locate Romantica."

“That is a bit more reassuring,” replied Pram."

Breakfast time was slowly drawing to a close." As the soldiers stood up and filed out one by one, the atmosphere in the cafeteria began to settle down."

“So, why did you ask us to meet?” asked Ajest, putting down her empty plate."

“Actually, I discovered how the vagrant situation was resolved historically." ”

“Oh?”

The remaining part of the main quest, Vagrants." Pram’s ears perked and Ajest linked her arm with Desir’s, listening intently as Desir began to recount what happened the day before." Yesterday, when he was busy working in the Lord’s office, Eyulan came in and recommended deporting vagrants." Once the Lord agreed to the expulsion, the quest progression dipped even though the lord decided to only expel the criminals." Historically, this was also how the Lord had decided to resolve the vagrant situation as a whole."

“Look at this Ajest,” said Desir, finishing his story and pulling out a handkerchief from his pocket." He held it out to Ajest." The material was poor, but the embroidery was beautiful."

“It’s quite an intricate work." ”

“One of the vagrant mothers made it for me, but they can’t even sell it." They are banned from the marketplace simply because they are vagrants,” said Desir, shaking his head, “Ajest, does this remind you of anything? The way they look at a part and judge the whole?”

“…”

Ajest and Pram tilted their heads quizzically." They pondered the question for a while but could not come up with an answer." It was impossible for Ajest, as only those who experienced the descrimination would understand." Thus, it was Pram that raised his hand." Desir pointed at him."

“Beta Class?” said Pram confidently."

“That’s right,” confirmed Desir." Pram and Desir, being from the Beta class, could distinctly recall all the prejudice and discrimination that they faced first first hand." They were derogatorily known as ‘commoners’ and were not given the opportunity to receive proper education."

“There are people,” continued Desir, “who have already decided that the entire population of vagrants are criminals just because they are ‘vagrants." ’ Doesn’t that remind you of Professor Nifleka, who had already decided that all commoners were incompetent simply because of their origin?”

“Well, that’s…” Ajest swallowed her words." Having observed Professor Nifleka up close longer than anyone, she knew this was true."

“If there are criminals within the vagrants, it is only just that they are punished." However, I can’t accept how the entire population is being judged based on the actions of a few." Could it not also be said that society is at fault for driving them into a corner and not giving them a chance?”

Ajest looked as though she had been punched in the gut."

“Does this have anything to do with the clear condition?” interjected Pram."

Desir nodded."

“It’s correct that the vagrant problem can be resolved by removing the vagrants that are causing it." However, the Shadow World has deemed the Lord’s decision to be the ‘wrong choice." ’ I believe this is because that decision is based on that prejudiced mindset." ”

Desir did not know what impact Wilhelm Evernatten’s choice had in history or why the Shadow World had deemed this choice to be the wrong one." He could only make assumptions from what he had learned thus far."

“Thankfully, the situation right now isn’t terrible since we saved the food supplies." Evernatten can hold on for the time being." Since the issue with the barbarians have been resolved, there is nothing immediately threatening the territory." Let’s take time to think of a solution carefully." ”

In history, the Lord had been driven into a situation where there was no other recourse, but things were different now." There was still time to find the best solution."

“Knight Captain!” It was the voice of a knight." Ajest turned around to see a knight moving in her direction." “Ah, the tactician is here as well." That’s good." I urge the two of you to follow me." ”

“What happened?”

“That’s…I think you should see it for yourself." ”

Desir, Pram, and Ajest were breathing heavily as they looked out from the top of the castle walls." The cold air burned in their tired lungs, but their heart raced more when they saw the bright red flag in the distance."

“This is…”

A sea of people filled their vision." An incredible amount of people were swarming at the castle gates: hungry people, people wearing rags, sick people making pitiful noises." They were all looking towards the castle with desperate faces." They were all vagrants."

“Let us in!”

“My baby is dying! Let me in! Just the baby at least!”

Voices of the vagrants drowned out each other in a crowd that easily exceeded three thousand." Desir and Pram turned pale, unable to believe the awful scene before them." This was a terrible turn of events." A sound of displeasure escaped Ajest’s lips." It wasn’t just Desir’s party who were shocked, nearby soldiers were also taken aback." The castle gate below was sealed shut and was the only thing holding back the swarming vagrants."

“Just where did so many vagrants come from?”

“Just what is this situation…”

Normally, the soldiers would have accepted the vagrants following the Lord’s policy." However, the number currently gathered at the gate was simply too much." The soldiers panicked and shut the gate to seal off the entrance." It was actually the best course of action given the situation." If the swarm had been allowed to enter, the resulting situation would be even worse." Still, Desir found himself speechless when faced with such a spectacle out of the blue."

“This much…is dangerous." ”

Accepting all these people will empty out the food supplies." The sea of vagrants pounded at the gates in waves." The quest seemed to be daring Desir to accept the vagrants."

“Why aren’t you letting us in!?”

“You said you’d accept vagrants!”

“Why are you discriminating against us!?”

“Open the gates right now!”

The demands were growing hostile and profanities could be heard mixed in every now and then." The voices stabbed at Desir’s heart like needles." Lord Evernatten’s generosity had already become an entitlement in their minds and they were enraged that they were refused entry."

As Desir’s party stared out with agitated faces, a messenger sent by the Lord knelt down beside them."

“What does the Lord say?” asked Desir to the kneeling man."

“He says accept them all for now." ”

“Of course he would." ” Desir had already expected this decision."

“Are you really going to let them in Desir?” asked Ajest incredulously, “what little public order we managed to obtain will be shattered instantly." No, even if I somehow manage to restore it to some extent, what about the food supply? Accepting these people will put the survival of this territory into question." ”

The survival of Evernatten." That was the name of the main quest and also the main portion of the assignment given to them." Desir could only out at the crowd of vagrants that were also his assignment."

“Your orders." ” The soldiers looked at Desir, waiting for instructions." Presently, he was the one with the most authority." Pram and Ajest could only helplessly watch his mouth." Desir’s lips clenched for what felt like an eternity before opening to speak."

“Open the gates." ”

As soon as Desir’s spoke, the soldiers raised their voices to relay the order."

“He says open the gates!”

“Open the gates!”

The orders quickly spread down to the other soldiers." Desir turned to Ajest."

“Ajest, please try to contain them for now." ”

“…Leave it to me." ”

Ajest climbed down from the castle walls and ordered the soldiers to create a path for the vagrants to enter." Desir could only watch with clenched fists."

‘I talked arrogantly about how we should give them all a chance and yet I hesitated when it came time to accept more of them." ’

He had hesitated." He had truly hesitated on his decision to accept these people." He already knew how overwhelming the situation was before and immediately thought that he could not accept any more vagrants."

‘…Damn." ’

Desir’s hesitation made him feel pathetic." He tasted blood from where he had bit down on his lip."

“Sir Desir,” said Pram, approaching him with a faint smile."

“I’m sorry Pram." ”

“Don’t be." I will always follow Sir Desir’s decision." ”

“I appreciate it." ”

The sound of chains moving filled the air as the gates finally opened." The vagrants began to pour in like the tide." Thanks to Ajest’s direction, they were funnelled through into the territory in an orderly fashion." Once the final person entered, a system notification appeared."

[Progress of the ‘Vagrants’ quest has declined by 15%…]

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**TL: Naturalrice
RW: Aster0x
KOR Check: Naturalrice**

[The Vagrant Problem: Progress Rate 12%]

The number of vagrants in Evernatten was unsustainable." Felonies such as burglary and even murder were becoming daily occurrences." Residents were afraid to leave their houses, in fear of the unwelcome guests." Due to the growing instability, merchants refused to pass through Evernatten, crippling its economy."

The atmosphere in the meeting was chilly." Lord Wilhelm Evernatten and his “think tank,” Knight-Captain Ajest, Knight Eyulan, and his advisor Desir Arman had gathered to again discuss the vagrant problem."

Eyulan, who was strongly in favor of expelling the vagrants, spoke first." “There are too many of them, my liege." On top of that, they’ve begun mistaking our goodwill and generosity as some sort of obligation." ” She spat out the last word venomously." Unsurprisingly, Eyulan was furious that the vagrants had no gratitude towards Evernatten, as if it were natural that they should be allowed in." “The most critical problem right now is the food supply." At this rate, our stores won’t last all winter." I say we kick the vagrants out immediately!”

“I object!” Desir interjected almost immediately." “My lord, do you remember why you let the vagrants into Evernatten in the first place? You believe in being a lord for your subjects." Expelling the vagrants would be abandoning that conviction." ”

“That conviction you speak of,” replied Eyulan, “does not simply refer to the vagrants, but also the actual residents of Evernatten." The same residents who are now starving because of these vagrants." Sacrificing the many for the few? Idiocy." ” Emotion and conviction spilled from her voice." “Think about this." These vagrants are strangers, faces you’ve never laid eyes on, and they are taking our goodwill for granted." How can we favor them? Should we not consider Wilhelm’s own people first?”

“We can save both,” Desir insisted." “To abandon one group needlessly is not what our lord believes in." ”

“Oh? We can? Our residents are afraid to leave their houses! We have no more rations, and no ability to obtain more! Face reality!”

“You’re simply coming up with reasons to expel them! Why do you insist on acting as though expelling them is the only option? Why aren’t you trying to come up with other options?!”

“Other options? Then present one! Can you? Can you come up with a solution to restore order to these vagrants hopping about like madmen and stop them from eating through all our rations?”

“That’s enough." ” Wilhelm’s voice instantly ended the argument." “I believed, once, that we could save them all." But that was a foolish belief from a distant past." I was wrong." ” His voice was heavy and melancholic, and the words came out slowly." He turned toward Desir." “I thank you for reminding me of those convictions I once so firmly held." But I cannot stubbornly refuse to change." Accepting all these vagrants will stretch what our territory can provide for beyond breaking." ”

Wilhelm sighed." “Ideals and reality." It looks like the moment has come to return to reality." ” He paused, the chilling reality setting in like the winter’s air, weighing on his heavy bones." The time for childish ideals was long past." “It’s impossible to save everyone." No, more than that, I lack the ability to care for everyone." I can no longer stubbornly refuse to accept this." ” He turned, slowly to Eyulan." “Apologize to the vagrants that we are no longer able to accept them." ”

“Understood!” Eyulan was disturbingly giddy as she heard Wilhelm’s words, assuring the expulsion of the vagrants."

Ajest watched this exchange silently, unsure of how to proceed." Clearly, the completion condition for this shadow world was to change Wilhelm’s decision to the correct one, but, as she watched the conversation unfold, she couldn’t think of a single argument against Wilhelm’s decision." She was certain, had she been in his shoes, that she would have made the exact same decision, which meant, unfortunately, that history was bound to repeat itself, leading to the quest’s failure."

As Ajest continued to think in silence, she saw Desir step forward and drop to his knees." Everyone froze, unsure of what to do."

“Just two days,” pleaded Desir." He knew this would seem desperate, but it didn’t matter to him anymore." If he had to abandon his pride for the vagrants that nobody else cared about, he would." “Give me just two days." I’ll come up with a plan." ”

Ajest looked back and forth between Lord Wilhelm and Desir." Everyone waited with baited breath."

“Fine." I’ll grant you two final days." ”

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The most urgent problem, it seemed to Desir, was resolving the food issue." The rations provided to Wilhelm’s garrison had already been heavily reduced to accommodate for the influx of people." Naturally, the soldiers had complained, but Lord Wilhelm had quickly quieted them by eating the same meals as the soldiers, taking the lead on accepting the reduced rations." Days had stretched into weeks like this, but now the situation was becoming untenable." Desir had only two days to produce a solution, or the vagrants would be expelled, and the quest failed."

To his credit, he had worked diligently on coming up with a solution to the vagrant problem, but so far, all his thinking had led him back to the same conclusion: there was no solution." Regardless of how he approached the problem, nothing he came up with would be better than simply expelling all the vagrants."

For example: Desir had initially considered trying to “help the vagrants help themselves” per se, by opening up apprenticeships and other opportunities for skilled individuals which would increase Evernatten’s export activity, but, unfortunately, he quickly came to the conclusion that such a plan would take far too long to bear fruit." Training every skilled individual to the point where they brought in more money for Evernatten than they cost would take at least a month – time they didn’t have."

Desir sighed." ‘No wonder the rewards for a 4th-level Shadow World were so good." ’ This Shadow World’s rewards was the artifact ‘Arms of Toa,’ which increased an individual’s mana pool." Due to his weak mana pool, Desir could only use first circle magic; without the artifact, he wasn’t sure if he could reach even the Third Circle." If only the quest wasn’t so incredibly difficult…

He shook his head, banishing those thoughts." ‘I can’t fail this." ’ If he failed, he would have to totally rearrange his plans." He looked up at the empty street ahead." The lack of merchants had brought sharp inflation to Evernatten, which meant that most stores were closed down due to a lack of customers." Compounding the emptiness, few residents walked about, afraid of the swarms of vagrants." The vibrant energy that once permeated the castle-city no longer seemed to exist." Desir felt all too aware of the frosty winds."

As he trudged through the thick snow, deep in thought, he passed from the residential area into the propped up shantytown of the vagrants." The signs of activity returned to his senses, but it was a darker, bleaker activity, a far cry from vibrance or joy."

“Don’t stray from the line!” The voices of soldiers barking commands from their station cut through the winter air." Desir saw a line of vagrants miles long, silently following the soldiers’ orders with lifeless eyes."

“Oi! There won’t be any food if you cut in line!” The soldiers, seeing Desir approach, stopped and saluted."

Desir waved them down." “Don’t mind me, you can keep working." ”

“Understood." ” The soldier went back to distributing rations." Desir peered down the impossibly long line of vagrants." They huddled in clumps for warmth, rubbing their hands to melt their frozen fingers as they waited restlessly." The lines had grown longer and the food supply smaller each time Desir came to observe them."

“Mister Desir!” A voice shouted from behind." Desir turned to see Lilica standing next to Ajest and waving her hand excitedly." She had basically been evicted from the castle, and was now effectively amongst the vagrants."

She held a fist-sized piece of rye in her hand; evidently, her ration." Desir came up to the pair of them." “Aren’t you bored waiting?”

“Nope,” responded Lyrica, shaking her head forcefully." “Miss Ajest stood with me so I wasn’t bored at all!”

Ajest stood beside her in a full suit of plate armor." Nominally, she was here to keep an eye on the ration line, but truthfully, she was keeping an eye on Lyrica."

“I’m sorry things turned out this way, Lyrica." ” Desir said quietly."

“No, why are you sorry? You were very good to me." I think that it’s thanks to you that I’m able to get this much." Of course, it’s too bad that Mister Pram couldn’t be with you as well."

“But, I wish they told me why they chased me out." Mister Jefran just got really quiet and didn’t say anything at all…Did I do something wrong? Did they kick me out because I made a mistake?”

Desir shook his head." “Like I told you before, it wasn’t anything you did." ”

“What was it then?”

Desir fell silent as well." How could he possibly explain the truth to her? It would be too cruel to expose the terrible reality to her." “You’ll be able to come back one day,” he offered."

“Then watch Carlos for me until then." ”

“Carlos?”

“It’s the name of the snowman I made." ”

“…Of course." Leave it to me." ”

Satisfied, Lilica disappeared into the mob of vagrants."

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**TL: Neria
RW: MrScaryMuffin
KOR Check: Neria**

The streets were filled with vagrants, making it look like a war zone." Knights were deployed to oversee the food distribution and Pram was sweating profusely as he gave orders to his soldiers." The situation was getting dire."

“We’re going to drive them away in two days anyways, why are we wasting food like this?” said a soldier, expressing the irritation felt by their peers." Others chimed in with their grumbling."

“While I feel bad for them, how can we look after them if we don’t have enough food for ourselves?”

“You know, I wouldn’t be complaining if we had food to spare." What is the lord thinking, I wonder?”

They weren’t necessarily wrong." People are typically inclined to share only when there is enough to share."

“Desir…” Ajest made her way towards Desir." She motioned to reach out to Desir but stopped, her lips pressed tightly." There was nothing that she could say."

“What a shitty feeling,” said Desir." It was a feeling that he had forgotten for a very long time." The feeling of despair, being unable to save someone no matter what you do." The feeling of being powerless to do anything in a helpless situation."

Desir clenched his fists."

‘Anything is fine." If I can just get one hint…just any help…’

“Have you thought of a solution?” asked Eyulan." She was overseeing the food distribution and, noticing Desir’s presence, was walking towards him."."

“Knight Eyulan,” replied Desir, “you speak as if you don’t want me to come up with a solution." ”

“Surely you jest." I may have some opinions of vagrants, but how could I let my personal feelings get in the way when the lord’s territory is at stake? I’m anxiously waiting for our tactician to come up with a reasonable solution." ”

“Please don’t worry." I intend to do so even without you pressing me." ”

“I’m certain you will, since you are a vagrant yourself." ”

That Desir was a vagrant was actually a lie." In order to win over the lord, Desir lied to created an ideal image of himself." However, there was no need to explain this to Eyulan since her opinion of Desir didn’t matter." Additionally, if the lie was exposed, the lord would no longer trust him."

“As a tactician,” continued Eyulan, “you must understand by now that the only solution is to deport all the vagrants." When it comes time to execute that order, I’ll be sure that all vagrants are expelled without exception." ”

Eyulan was simply repeating what the lord had said, but there was an emphasis on ‘no exceptions’."

“You say you were kneeling to save others,” said Eyulan, “don’t make me laugh." In the end, aren’t you kneeling to save yourself? It’s no different than pathetically begging for your life." ”

At that moment, Desir grabbed Ajest’s arm." He had barely stopped her from striking Eyulan." Ajest tried to free her arm, but Desir whispered in her ear."

“This isn’t like you." Don’t be so upset." ”

“I wonder,” continued Eyulan, unaware that she had narrowly avoided a slap to the face, “why is every single vagrant so selfish and ego-centric…?”

Just then, loud voices could be heard among the vagrants, gradually climbing in volume." A few soldiers were quickly dispatched to deal with the disturbance."

“Did you know that an incident like this occurs every hour? The vagrants are trying to steal each other’s rations." How uncivilized." ”

“…”

However, the shouting was still getting louder." More soldiers got deployed and were squeezing their way through the crowd."

‘Is it a fight?’

Desir immediately dismissed the thought." Rather than a fight, it looked like the soldiers were trying to stop something." Someone was trying to make their way to Desir and Ajest and the soldiers were blocking the way." It was difficult to see what was going on due to the wall of soldiers around them, but Desir could hear a frustrated voice."

“Hey, let go of me! I just told you, there is someone I need to talk to over there!”

“You may not approach our tactician." ”

“But I know him!”

Ajest and Desir shared a blank look." The voice was certainly familiar."

“Is that Romantica?”

Ajest nodded and the pair made their way towards the commotion." Curious, Eyulan followed them."

“I swear I know them!”

“How dare you claim to know them when you’re just a vagrant!”

“How many times do I have to tell you I’m not a vagrant, you moron!”

As they got closer, Desir was certain that the voice belonged to Romantica."

“Let her go." I do know her." ”

“Oh, sir." ” The soldier hesitated before stepping aside." In front of them was a young lady."

“I told you so!” Upset, Romantica shook her fist at the soldiers before turning towards Desir." “It’s been a while Desir!”

“I’m glad you’re okay, Romantica." ”

“Of course! Who do you think I am? I’m Romantica, a third circle mage!” Romantica put her fists on her waist and puffed out her chest in pride." Seeing her brimming with energy, Desir smiled gently."

“Where did you end up?”

“The Kervan Territory, one day’s travel from here by carriage." I cleared my quest over there and then saw the Main Quest, which led me here." However, they said I needed some kind of document to enter the castle? Anyways, now I’m caught up in this mess." ”

Desir felt proud of Romantica." She had been able to accomplish a lot by herself."

“The situation here looks bad,” continued Romantica, “why did the quest progression decline?”

Since Romantica was in another territory, she was not aware of the current situation." Desir explained thoroughly to get her caught up." He told her about the large influx of vagrants, which caused the quest progression to decline sharply."

“The situation is looking bad, Romantica." ”

The biggest problem was food." There simply wasn’t enough to go around."

“Public opinion of vagrants isn’t too great either." If I don’t come up with a solution in two days, they’ll be kicked out of the territory." ”

Desir knew that if that happens, his party would fail the quest." It would be the end."

“Hm…is that so?” said Romantica, tapping her chin."

“For the time being, you should rest." It must have been a long trip." I’ll let them know to expect you at the castle,” said Desir considerately." He wanted to let Romantica rest after her long journey." At the same time, he didn’t have a plan to improve the quest progression yet."

“I’ll gladly accept your offer,” replied Romantica, nodding, “as you can tell, I’m pretty tired." However, is that the only problem we have left to deal with?”

“Hm?”

“Will the vagrant problem be resolved if we solve the food shortage?”

Desir wasn’t sure where Romantica was going with this line of questioning."

“Not completely, but probably most of it." The main reason why we’re driving away the vagrants is because we don’t have enough food." ”

“That’s true." No matter what kind of solution we come up with, it’ll be pointless if we still don’t have food." ”

Having identified the root problem, Romantica crossed her arms and tried hard not to laugh." However, she could not help smiling as she was overjoyed that she had one up over Desir in this situation."

“Did you think of something?” asked Desir."

“Haaa? Think of something? Why do you ask?” teased Romantica, savouring the moment, “do I really need to think of a solution if I already have an answer?”

“What?”

“I’ll solve the problem for you." I’ll supply the f-o-o-d." ”

Desir’s eyes widened." He could not believe his ears."

“How could a nobody like you solve our food shortage?” interrupted Eyulan." It was easy to follow the conversation since Romantica’s voice was loud." Still, it was considered very rude to cut into a private conversation." That Eyulan was doing so implied that she was looking down on both Desir and Romantica." Romantica turned to look at Eyulan with a cold expression."

“A nobody? Who are you to say that?”

“I am an honourable knight serving Evernatten." The vice captain Eyulan Lilistick." ”

“Oh, is that so? A noble huh? What a fancy title." No wonder you can talk smack." ”

Romantica glared at the knight." It was not a good first impression for either of them."

“How insolent!” roared Eyulan loudly, “What did you just say to me?”

“Hey now, listen to me." Didn’t you start it first, old hag? You’re the one calling me a nobody." Do you even know who I am?”

The knight drew her sword in an intimidating fashion, but Romantic merely raised an eyebrow." Her pride would not let her back down." Seeing that, Eyulan lost her composure and faltered." Then, she spoke once again, this time in a quieter voice."

“Aren’t you a vagrant?”

“How many times do I have to tell you that I’m not a vagrant!? It’s starting to irritate me." I’ve had enough!”

It was at this moment that Desir noticed that Romantica’s clothes were unusual."

Note : Please download the sponsor's game to support us!

**TL: Naturalrice
RW: MrScaryMuffin
KOR Check: Naturalrice**

Romantica was wearing luxurious clothes spun from obviously high quality material." Even Eyulan could not deny this."

“Regardless of who you really are,” said Eyulan, “this crisis involving the vagrants and the food supply is impossible to resolve." ”

“Aren’t you revealing your intentions a bit too much? You sound like a middle-aged woman saying that we should just give up without even trying,” countered Romantica harshly, “if someone told me there was a solution, I would smile and ask for the details." ”

“In any case,” continued Romantica, “you’re very rude." Did you grow up in a place where it’s okay to cut into other people’s conversations? Before you boast about your own importance, shouldn’t you consider that the person you’re talking to might be even more important? Ah…maybe this type of thinking is beyond your abilities? Are you just a muscle brained knight?”

Romantica’s words were disparaging, but Eyulan was unable to rebuff her." All she could do was make a show of her displeasure, but it was all bark and no bite."

“Romantica,” whispered Desir quietly, “what role did you get when you entered the Shadow World?”

“I thought you would never ask." ”

Romantica whistled loudly, rousing a youth in the crowd." He handed her something bound in black leather." Romantica casually checked the object before handing it over to Desir." It was a ledger." Desir’s stood agape as he received it."

“I’m a merchant,” said Romantica, “and I will solve the vagrant issue the merchant way." ”

“Really? This is…” Desir was amazed."

That feeling of amazement did not fade as Romantica led them into a forest near the gates." Those accompanying him shared his sentiment." Their eyes were wide and jaws hung open."

“Wha-wha-wha!?”

Horse-drawn carriages and wagons were lined up, filling the entire forest." They were not small in size, with each of the 30 massive carriages requiring four horses each." There were also countless workers managing the wagons."

“T-this…is impossible." What is…” As the knight stood dumbfounded, Desir and his party walked ahead." The workers managing the carriages were all wearing the same uniform and all greeted Romantica respectfully as she passed."

“This is a merchant group lead by me,” explained Romantica, “we usually deal with medical product but, well, we recently had to shift our focus in a major way." ”

Romantica walked over to one of the wagons and revealed its cargo." The wagon was filled to the brim with food supplies." There were all kinds of products, including wheat."

“I got news that all the vagrants were gathering in Evernatten." From the sheer number of them all, I knew that there was no way Evernatten could sustain them all, so I predicted that value of food to skyrocket." ”

Compared to other merchant groups, Romantica’s merchant guild was doing pretty well." She had dominated the market not only in her headquarter’s local area, but in the surrounding territories as well." Romantica’s outstanding business sense had ushered in a golden age for her guild."

“And so I went all in." ”

Romantica had directed the guild to liquidate a significant amount of its assets in order to purchase food." This was a bold move, foolhardy even." But it might have been this sort of aggressive thinking that had help the guild grow in power." Romantica gathered information, analyzed it thoroughly, created a plan, and executed it without holding anything back."

Of course, things didn’t always go to plan." It wasn’t possible to account for all scenarios or gather perfect information every time." This is where business sense was important." Although betting everything on a “gut feeling” meant you would risk losing everything, Romantica was fortunate thus far that her business sense had always resulted in the most favourable outcomes."

“We were almost robbed by bandits on the way here, but we managed to fend them off." Now I understand why you worked so hard to make me a Third Circle mage." ” Romantica showed off the rifle she was carrying." Desir felt sorry for the bandit group."

“So Ajest,” asked Romantica, “is this enough food?”

Ajest was meticulously studying the inventory and calculating the amount of food brought by Romantica as well as the amount remaining in Evernatten."

“…We should be able to hold out through the winter with this much." ”

Being able to feed everyone through the winter was no longer just a dream." The combined food supply greatly improved the situation." It could even be said that they would never have to worry about food again." Colour began returning to Desir’s face."

“Great,” said Desir, “this is really great, Romantica." ”

“I’m great right? Praise me more." ”

“Genuinely, you deserve all the praise." This is quite an achievement." I’m truly grateful, Romantica." ”

“W-well, you don’t have to go that far,” stammered Romantica, “it’s not that big of a deal." I’m giving you all the food even if you don’t praise me that much." ”

“Miss Romantica,” interjected Emil, “you’re not thinking about giving away the food for free are you?”

“Hm? Why not?”

“If you do that…the guild will go bankrupt…”

The pleading look in her employee’s eyes made Romantica feel guilty." She had lost sight of her position as the leader of the merchant guild as she wasn’t originally from the Shadow World." If she carried out this decision, she would be betraying the expectations of the people that had believed in her and followed her all the way here."

[Sub-quest created! Trade with Evernatten:

Desir and Romantica shared a look before Romantica quickly began to control the situation."

“Hm? O-of course we won’t hand over the food for free." That’s right, we’re going to start negotiations." ”

Desir had a plan."

“On top of paying a large sum for the food within six months,” he said, “we’ll let you use the name of Evernatten for your business." In other words, your guild will become a group operating within Evernatten." ”

“Giving us full trading rights?” said Romantica, “that’s not bad." ”

“Eeehh? W-wait a minute guild leader,” said Emil, his voice growing loud in panic, “are we handing over all the food just for the name of a fallen noble? In what world is that a fair trade?”

Romantica and Desir shared a sly smile at his panicked voice."

“It’s an incredible loss for now, “ explained Romantica, “but Evernatten’s name still holds a great deal of prestige." A noble’s name is not nothing." It’s a name that everyone recognizes." I’ve heard that Evernatten’s main source of income is supplying knights to support other regions." ”

“Wait, how do you know that much?”

“Most bandits wouldn’t dare touch products if it is marked with the Evernatten name." ”

Despite Evernatten being a fallen noble, his name was still widely known."

“We will be able to grow our guild several times in size within five years." Borrowing Evernatten’s name with just this amount of food is a great deal for us." ”

Emil stood slack jawed, unable to refute Romantica’s logic." Romantica turned back to Desir."

“You’ll make our guild Evernatten’s main merchant group and grant us the same rights as residents of this territory." This much should be okay, right?”

Desir bowed with a wild flourish as if they were acting in a screenplay."

“We welcome you to the Evernatten region, Miss Romantica." ”

Romantica responded in kind, enjoying the acting." She pressed her lips together and did her best impression of a noblewoman."

“Ho ho." I leave myself in your care, Mr." Tactician." ”

[Sub-quest cleared! A trade agreement has been made that satisfies both parties." With the deal complete, the region’s food issues have been miraculously resolved."

Note : Please download the sponsor's game to support us!

**For the People (1)**

TL: Billy Stevens
RW: Wynn
KOR Check: Billy Stevens

Lord Evernatten felt a substantial uptick of refugees arriving at his city walls, dwarfing any other instance in recent times." The sudden increase led him to believe that something was amiss, and he probed for more information." As a result of his investigation, he discovered that they had arrived from the Holy City of Gottheim."

Rumors spread throughout the camp eventually found their way to his ears, and he learned of an evil spirit kidnapping people and peeling off their skin." Wilhelm grimaced; a truly grotesque tale."

The urban legend was rampant in the vagrant slums, being the most predominant story lingering in their minds." Lord Wilhelm, expecting that there was some truth to the matter, sent people to the area surrounding the Holy City to collect information—the man kneeling in front of him was one of his trusted confidants."

“The situation in the Holy City is severe." In order to prevent Judgement, they are levying heavy taxes in the name of God." As a result of this, assets are being seized en masse, and the number of refugees can only grow ever more." ”

“And the rumor?”

“There is truth in the matter." Missing persons are oft never to be seen again, milord." The only thing is that his Majesty appears to be taking no steps to address the threat." ”

Wilhelm paused." “…for sacrifices?”

His voice was barely audible."

“Yes." Based on multiple eyewitness accounts, it is likely an act of sacrifice in the name of Artemis, all to prevent the Goddesses’ Judgement." ”

The Goddesses’ Judgement."

In order to correct the sins of man, in order to lead history to righteousness." Simply enter the space and return history to the correct path and the Judgement would cease." However, the Holy Kingdom refused to take action to stop them."

Instead of fighting the Judgement, they chose the path of sacrifice." They believed that in the space, the Goddess would reveal their sins and take the world back under her embrace." By offering the flesh and blood of sinners, they attempted to appease the Goddess."

“Do they really think that they can fight the Judgement like this?”

Wilhelm Evernatten’s clenched fist trembled in anger." He felt powerless to stop this chain of events." To make matters worse, his informant wasn’t finished."

“A few days ago, a large number of children disappeared, coinciding with the mass immigration of refugees to Evernatten." ”

The lord’s eyes crinkled." “Did an enormous Judgement appear?”

“Most of the other lords predicted the same, but with the current state of the Holy Kingdom, it will be difficult to prevent this from occurring." ”

Wilhelm closed his eyes momentarily to consider the implications of the man’s words." He warily opened them again and looked down at his informant."

“Milord, the Earl of Mitelfer has requested to advance upon Gottheim." ”

“I will pretend that the request wasn’t received." You are dismissed." ”

“My lord!” The informant exclaimed before realizing his place and kneeling once more."

Wilhelm shook his head." “Regardless of the fact that I was chased out, I swore on my name that I would live to serve the Holy Kingdom." I will not tarnish my honor." Leave this place, Lord Carlos." ”

Footsteps echoed out as Desir meandered through the lush garden." Romantica had solved the immediate problem of food, but there was still more to be done." In time, the food would run out; a solution was needed to end this, once and for all."

‘Only one day left now." ’

Despite the most pressing problem being alleviated, there was no additional time to resolve the overarching issue." Without a solution to address the influx of refugees, the Evernatten estate had little to no reason to deal with Romantica’s guild." In the meantime, they had the leeway to think up a long-term solution thanks to Romantica’s intervention." For instance, educating and employing the refugees based on their talents."

This would be the quickest solution that came to mind, but Desir quickly concluded that there were problems with this method, and dismissed it."

‘Wilhelm Evernatten is an astute man." He’s already thought about it." ’

The truth of the matter was that it wouldn’t solve everything." There wasn’t enough money to go around to educate and provide work for everyone."

Desir slowed down and stopped in his tracks." Somebody was building a snowman in the garden, humming away in bliss." It was Lilica; with the food problem no longer an issue, she could return to work in the castle." Looking around, Desir found plenty of snowmen perched around the garden and approached the little girl, patting down the snow and grabbing a carrot for her newest creation."

“You’ll catch a cold building a snowman out here,” advised Desir."

“Mister Desir!” exclaimed Lilica."

“It seems like every time I see you, you’re building snowmen." ”

Lilica smiled brightly at Desir." “Yup, snowmen are my friends! Do you want to build a snowman?” Her eyes shined with anticipation." “…what? Don’t look at me so pitifully! They’re real." We’ve been friends since before coming here." ”

A warm chuckle came out of Desir’s mouth." “So the snowmen aren’t imaginary?”

Lilica’s cheeks puffed out and she crossed her arms at Desir." “Excuuuuuse me!” She looked forlorn as she gestured towards the snowmen." “Do you remember the kid that I asked Mister Desir to take care of? He was my closest friend." ”

“It must have been lonely parting from him— his name was Carlos, right?”

“Yeah." I couldn’t even say goodbye." ”

“Were you too busy?”

“No… he disappeared suddenly." Some people said that a ghost was to blame." ”

“You mean the evil spirit that takes wandering people and peels off their skin?” A voice rang out from behind them as a gentle breeze drifted forward." Romantica walked towards the two surrounded by the snowmen, and Lilica’s eyes bloomed with curiosity."

“Hey Big Miss, how did you know that?”

“It doesn’t seem like the rumors have reached the outskirts of the Holy Kingdom, but plenty of news have passed in the cities leading up to Evernatten." Lilica, are you originally from Gottheim?”

“Yup." Not just me, but all of the refugees are from the Holy City." ” Desir’s eyes widened at the sudden discovery." “Didn’t I mention it to you, Mister Desir?”

Romantica let out an exasperated sigh." “You really don’t know anything going on in the Holy City, do you?”

She was correct; Desir’s knowledge of the Holy City did not extend past what Jefran had revealed." Desir didn’t have the time to look into the affairs of much anything outside of Evernatten with the abundance of work assigned to him after becoming the advisor to Lord Wilhelm."

‘How did I not think of that?’ chastised Desir." His focus was so intent on resolving the refugees that he didn’t put any thought into how they came about." There were just too many problems to solve." ‘To solve any problem, one should always look to solve the fundamental cause." ’

At this moment, Desir realized that historically, Wilhelm Evernatten made the wrong decision to abandon his principles and exile the refugees." Whilst that would solve the immediate problem, it turns a blind eye to the fundamental issue: the Holy City." If the problems plaguing Gottheim were never addressed, the problem would only infect the rest of the Holy Kingdom and one day extend its reach to the Evernatten Estate."

“Romantica." Tell me everything you know." ”

The morning fog rolled over the castle and settled in, chilling the atmosphere inside of the office." The fireplace lent no warmth to the individuals inside, consisting of Desir’s party and the heads of the estate."

Two days had passed." Success or failure would all come down to this moment." Wilhelm lightly coughed to grab his peers’ attention."

“Before we begin our discussions, I would like to express my gratitude towards Madam Romantica for your foresight and leadership." The food situation has improved immensely with your assistance." To that end, I would like to express my thanks." ”

Romantica curtsied and elegantly paid her respects to Lord Evernatten." The conversation was as smooth as molasses, and the room was in good spirits."

“There is still the problem of public security, milord." ” Eyulan stepped forward to bring everybody back to reality."

Wilhelm gave her a curt nod and turned to his advisor."

“Well, Desir." The allotted time has passed." Have you come up with a solution?”

Desir stepped forward and kneeled in front of Lord Evernatten."

“Whilst the situation has improved, many problems still need to be addressed; public security for one." Unfortunately, not every problem can be solved immediately." Even if these problems are addressed, the large influx of refugees mean that all solutions will only be useful short-term." Eventually, we will be bereft of options."

“Take, for instance, the food shortage." The merchant’s guild can only offer so much support, and this won’t be the only time." If the problems in the Holy City continue, refugees will arrive year after year." If we wish to make use of the refugees, we will need to educate them."

“The only logical solution is to banish the refugees." If we do not accept them, then there is no responsibility." With that, we can resolve our problems almost immediately." In fact, that is exactly how many other estates are approaching the problem."

“However, there will only be more and more refugees." All of those men, women, and children with nowhere to go will die." This isn’t a solution." This is a death sentence." By exiling these people from the territory, we are averting our eyes from the suffering and avoiding the problem." ”

Desir’s intense gaze swept across the room, resting a moment longer on Eyulan." She had her fists tightly clenched, but did not dare speak out in front of the lord."

“I wish to provide a solution that will solve the fundamental problem,” announced Desir." Wilhelm Evernatten cared for the people deeply— deeper than anybody else in the entire Holy Kingdom." He had not spent a long time with Wilhelm, but his compassion and charity exuded from his very being."

“Do you know the root cause, milord?”

“I gather it is due to the problems in the Holy City." ”

“Correct." Almost all of the refugees have come from the Holy City, and they are suffering violently." With nary an option left to them, they can only run away." In the future, the people who suffer will continue to compound the problem we are experiencing right now." This is not just about them." The tyranny that originally drove them out of the Holy City will one day reach here." ”

The Holy Nation’s capital was headed for ruin." In the name of religion; in the face of the dangers ahead of them, nothing was being done." The problem would eat away at the Holy Kingdom until it was completely submerged, with only one result: Ruination."

Desir knew what had happened to the Holy Kingdom." Through a Class 1 Shadow World, the entire Holy Kingdom was eventually annihilated by the encroachment." In the end, only a handful of survivors of the Artemis religion remained, living out the rest of their days in the Western Kingdoms and piously spreading their religion."

A companion in his former life, Priscilla, was also a member of the Artemis religion." She was bitter whenever she recalled the downfall of her once-great nation." It was due to this that Desir could speak with confidence." In order to bring the Holy Kingdom back to form, sweeping reforms were needed." With that, Desir presented his solution."

“The Holy Kingdom is currently on the path to ruin." The endless waves of refugees are a byproduct of this." In order to resolve the fundamental issues and provide for these vagrants, we must change the twisted ideals of the Holy City." ”

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**For the People (2)**

TL: Naturalrice
RW: MrScaryMuffin
KOR Check: Naturalrice

An Artemis priest was outraged at Desir’s proposal."

“You call this scheme a plan? This is a rebellion." It’s treason!”

“Father,” interjected Ajest, “don’t interrupt the Lord." ”

The priest glared at Ajest with murderous eyes." He wanted to say more, but kept silent." It was a momentary respite, the same kind of peace they experienced last night when Desir asked for more time to resolve the vagrant issue." Eyulan and the priest glared at Desir." They wanted Desir’s party to know that they would not stand by this course of action and were ready to leave at any time."

“So, you’re essentially asking me to spark a rebellion,” said the Lord." Even in this extremely tense situation, he was only focused on Desir." “Are you aware of who I am?”

“You are the lord that rules over the Evernatten region,” replied Desir."

“Not my name, but my past." ”

Wilhelm Evernatten, the fallen hero." As a cardinal, he achieved many great accomplishments leading his order of knights against the Shadow World." And before he was a cardinal, he was a knight who had devoted his life to the kingdom."

“I have pledged my life to the Holy Kingdom and you’re saying that, in order to save that very kingdom, I should start a rebellion?”

Wilhelm achieved the highest order of knighthood as a Knight-captain." There was no questioning his loyalty to the kingdom."

‘And yet…’

Desir noticed that the Lord did not reject his proposal outright." The context of a conversation could be completely flipped depending on minor nuances." That was the case here." Wilhelm wasn’t throwing accusations at Desir, but rather asking subtle questions in order to gauge his reaction."

‘He is already aware that there is a bigger problem." ’

This was a man that once held the lofty position of cardinal within the Holy Kingdom." It would be stranger if a person with such rank was unaware of the problems facing the kingdom."

‘But he’s unable to act due to his oaths." ’

Wilhelm was unable to pursue the ideals he valued because of his obligations to the kingdom." Desir mentally prepared his answer." It was time to help Wilhelm Evernatten realize what he was truly searching for."

“I believe we have to make one thing clear." What was it that caused you to pledge your life and sword to the kingdom? I implore you to reflect on this cause." ”

Desir knew the answer already, even without hearing Wilhelm speak." This was a man that had accepted vagrants at the risk of peace and security within his own territory." Currently, the denizens of the Holy Kingdom were suffering under the church’s corrupted ideology." They were chased from their homes and driven into the frozen outlands."

“If the Lord originally picked up his sword for the sake of the people, then it would make sense for you to do so once again for the sake of the same people." ”

Desir used all the information that he had gathered on Wilhelm and carefully crafted a statement to strike right at the Lord’s heart."

“…My life and sword were originally meant for the people." ”

Desir’s words were starting to have an effect on Wilhelm."

“I had always stood for the people since the beginning." I will do anything for their well-being." This is my one true conviction." ”

Wilhelm’s eyes lit up, reflecting the blazing hot flames of the fireplace."

“Knowing this, I still question your proposal." Is calling for war truly for the people? War causes the suffering of countless innocents, Desir." ”

Desir could not deny this." Regardless of how nicely he worded it, in the end it was still a call for war."

“It is possible that starting a war, instead of remaining silent, might cause more people to suffer." Answer me this, Desir." What will you do for those that will get swept into this war and suffer? Can you be so sure that war is the best course of action?”

Regardless of the politics surrounding it, the ones who would feel the effects of war the most were the people." Men and supplies would need to be gathered in preparation for battle, which meant that families would be separated and people would go hungry." Even if they say that the war was ‘for the people’, it would be the people that would have to pay the cost for the war itself."

“B-but, Lord!” It was at that moment that Romantica stepped forward."

“Outsiders shouldn’t say anything!” intercepted Eyulan immediately." Romantica’s body shook as she glared at Eyulan, but the knight was calmly focused on her liege."

“In that case, may I speak my mind?” The Knight-captain Ajest stepped forward and the Lord nodded in response."

“If people get swept into a war, they may or may not suffer more compared to what they’re experiencing right now." However, if we let this stop us from acting, the suffering of the people will definitely get worse over time." The time to make your decision is now, my Lord." ”

“Mmm…”

“Additionally,” continued Ajest, “the reason that the number of vagrants have grown so exceedingly is because the Church of Artemis have been forcibly taking many people as sacrifices." ”

It was obvious to everyone why the church had suddenly required a large amount of sacrifices."

“It must mean that a judgement of dangerous proportions is approaching." ”

Desir was surprised that the Lord was aware of this fact, but Ajest caught his attention with a gesture." By calmly speaking her mind, she had brought this insight to light." It was not an opportunity to be missed."

‘Nice assist, Ajest." ’ thought Desir as he immediately followed up on her words."

“It might be a judgement that could affect the entire Holy Kingdom and maybe there is no one there that could properly deal with it." ”

Desir estimated that the impending Shadow World was a Grade-1 Shadow World." Even if they mustered every bit of strength they had, there would be no guarantee that they could repel a Shadow World of this magnitude."

“The kingdom will be unable to fight against it and will be swallowed if we delay any longer,” said Desir, with conviction." The Shadow World would lead to the death of every being within the Holy Kingdom, a fate incomparable to the suffering caused by a rebellion."

“Knight Eyulan, what do you think?”

“I don’t agree with the premise in the first place,” said Eyulan, with a hint of displeasure in her voice, “even if we did start a war, it would be for naught." I don’t believe any one of the territories would be a match for the Holy City on the battlefield." Even though the soldiers in our territory are of higher quality, I see almost no chance of victory against the Holy City." ”

Even by modest accounts, Evernatten was only a medium-sized territory while the Holy City was the capital of the entire nation." The sheer difference in size was insurmountable."

“I received word from another lord yesterday,” said Wilhelm, “it was a letter proposing that we take on the Holy City together." Of course, even if we joined forces, it would not improve our chances of success." ”

A hint." The Lord was giving them a hint that other lords supporting the notion of a rebellion existed." There had to be some that were displeased with the Holy City." Some, like Wilhelm, might be champions of the people, while others might have concerns that the actions of the Holy City would affect the security of their territory." The specific motivation for each lord was unimportant, what was important was their available military force." If all these lords banded together, manpower would not be much of an issue."

Wilhelm had to be aware of this as well, but his tone implied that he was still feeling guilty about the decision." If that was the case, it was now on Desir to help ease his burden."

“We have the people’s support, my lord." ”

“The people’s support?”

“That’s right." Despite the damage it has caused our land, we willingly accept the countless vagrants that were displaced from the Holy City." This act alone justifies the rebellion." ”

This was a line of reasoning that Desir would not be able to bring forth had the vagrants been expelled from Evernatten."

“If we become a spark and make people aware of the Holy City’s sinister deeds, then the lords of other territories are sure to support us." ”

Feudal lords who were aware of the situation within the Holy City, but were unwilling to take action, were sure to rally behind Lord Evernatten if he took the lead."

“This,” continued Desir, “is all because we had accepted the vagrants who were escaping from the Holy City." ”

Wilhelm had taken in all the vagrants that were rejected by the other territories."

“The Holy City has gone too far with their sinister deeds." With the people’s support behind us, what lord would not join to support our cause? We have the famous Evernatten name, a justified call to action to correct the wrongdoings of the Holy Kingdom, and the urgency of stopping the encroaching judgement." The rebellion is the best course of action that I can propose to you, my lord." ”

Desir finished his speech and returned to his seat with his head bowed." He had said everything he wanted to say and done everything that he could." All that was left was for the lord to decide."

The priest sniffled and Eyulan rubbed her brow anxiously." Desir was focused only on the Lord, watching in silence." The blaze in the fireplace crackled, assuring everyone that time was not frozen, but instead crawling at a painful pace." Finally, a decision was made."

“Knight Pram." ”

“Yes, my lord." ”

“Send a missive to all the knights in every region." Desir, prepare a letter to each of the lords." Let all know that we can no longer sit idly by and watch the sinister deeds of the Holy City any longer." Let it be proclaimed that we can longer follow the doctrine of the incapable Church of Artemis!”

Finally, the fallen hero had recovered his noble heart and taken up the sword once more."

[Unique Hero: Wilhelm Evernatten has been changed into Epic Hero: Emperor Wilhelm Ludwig Evernatten."

[Main Quest: Ancestor of Evernatten has been cleared." Rewards will now be distributed." ]

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**TL: Naturalrice
Sponsored Content**

October 15th."

A party was organized after all the Shadow Worlds were successfully subjugated." It was a long-time tradition to celebrate subjugations with a party and Hebrion Academy classes were on break as well." During this time, students and teachers alike were in a festive mood." Many people were gathered at the party hall and, in the middle of all of it, students were dancing while musicians set the mood with their music."

Within this boisterous event, a woman walked silently into the party hall largely unnoticed." Those that manage to catch a glimpse were enthralled by her beauty." This woman, with flowing pale blonde hair, scanned the interior of the hall quickly."

Ajest Kingscrown." A woman exuding a chilling aura of classiness." Several people attempted to start a conversation with her, but she slipped gracefully away with short and polite responses." Having experienced parties hosted by Professor Nifleka before, she already knew how those conversations would go."

Originally, she didn’t have any interest in attending this kind of party, as she hated parties." Attracting attention from strangers and being forced to mingle with them was exhausting." However, there was a reason that Ajest had chosen to attend this party and, once she found the person she was looking for, she quickly made her way towards her target." As she got closer, she could hear his voice get gradually louder."

“Why don’t you try dancing too?”

“Don’t even joke about that." I don’t know how to dance." ”

“I can teach you how to dance, Mister Desir." ”

“You should at least learn the basics, Desir,” said Ajest, interrupting their small talk." Desir’s party all turned to face her."

“Ah, you’ve come." ”

“Good evening, Miss Ajest." ”

“You took your sweet time." ”

They exchanged brief greetings before Ajest sat down in the last remaining seat." She was seated directly across from Desir, who handed her a glass."

“Ajest, your efforts in the Shadow World were invaluable." We couldn’t have cleared it without you." ”

“You praise me too much,” replied Ajest as she accepted the glass." She honestly felt that the praise was overstated." All she did was rout the barbarians." Of course, such a thing was made easy because of her high skill level, but Ajest felt that the issue could still have been resolved by Desir’s party without her."

“It is you that should be praised." ”

Ajest’s opinion of Desir grew a level higher after this ordeal." She was not aware of his abilities beyond what she had personally witnessed during the promotional exam, but Desir had managed to subjugate the Shadow World without even utilizing his ability to analyze magic." He instead displayed the ability to gather the information laid out before him and use it to produce exceptional results." This ability not only allowed him to see through his opponent’s strategy and dismantle it, but also see through other people’s intentions and influence them to his benefit."

‘Not only that…’ Ajest thought about Wilhelm Evernatten." He was a man who was broken once, but managed to rise once again." He was truly a respectable figure." A man who lived for his people."

‘That’s a characteristic that I need to learn as the future empress." ’

Ajest wondered what she might have done in Wilhelm’s shoes, but eventually shook her head in resignation." Certainly, she would not have acted as Desir did." Ajest took a sip from her glass in resignation before noticing that the beverage tasted funny."

“…Did they put out plum tea for this party?”

“No, I brewed it myself." I put a lot of effort into preparing it…what do you think?”

“That’s a bit random, Desir." ”

“Why? You said you wanted to taste the one I made in the Shadow World, so I tried to make it here…Why? Is it not to your taste?”

‘He…remembered?’ Ajest’s eyes grew wide." She could feel her normally steady heart beat faster." However, she was not angry or engaged in combat."

‘What is this feeling?’ [1]

Ajest couldn’t figure it out and ended up shaking her head in frustration."

“No, it’s quite good." ”

Romantica watched the pair during their exchange with an unsatisfied expression before nudging Pram." Pram understood her intent and quickly spoke up, disrupting the atmosphere."

“M-mister Desir! S-so…how is the Artifact?”

Artifact." Upon hearing this word, Desir looked down at his hand." The Armament of Toa was an artifact in the form of a pair of gloves with undecipherable runes etched onto its backside." Desir’s party had received the Armament of Toa and a 4th level magic crystal as a reward from the Shadow World."

‘I remember that the original reward was only the Armament of Toa." ’

This could have been because they had managed to clear the Shadow World using a better method than the original party used in Desir’s past." As the party’s rep, Desir declared the Armament of Toa to Student Services and bound the artifact to himself." He sold the bonus magic crystal to the Magic Tower and used the money to pay for transportation fees and taxes."

Desir attempted to distribute the rewards equally afterwards." However, deciding ownership of artifacts was not as easy as splitting money." He explained that the Armament of Toa increased the absolute amount mana capacity and why he would benefit from it the most, but the others agreed with him so readily that he wondered if his explanation was even necessary."

They were all supportive of his decision: Ajest had a large mana pool innately, Pram didn’t need it at all as a swordsman, while Desir had helped Romantica rise up to the third circle." In the end, it was decided that Desir would take the artifact and the money would be split among the rest."

“I haven’t tried using higher grade magic yet, but I think it’ll be fine,” replied Desir."

“What do you think would have been different if the Holy Kingdom didn’t fall to the Shadow World?” asked Romantica, steering the conversation towards another topic."

“There’s no point thinking about what could’ve been, Romantica." ”

“But aren’t you curious? A powerful country like the Holy Kingdom fell to the Shadow World because of such a ridiculous reason." If the kingdom hadn’t fallen so pitifully, things might be different now." ”

The Shadow World that Desir’s party entered revolved around the Holy Kingdom during its economic decline and it had met its demise before history was first recorded." Before this economic decline, it was known that the Holy Kingdom of Artemis had acted as a shield against Shadow Worlds for various kingdoms and had put in a lot of effort into clearing the Shadow Worlds afflicting other kingdoms." Once the Holy Kingdom fell, the continent slowly began to be swallowed by the Shadow World as others failed to fill their shoes." The other kingdoms realized the important role played by the Holy Kingdom and began setting up organizations to face the Shadow World, leading to the creation of the Hebrion Academy in the Hebrion Kingdom and the Abron Corporation in the Western Alliance of Kingdoms." Unfortunately, it was too late for the Holy Kingdom itself and, by the time these organizations were created, much of the continent had already been shrouded within the dark fog."

“Nothing is for certain, but if Wilhelm Evernatten managed to turn the Holy Kingdom around, half of the continent might not have been swallowed by the Shadow World." ”

The Holy Kingdom existed before the development of magic." The strength of Knights defined its existence as a military powerhouse." In the present, swordsmanship had fallen out of favour and magic had taken its place." However, Knights held a symbolic importance to the Holy Kingdom." If the Holy Kingdom had not fallen and their swordsmanship was allowed to develop to the present time, the Knights might have been instrumental in subjugating the Shadow Labyrinth as well."

As his thoughts reached this conclusion, Desir felt a bitter taste in his mouth."

“I still can’t believe that the Church of Artemis has such a history,” said Pram, adding his own thoughts to the conversation." The Holy Kingdom was the birthplace of the present day Church of Artemis." After the Holy Kingdom fell, their headquarters within the Alliance of Western Kingdoms doubled their efforts, leading to an age of prosperity for the church." In the present day, they even had followers outside of the Alliance borders." Though they did not have the militaristic strength of the Hebrion Kingdom or the Alliance of Western Kingdoms itself, they possessed significant political influence across the entire continent."

“The Church of Artemis probably hoped their history would fade away like the Holy Kingdom,” said Desir with a smirk." Historically, those within the territory had continued to suffer until half the continent had been overrun by the Shadow World." Countless kingdoms disappeared without a trace, as they existed prior to the development of printing technology and appreciation for history." This included the Holy Kingdom, which neglected historical records to the chagrin of those in the present." Clearing the Shadow World helped to fill these blank pages in the annals of history." From their mission, Desir’s party had managed to discover important details within the history of the Holy Kingdom and the reason behind its fall." His party’s name will be added to any books referencing this incident." This served to further raise his party’s infamy."

“…Don’t say that." We’re here to celebrate our achievements, aren’t we?” complained Romantica, bringing attention to the fact that they were simply sitting in their seats during a party."

“I’m not sure who started this conversation, but aren’t we having a good time already?”

“Well, I’m just saying that we should go out and do something,” replied Romantica, shyly looking back and forth between Desir and the dancers in the center of the party hall." However, it was Ajest that took the initiative this time."

“Since she mentioned it, how about we go and dance for a song, Desir?”

Pram’s jaw dropped." All he could do was stare at Ajest." The colour drained from Romantica’s face as she could only look on while her target was snatched right before her eyes."

“I told you before, I can’t dance,” replied Desir." At his response, Romantica could feel some colour return to her cheeks."

“I’m saying that I can teach you how to dance,” laughed Ajest, “I don’t know what your ambitions are but, as you become more famous, there will be more parties to attend." When that happens, you can’t just refuse every invitation to dance, can you?” Ajest found it funny that she, a person who hated parties, was extending an invitation to dance."

“W-wait a minute!” shouted Romantica as Ajest directed Desir towards the center of the party hall."

“She got one on you,” said Pram, indicating that her shouts were futile."

“…You might be right,” said Desir, “it might be good to learn for the future events to come." ” He accepted Ajest’s line of reasoning and accepted her invitation." As Desir relented, Ajest felt a strange sense of giddiness." For the first time, she was thankful for all the frustrating dancing lessons that she was forced to take as a member of royalty."

“I’ll warn you now." I really can’t dance." ”

“I’ll lead." Just read my movements." ”

“It’s not like this is a battle…”

“Don’t take it lightly." In society, dancing is not much different than fighting." ”

“…In any case, I leave myself in your care." I promise to study diligently." ”

Within the crowd of dancers in the center of the party hall, Ajest and Desir’s hands met."

“We’ll start at the same time on the count of three." ”

“One." ” Ajest began to slowly move her feet."

“Two." ” Desir also began to move his feet and their eyes met as the next song, a waltz, struck its opening chord."

“Three." ”

Translator’s Note:

[1] ‘What is this feeling?’ – #cringe

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**TL – NaturalRice
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At the center of magic studies, Althea stood in all of its glory." The small territory seemed small in comparison to its significant breakthroughs in spellcraft and its military might." Its renown worldwide in magical studies stemmed from the Magic Tower, whose main branch lured magicians of all shapes and sizes to Althea."

The Magic Tower’s innovative magical techniques cornered the market on anything magic from military application to everyday objects, spanning across multiple nations." The Western Kingdom Alliance and Hebrion Kingdom both paled in comparison to the Magic Tower’s market share in producing objects with Magic Crystals."

Like its namesake, Althea’s Magic Tower dwarfed its neighbors." On every floor of this cylindrical tower, divisions of magicians expressed their talents through innovation." Magicians whose names were widely recognized within the Magic Tower were given their personal labs to test their conjectures, outfitted with state-of-the-art equipment." These rooms were forbidden to all others; any magician worth their salt would be awed by the state-of-the-art equipment lining the walls from end to end."

There was one room within the tower that was endlessly churning out noises." Many rumors spread about what lurked in the laboratory— in reality, it was the private lab of Zod Exarion." Zod was in the middle of an experiment with a Magic Crystal on the table when an elegant voice rang out through the Pad beside him."

“Old man, I didn’t think I would see you in a lab again." ”

Zod’s hands moved delicately across the Magic Crystal as he studied the surface of the stone." Zod clicked his tongue as he carefully carved the surface and brushed off the residual dust."

“I’ve come across an interesting technique as of late,” explained Zod."

“Mmm… I don’t see how you find techniques so interesting." ”

“Complex mechanisms." Logic that moves through countless magical circuits." The fundamental laws from which creation is based." Once a new technique is discovered, the world advances one step forward in the face of true progress." Isn’t it scintillating?”

“To somebody normal like myself, it sounds absolutely dreary." ”

A buzzing sound whizzed, and a spark flew out of the Magic Crystal." Zod shook his head in disappointment." “Is three the max for a 5th-grade Magic Crystal?”

“Old man, could you focus? It’s been many months since we last spoke." In a conversation with the Saintess, only someone like you can speak to me like this." ”

“You can meet me anytime you want." This technique is a priority for me." ”

The elegant woman shook her head and gave up trying to convince Zod." She was Saintess Priscilla, the woman leading the Church of Artemis, whose influence reached every corner of the planet." Her fame led many to refer to her as the 6th sovereign of the Alliance of the Western Kingdoms; a power putting her status on par with the head of the Magic Tower."

“Just like last time, I suppose I won’t be expecting you at the Grand Council meeting?” asked Priscilla." The Grand Council was a meeting of the most influential members in the Alliance of the Western Kingdoms." In truth, the lady’s call was primarily just to check on Zod’s attendance."

“You know I’m not going to—what’s the point in asking?” Zod turned back around to tinker with his Magic Crystal before pausing and murmuring to his peer." “Ah, right." Actually, I’ll be coming along this time." There was a new Magical Technique expert who wanted to sit in." ”

Priscilla’s ears perked up at Zod’s words." “Oh." A new expert? Who was it— Hephatos, head of the northern branch? Elianos, the wise man of the West? I wonder who could drag Zod’s himself out of seclusion." I’m not familiar with any other Archmages." ”

“Desir Arman." 1st Circle Mage." ”

Priscilla couldn’t hold back her laughter, and a guffaw came streaming out of the Pad." “1st Circle? Zod, are you losing it already? I’d have thought it would take a few more years before you start going senile." ”

“This kid has the qualification." ”

“Alright." I don’t have the right say speak for your corporation." ” Priscilla shook her head in disbelief." “…say." I feel like I’ve heard that name before." ”

“You’ve probably head of him." He’s the Single Ranker of Hebrion Academy." ”

Priscilla’s eyes squinted as she heard his words." “Old man, you’re not really saying you’re going to invite a member of Hebrion Academy to attend our meeting, are you?”

“I can’t see why this is an issue." We’re all allied nations now." In any case, he will be attending not as a member of Hebrion Academy, but as a member of the Magic Tower." ”

“You know that whilst we’re allied, the other nations will not take kindly to someone of his pedigree at the meeting." ”

Historically, Hebrion Kingdom and the Alliance of Western Kingdoms were on bad terms." It was only after the Holy Kingdom fell that they had no choice but to form an uneasy partnership to bring humanity back from the brink of extinction, but there was a lingering animosity between the two nations." The two main organizations subjugating the Shadow World were Hebrion Academy and the Alliance of the Western Kingdoms, supported by their requisite nations." These organizations competed for every single scrap of Magic Crystal dropped by the Shadow World, and each completed Shadow World dug into the profits of the other." Each successful Shadow World yielded Magic Crystals that led to military growth for each nation."

In the past, the two nations devolved into a bitter war before the Shadow Worlds started appearing." Rivers of blood flowed and many compared it to the mythical War of Good and Evil." By the time the Shadow Worlds began, the grudge was deep-seated and small skirmishes erupted whenever a Shadow World was being subjugated."

“You know that a Shadow World recently popped up, right?”

“Of course." It was very welcome; we were in need of supplies." ”

“Desir’s party had entered a Shadow World and discovered documents pertaining to the Fall of Holy Kingdom during its subjugation." I imagine you’ve been looking for this for a while now." ”

“What? How?” Priscilla let out an uncharacteristic yelp in shock."

“Didn’t they tell you? I suppose it’s not surprising, what with the uneasy relationship between Hebrion and the Church." You’ll find out anyways, but it may be worth hearing what he has to say first hand." What do you think?”

The Saintess looked helpless in front of Zod as he had gotten one over on her." “It looks like I’ll have to meet him just this once." ”

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The world was on the cusp of being destroyed." Everything was gone." Explosions crashed and tore at his eardrums." The violent sound of war that was so characteristic of his past." Screams bellowed out as the world was covered in soot and ash." Shouts yelled out for loved ones who were at death’s door." Weapons of war emerged to combat the incoming threat." He could faintly hear the waves crashing on the shore as the distant sea glittered in an ashen gray."

The metallic scent of the sea briefly tickled his nose before fading away only to be replaced by a burning heat that seemed to consume the world around him." It was an ordeal that drained him of all his energy." He could only watch exhausted as everything underneath the ashen sky was dyed in red."

The world was in chaos." Thousands of bodies littered the battlefield and more appeared by the minute." With each explosion, the body count increased by one or two dozen." Within the catastrophe, a girl’s torso was squirming sporadically." Desir’s eyes met her own as she opened her mouth to speak." Blood spilled out of her mouth, but no sound came out."

To this day, he could never forget the final words that she mouthed to him."

“I don’t want to die, Desir." ”

Her eyes soon lost focus; it was at this moment that Desir lost himself." The name written on the girl’s dog tag buried within the debris was…

Romantica Eru."

There were no tears in his eyes." His heart was in complete anguish."

A surviving soldier was looking at “something” gigantic beyond some great distance as he muttered something straight from Desir’s heart." “How do you expect us to stop that thing?”At the end of their gaze stood a nightmare from legends past; a cruel butcher with runic words carved into his molars." Flames of hell writhed around his neck and he stood solemnly in front of his opponents." Desir looked at him with disbelief as he pulled the name of the monster from the depths of his memory."

“The Devil of Ruin, Dadaneuph." ”

Hundreds of spells blotted out the sun in the pursuit of the devil." Following the muffled sounds of explosions, there was no damage done to him." In response, he let out a monstrous roar and began his counterattack." Humans wrapped themselves in defensive magic, but it was to no avail." Even the most accomplished magicians bled from their eyes and ears as they cried out in pain and agony." There was no better word to describe him than a ‘calamity’."

The earth groaned at his footstep and dark clouds shot out, akin to a volcanic eruption." Tremors quaked beneath their feet as an earthquake tore the ground apart, and the skies burned up at the sight of a massive meteor." Desir screamed." He screamed with all his might, but only a hoarse sound of air came out as tears began to blind him."

He was awake." Desir stood up in a panic with his arms flailing in the air only to find walls painted in a creamy white color surrounding him and the faint sound of a grandfather clock ticking somewhere in his room."

Desir woke in a panic as he looked around to see his creamy white walls and the faint ticking of a grandfather clock lingered in his room." The bloody war, the falling fortresses, and the devil of ruin were nowhere to be seen."

“W-was… was it all a dream?”

Desir wrapped his head in his trembling hands and shuddered." As he wrapped his hands around himself for comfort, his pale fingers sapped away the unsettling heat radiating from his face." His entire body was soaked in cold sweat." Whatever he did, he couldn’t stop shaking." Cruel memories haunted him haunted him everywhere he went—a scar that would never fade."

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**TL: Billy Stevens
Rewrite: MrScaryMuffin**

Hot and humid." It was the last Friday of the semester."

The students of Hebrion Academy were in high spirits, summer break was almost here! Amidst this boisterous atmosphere, a magic class was about to be in session." Desir entered the classroom and looked around." He could see that Ajest and Romantica were already seated." Pram was not present." As this was a magic class, it was not part of Pram’s curriculum."

“Good morning Desir." ”

“Good morning." ”

“Yes, good morning." ”

After exchanging greetings, Desir stacked his books on a desk next to Romantica and sat down."

“You look tired, did you get any sleep?” asked Romantica, noticing the dark circles around Desir’s eyes."

Desir yawned, “I got up really early because I had a nightmare." ”

“A nightmare? Well aren’t you a special snowflake." You’ve appeared many times in my nightmares." ”

“That’s quite an honour." What do I do in your nightmares?”

“You were the Devil King." ”

“…I see." ”

“If you’re tired, why don’t you eat this? You’ll get in big trouble if you doze off during Professor Brigette’s lecture." ”

“That’s true, thanks." ”

Romantica held out a mint." Desir took it and popped it in his mouth." The cool taste spread over his tongue and throat, instantly making Desir feel more awake." There was still five minutes before class started." Desir turned to talk to Ajest and Romantica."

“Summer break is about to start." Do you two have anything special planned?”

“I don’t particularly." I’m thinking of staying at the academy,” replied Ajest." This lined up with Desir’s memory." Ajest had always stayed at the academy."

“I’m thinking of returning to my hometown." It’s been a while since I’ve seen my parents." I do write to them, but it’s still good to see them once in a while,” said Romantica."

“Ah, that works out then." Your hometown is in the Prilecha Kingdom right?”

“That’s right, the scenery there is very beautiful." ”

Prilecha Kingdom." It was a small country with little territory and a small military to match." However, it had become one of the powerhouses within the Western Kingdom through economic means."

“Good, that works out then,” repeated Desir."

“Why? What are you planning this time?” Romantica had an uneasy feeling as to where the conversation was going."

“I have something in mind for us for the summer break." Fortunately, it doesn’t seem like it will get in the way of anybody’s plans." ”

“Did you even listen to what I said? I’m pretty sure I said I was going back to my hometown." ”

“So,” continued Desir, “our party will be heading to the Prilecha Kingdom this summer." I’ll say this again when we see Pram, but the Golden Ocean Tournament will be held in the Prilecha Kingdom." We will be entering that tournament." ”

The Golden Ocean Tournament." A famous event where young adults competed against each other in combat." Whether it be with magic or the blade, adolescents confident in their abilities could compete without restriction."

This tournament was famous in other countries as well." If you ask anyone what the Prilecha Kingdom was known for, they would give one of three answers: its markets, the beautiful coastline, or the Golden Ocean Tournament."

“If it’s the Golden Ocean Tournament, there will be talented people from all over the world! I don’t think we’d do well,” remarked Romantica pessimistically."

“You should be proud of your skills." It’s not common for someone your age to be a third circle mage." ”

“Oh well that…” Romantica puffed out her chest, “that’s just innate talent!”

“Having confidence is good, but don’t get too carried away." Ajest here is also a third circle mage and Zod, the head of the Magic Tower, accomplished this achievement when he was 3 years younger than you." ”

Hearing that, Romantica lowered her gaze."

“If our party does well in the tournament, it’ll improve our reputation and that will help us in the future." ”

“Indeed…doing well in a tournament that is famous in multiple countries…it would certainly be a good thing,” said Ajest, nodding her head in agreement." Romantica also voiced her support."

“That’d be great! If we were to win, we’ll never be brushed off as a mere commoners party again, will we? I’ve always wanted to try it once." ”

“Yeah." We just need to ask Pram as well." ”

They needed to hurry, as the entry deadline was soon." The Golden Ocean Tournament was starting in 3 weeks."

“In the meantime,” said Romantica happily, “we can rest! I don’t know when we last got a break." ”

However, Desir was having none of it."

“What are you talking about Romantica? We’re training after class today as well." ”

“What!?”

“We need to keep up our training." ”

“Oi, do we really have to? Did you forget that, thanks to me, we cleared the Shadow World?”

“That was then, this is now." ”

“But…!”

“You haven’t forgotten our contract, have you?”

The contract: Members will follow the orders of the party leader." Especially when it comes to training."

“Dirty scammer!” shouted Romantica, coyly turning away with a scoff."

In that instant, Desir saw something overlapping his vision." His ear felt numb, there seemed to be shouts coming from nowhere." Desir stared hard at Romantica."

An eviscerated torso." Gushing blood." Desir felt as though his heart was being crushed."

“What? Why are you staring at me like that?” Romantica’s voice brought Desir back to reality."

‘This time definitely…’ Desir tightly squeezed his eyes shut for a brief moment before opening them again."

“Romantica, we’re doing double training today." ”

“Whaaaaat!?” replied Romantica, losing it, “Hold on, don’t tell me this is because I just called you a dirty scammer?”

Desir did not reply and instead began flipping through his books."

“Pardon me, Mr." Desir." I’m sorry." Some vile words slipped out of this young lady’s tongue." Please forgive this innocent girl." Ah, w-wait! Desir! Where are you going!?”

Desir collected his books and moved to a seat at the front of the room next to Ajest." Romantica panicked and tried to follow." However…

“Hello everyone! What a wonderful morning to study magic!” announced Professor Brigette as she entered the room." Romantica could do nothing except give Desir her best puppy dog eyes from afar."

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The Hebrion auditorium was made of stone and, during the summer, was very hot and humid, especially at noon." There were many people gathered in the auditorium." Most were students, but there were some teachers gathered there as well." The crowd was quite noisy."

Justin, the headmaster of Hebrion Academy, made his way up to the lectern and turned on the switch for the loudspeaker." As he took a deep breath, a wave of silence swept through the entire auditorium in an instant." The headmaster coughed for a moment and then opened his mouth."

“There are many scientists as well as many magicians." The magic system developed by Rockhilt has become the basis for modern magic and Zod’s development of enchantment magic has opened a new path for mankind." Many scientists and magicians have contributed to humanity and, as a result, mankind has survived the scourge known as the Shadow Worlds." ”

Justin paused for a breath before continuing."

“I am sure that you, too, have contributions to make." I have every confidence that anyone here could be the next Rockhilt or Zod." The Hebrion Academy, this continent’s most prestigious and largest magic academy, will provide all of its support to you." ”

He looked out to the faces of the students before him." The students bore a variety of reactions: bored, happy, excited, indifferent…

Children will be children." The headmaster smiled, thinking to himself this ancient adage."

“I’ll wrap up my speech now." Let the Hebrion Academy summer break begin." ”

The auditorium erupted with the sounds of departure, the student body disappearing like the receding tide."

After the speech, Desir’s party gathered." They all looked very tired, Romantica, Ajest, Pram and Desir." Unlike the other party members, Romantica was pulling along a very large suitcase." With Desir, Pram, and Ajest staying at the Academy, she was the only one in the group leaving."

“Thanks for this week." ”

“It was all for you Romantica." The stronger you become, the more effectively you can tackle Shadow Worlds moving forward." ”

“Hmph!” Romantica was sulking." She had been forced to train right up until yesterday."

“You’re going to miss your train Miss Romantica." Please don’t delay." ”

“Got it Pram." ”

It was time to go."

“Rest well in the upcoming week." We’ll all meet again in the Prilecha Kingdom." ”

Romantica turned around and left the auditorium without responding to Desir, the sound of her suitcase rolling on the stone floor filled the silence." Romantica walked down the pathway at a slow pace." She continued for quite a distance before turning back to look at Desir." Desir was still standing outside of the auditorium, waving at her."

Romantica called out to him."

“You’re dead if you’re late!

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**TL: Naturalrice
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The sound of the train travelling over its tracks filled the air." Beautiful scenery passed by endlessly beyond the hallway window." Staring out the window, it was hard to tell whether the train was moving, or if it was the world moving around them."

“We’re starting to move,” said Pram as he entered the passenger room at the end of the train." Desir’s party could only start their journey four days after Romantica left as the procedure required to obtain the entry permits into the Prilecha Kingdom was considerably arduous."

Because of the Shadow World, the Western Kingdom Alliance and Hebrion Kingdom had formed a peace treaty in order to survive." As such, citizens of both nations could freely move between the two countries, but obtaining an entry permit was still quite a finicky and time consuming process."

The Outers." As long as this criminal group existed, scattered across the continent, each country had to take the traveller screening process seriously."

“We’ll get there in three days, so rest up,” said Desir." Hearing this, Pram looked around excitedly while Ajest pulled out a book and began reading." Desir was planning to review his own plans for the future during the trip." The superficial reason he had given the party for this trip to the Prilecha Kingdom was the Golden Ocean Tournament." However, that was only an excuse." His true purpose was the Western Kingdom Alliance’s Grand Council meeting."

‘My real reason for visiting the Prilecha Kingdom is the Grand Council Meeting for the Western Kingdom Alliance." ’

The most important figures from the most influential groups within the five kingdoms that formed the Alliance will be participating in this meeting and, thanks to Zod, Desir was allowed to attend as Zod’s companion and as a member of the Magic Tower."

‘Priscilla…she will be a great help." ’

Priscilla Hysilkite." Priscilla obtained the title “Immaculate Saintess” with her ability to handle magic beyond the realm of the modern magic system and had become influential enough to be referred to as the sixth ‘King’ of the alliance." It was because of this influence that she participated in the Grand Council, attending as the head of the Church of Artemis."

‘The power of the Western Kingdom Alliance is also needed to prepare for the Shadow Labyrinth." ’

Before the Shadow Labyrinth itself appeared, there had been several omens that were continuously ignored by humanity." In the end, they couldn’t properly gather their forces before the Shadow Labyrinth was upon them."

By the time the Alliance and the Hebrion Kingdom managed to form a unified army to stand against the worst Shadow World in history, it was much too late." Ultimately, each nation gathered their most powerful people and they sent out an army of over 100 million." However, even when faced with such a calamity, the two nations had such a tumultuous history that they found it impossible to work together and had to split their forces." In this state, it was impossible to stand against the worst of all Shadow Worlds."

‘At that time as well…’

Desir could see the scenes from his nightmare flash before his eyes." He had experienced countless nightmarish situations in his past life and each moment was etched deeply upon his heart, resulting in an overwhelming feeling of melancholy that he could barely contain."

Desir was lost deep in his thoughts when someone knocked on the door." Desir looked towards the door."

“Who is it?”

“Excuse me." I’m travelling alone." Do you mind if I sit here?”

The person who entered through the door was a silver-haired old man." His wrinkles left a strong impression of the many years that he must have experienced." Pram and Ajest reacted to the request." Ajest barely looked up from her book, but nodded in consent." Pram agreed as well."

“Come on in." ”

“Pardon the intrusion." ”

The old man entered the passenger room." As it was designed for four passengers, the room didn’t feel cramped." The old man looked over his new travel companions carefully."

“I hope I’m not interrupting something." ”

“No, not at all." ”

“Such a polite young man." I’m Dmitri." Are you all students from the Hebrion Academy?”

“Ah yes." I am a student from the Hebrion Academy." My name is Desir Arman." ”

“Ah, I didn’t recognize such a celebrity! I had wanted to meet you, but I didn’t expect it to be like this." ”

Dmitri recognized Desir’s name and held out his hand, his expression still locked in surprise." Desir clasped the man’s hand awkwardly, but Dmitri shook it enthusiastically."

“You know me?”

“That’s right." Your name is quite famous." Didn’t you cut the aristocracy down a peg as a commoner?”

Desir immediately understood."

“That’s a bit of an exaggeration." ”

“It’s not exaggerated at all! Is it so easy for a commoner to become a Single Ranker at Hebrion Academy, a school dominated by nobles? I’m well aware of the situation, since my own children are attending that school as well." ”

“Ah, haha." ”

“Honestly, there were many doubts when you passed the Promotional Exam." People were saying that you used some trickery or that you bribed some of the teachers." Of course, I believe in you all the way, but you really proved your skills by clearing that fourth rank Shadow World! You all have shown us commoners that we can do it as well." You proved that we are no worse than those noble bastards." ”

Dmitri was still holding onto Desir’s hand and showed no intention of letting go." It was a small thing." A small step towards showing that commoners can also make something of themselves." Even so, Desir relished the feeling of this personal goal of his progressing as he intended."

“Ah, this old man is embarrassing you." I’m sorry." ”

Dmitri let go of Desir’s hand and began to laugh awkwardly." As he did so, he took closer note of the others in the passenger room."

“Now that I look at it, these are all your party members." ”

“That’s right sir." ”

“Please clear the Shadow World next year as well." I leave it to you." ”

“Of course." ”

They travelled with Dmitri about halfway to the Prilecha Kingdom before the old man disembarked." Dmitri said a brief farewell as he got off." Desir’s party arrived at their own destination the day after."

Thanks to Zod’s referral, the border crossing was quick." As they left the station, the first thing they noticed were the thousands of lampposts lighting the wide highway that stretched as far as the eye could see." Fancy buildings lined this great highway, all closely packed in together." This was the capital of the Prilecha Kingdom, the city of commerce and prosperity, Deltaheim."

From the liveliness everywhere, it was easy to see why the Prilecha Kingdom was called the great nation of economy." There were roads connecting every city within the Prilecha Kingdom and the capital, Deltaheim, had the ocean directly to its east." All exports from the Alliance were sent out to the rest of the world through this ocean." Deltaheim’s pride wasn’t its fancy buildings or highly organized network of roads, but this ocean."

As the sun set, the ocean glittered with a golden hue, as if reflecting the wealth of Deltaheim." The Golden Ocean Tournament originally started as a tribute to this ocean." Desir’s party was mesmerized by the sights and sounds of Deltaheim." It took a while before they noticed a well-dressed man holding a sign that read: Desir Arman." Desir’s jaw dropped."

“It looks like Sir Desir’s name has even spread to this far away land,” said Pram, sounding like he was growing tired of fame, “it’s almost scary at this point." Could it be that the entire continent knows your name?”

Desir gulped." He dared to hope that was the reason for a moment before returning to reality and refuting Pram’s statement."

“That can’t be true." The old man from the train only knew me because his children were attending Hebrion Academy." This time…there must be a reason as well." ”

“How about we go and ask then?” suggested Ajest."

“We should, right?”

The man looked at Desir as the party approached him."

“Are you Mister Arman?”

“That’s right…”

Desir glanced down at the sign, but the man put it away and bowed."

“I am from the Eru Trading Group." The esteemed Miss Romantica has requested your group to her residence." ”

They had planned on visiting Romantica, but definitely not in this fashion."

‘That’s right…the Eru Trading Group is a massive trading firm." ’

“Miss Romantica is actually quite wealthy huh?” muttered Pram, only now registering the fact." They often forgot about Romantica’s background because she was quite expressive, unlike most women from wealthy families."

They got on the wagon prepared by the Eru Trading Group and arrived by evening time." Romantica’s home was a residence with a great view of the ocean." When the bell was rung, Romantica popped out of the house." She was wearing a frilly feminine dress." She greeted Pram brightly and barely acknowledged Ajest." Of course, Ajest didn’t mind it at all." Finally, Romantica turned to Desir."

“You weren’t late." ”

“I did promise." I don’t break my promises." ”

“So you say." You haven’t eaten yet right? I’ll get dinner prepared, so wash up and wait." You can head to your room and put your luggage away, I’ll let the servants know." ”

“We can just go in like this? Don’t we have to greet your parents too?”

“It’s late, so you can do that next time." It’s only me and a few servants here right now anyways." ”

“Hm?”

“This is a vacation house." They’re at our main home somewhere else." ”

‘This is a vacation house?’ Desir suppressed his shock." Romantica was definitely cut from a different cloth."

Desir’s party entered their rooms and began putting away their luggage." They ate a nicely prepared dinner and gathered together in the living room for dessert." The view of the ocean at night was quite beautiful." As they enjoyed this relaxing moment, Romantica spoke up."

“I registered us for the Golden Ocean Tournament ahead of time, just in case." Now we just have to wait six days for the tournament to start." ”

“Is that so? We have more time to train ourselves then." ”

Training." Romantica’s face sagged upon hearing the word." She quickly recovered and layered on the charm as she addressed Desir."

“Hey Desir, we’ve trained very hard up until now right? We cleared the Shadow World successfully and it’s summer break now…”

Pram, who was watching the exchange, put in his own two cents."

“That’s right, Sir Desir." When would we get to come here again?”

“Right, right." You haven’t noticed because you arrived so late in the evening, but the ocean’s golden hue is quite a sight." ”

“Isn’t just one day ok?”

It was a Pram and Romantica combined assault." Desir looked over to Ajest."

“Ajest, what do you think we should do?”

“I think it’s the responsibility of the party leader to consider his member’s desire for recreation." ”

“Hm, is that so…”

Desir considered it for a while before letting out a sigh."

‘I did push them pretty hard before the break…I need to give them some kind of reward if I want to push them again." ’

Since there were more than a few days before the tournament, he decided to relent to Romantica’s request."

“Ok, just one day." ”

“Yahoo!”

“We did it!”

Pram and Romantica high-fived while Desir gazed silent out the window." The faint sound of starlit waves crashing against the beach tickled his ears."

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**RMSBS - Episode 63 . Summer Vacation (4)**

The beach covered in fine sand was bustling in the midst of midsummer heat." All over the beach there were colorful parasols, vendors wandering around to sell street food, and tourists enjoying their summer holidays." It was the high season, and there were people everywhere." Today, Desir was one of them."

Wearing shorts, Desir with his hands covering sunlight, was looking for some people, his group members to be specific, who had promised to meet up somewhere around where he was."

“Have I kept you waiting?”

Hearing the voice from behind, Desir turned his head."

Romantica was there wearing a bikini." She was wearing a sort of a skirt, which made her look even more cute."

Desir, baffled by Romantica’s bold sexiness unlike usual, answered calmly as if he didn’t care."

“Well, not that long."."

“That’s great." ”

“Wait, did you say great? I was just being polite, you know." Why don’t you ask me again?”

“Why should I ask you the same thing again if you said for yourself that you haven’t been waiting?”

The two rented a parasol, set it up on the beach, and laid mats to sit down."

When Desir was taking his break after all those preparations, Romantica asked,

“W…well, so what do you think?”

“Fantastic." I guess you were right about coming to the beach." ”

“That’s not what I meant! I was asking about my swimsuit!”

"Looks good on you." ”

“I designed it myself." Of course, it looks good on me." ”

Romantica replied, swaggering her shoulder."

“You did? That’s awesome." ”

It was quite a surprise to Desir." He hadn’t expected her to have a talent other than magic."

“You know, I’m a genius designer! I could profit mostly from my own designs during my merchant training." I hand-picked swimsuits for Pram and Azest as well." ”

“For Pram and Azest? Now I’m a little bit concerned." ”

“Hmph! We’ll see about that!”

Wooosh."

Ocean waves kept hitting the sand." About 5 minutes had passed."

The first group member to show up to the parasol said,

“I was looking for you for ages." ”

Pram was wearing a coat that came down to his thigh."

When he realized Desir gazing on him, Pram hesitated, and slipped down his coat."

“It… it’s just a little too embarrassing to wear it by itself."."."."

The rashie he was wearing was completely stuck to his body, emphasizing his slim body shape."

His thigh was showing below the silky coat."

“Well, it doesn't look good on me, does it?”

Pram’s facial expressions were exquisite." He was looking up at Desir, blushing with an embarrassed look."

He could almost have been mistaken for a girl." Anyone would fall in love with him, if stared at with such a look."

Desir was mesmerized by his looks." What a destructive combination…

As Desir looked at Romantica, she folded her arms and nodded, looking immensely pleased."

“Yes, I knew you'd make that face,” she said."

“Romantica,” Desir replied."

“Yeah?”

Desir raised his thumb."

“I apologize for doubting your talent." You are the best." ”

“Oh, my." Too late for you to realize my talent, isn’t it?”

“What are you two on about?”

Pram interrupted." He had no idea what they were talking about."

“We were just saying you were so cute, Pram." ”

“Really?”

“Sure." Right, Desir?"

“Of course." ”

“Whoa,” Pram exclaimed with joy."

Just then, they noticed people speaking of something."

They were all looking at one direction, for a reason they all knew why."

“Would that be Azest?”

“Probably." ”

Azest was the second to arrive." Romantica stood up from her seat and said,

“You’ll see about how good I am." ”

They got up from their seats and walked towards where everyone’s eyes were facing."

Azest was wearing a swimsuit of a mixed design between a bikini and a dress."

Although it was less exposed than the bikini that Romantica was wearing, the design that both exposed and covered her waist made Azest look even more attractive."

Her snow-white skin and shining blonde hair even overshadowed the beauty of the sea." It wasn’t as creative as what Pram was wearing, but still, the swimsuit looked great on her." When Desir was about to compliment Romantica,

“No…,” said Romantica."

"Huh?"

“That’s not what I gave her." ”

Romantica's facial muscles were unnoticeably trembling."

Desir had no idea what was going on."

Azest approached the two."

Desir, who had learned how to talk with girls from the past experience with Romantica, came forward and said,

“Looks fantastic, Azest." ”

“Thanks." ”

Thanking Desir, Azest approached Romantica, and handed her something she was holding in hand."

“I apologize I couldn't wear the swimsuit you gave me, Romantica." ”

It was the swimsuit that Romantica had given Azest."

“Why didn’t you wear it?”

“It was too tight and uncomfortable." I had no choice but to buy a new one."."

"What? Was it too tight?"

"Yes." Especially my…”

Romantica raised her hand to stop Azest from saying any further."

"Wait, stop." Don’t make me mad at you." ”

“What’s wrong?”

"That."."." I can't say." ”

Azest nodded."

"Well, I have no clue what you’re saying, but I respect whatever you say." ”

Romantica after looking alternately at her own bosom and that of Azest, clenched her fist and shivered in frustration."

Azest unknowingly defeated Romantica."

Desir and the group members played volleyball." Desir and Pram was on one side, and Romantica and Azest was on the other."

The losers were supposed to prepare dinner, so the game was outrageously fierce."

Team Azest was edging out their opponent by 11-10."

Pram and Azest were each the ace of their team, and the speed of the ball between the two was incredibly fast."

Desir and Romantica were not as good as their teammates, so that unfortunately they could only score by shooting the ball towards either of the two."

“Aaaaargh!”

Romantica couldn’t catch the ball that was too high and fell backwards." The score became 11-11." Any team that earns one more point could be the winner."

“Desir and Romantica, no wonder why you’re wizards." ”

“Well, we’re wizards, we’re nothing like you knights,”

Desir replied, stretching his stiff shoulders."

“We wouldn't be so helpless if we could only use magic,”

Romantica murmured, standing up and shaking off sand all over on her body."

Pram suggested as a response to their complaints."

“Then, why don’t we allow Desir and Romantica to use magic for the last point? Of course, Desir you can’t reverse any magic." Use only magic and we’ll see who’s better." ”

Romantica and Desir exchanged glances."

“All right." I’m down." ”

“I’m down, too." ”

The game quickly resumed, starting with Desir’s serve."

[Enhance muscle strength]

[Enhance agility]

[Enhance dynamic vision]

Desir enhanced his power with his enhancing magic spells."

Having secured the pawn-level abilities, he threw the ball up and smashed it down."

Whoosh!

The ball flew straight towards the Team Azest’s court." It was certainly different from the previous serve attempts that had ended in vain."

“Now we’re talking." ”

Azest returned it near the net."

Pram ran across the court and returned the ball again."

Boom! B-boom!

The rally was going on so fast."

The ball could blow up in any minute." The team that blows up the ball was to be lost."

Azest tossed up the ball to Romantica instead of smashing the ball, trying not to risk the explosion."

“Romantica." ”

“Got it!”

The formulas got arranged in the front of Romantica."

[Gust Wind]

The ball accelerated to a great speed, as if it had been smashed, like a solid smash."

“Pretty cool, but I could do the same without any magic!”

As Pram shouted and tried to receive the ball, the ball suddenly switched its trajectory to something that was physically impossible." Controlling the orbit of a flying object, was something Romantica could even do blindfolded."

‘This is how you trained me, Desir." ’

By the law of inertia, Pram couldn’t possibly turn his body again to receive the ball that was already moving in the opposite direction." Desir who was right behind Pram could barely receive it."

“Stay focused, Pram! She can always change how things move with magic!”

“Got it, sir!”

The game went in favor of the Team Azest." Romantica’s magic wind could efficiently control the ball’s orbit, and the control of the 3-circle wizard was a great threat to the opponents."

Catching what Romantica could do, Azest volunteered to take the role of a supporter for Romantica’s attack, rather than attacking by himself."

[The Storm of Avaros]

A 3-circle spell."

The magic that recreates a small storm."

“Wait, you’re using a 3-circle spell?”

“Why not? Everything’s under control and it’s gonna be fine! It’s YOU, who trained me like this, Desir." ”

“Looks like you’ve waited so long for this day." ”

The ball was approaching fast."

The ball could change its orbit in any minute, so Team Desir could only barely defend themselves without being able to launch an attack."

Fortunately for Team Desir, Pram the knight didn’t lose his focus until the last minute of the game, and he received the ball that was almost about to touch the ground with great athleticism." Romantica got nervous."

The game couldn’t continue like this forever, though."

“Your left!” Shouted Desir, who had read Romantica’s thoughts and figured out the ball’s trajectory."

As long as the ball’s trajectory was known, it wasn’t a difficult task for Pram to receive the ball and return it."

Pram’s return crossed the net and headed straight to Romantica."

“…?!”

Romantica, who had been waiting at the back to receive the seemingly fast ball, was shocked." The ball had suddenly stopped moving in the air."

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**RMSBS - Episode 64 . Summer Vacation (5)**

As Romantica used her wind magic, Desir used his own wind magic and created a headwind." Since it did not alter the magic itself, it was not considered to be an inversion magic." Soon the ball that was hovering in the air fell to the ground."

“It got me”

Romantica thought that she had lost, however Ajest ran past her towards the ball." It was a superhuman like speed that created a strong wind near them." With a clean sound, the ball bounced up, falling onto the other side of the court." Desir and Pram were not paying attention and saw the ball roll after it fell into the court." There was a complete silence."

“We won." ”

After some time, Romantica broke the silence and said."

“We won! Desir, you didn’t forget that the team that lost has to prepare dinner, right?”

Ajest’s movement speed was faster than what Desir predicted." It seemed that her athletic ability rivalled Pram’s at Knight-rank." Even though Ajest finished the last game, throughout the game Romantica was in charge." The ability to control mana that Romantica showed was very skilled." Her achievement was one step beyond Desir’s expectation."

“OK, I admit my defeat." ”

As a leader, Desir felt a sense of accomplishment." On the other hand, the fact that he had to prepare the dinner made him smile with bitterness." Romantica picked up the tube that she put aside before."

“I’m counting on you for the dinner~”

“."."." well, a promise is a promise." ”

Desir rested his tired body under the parasol." Listening to the refreshing ocean sound, Desir and his crew spent a peaceful day." In the evening, Desir and Pram prepared the dinner." Pram was really good at cooking." He knew a lot of recipes and how to handle the cooking material." Desir worked alongside Pram to assist him while he was cooking." Even though Desir was not very good at cooking, after being harshly trained by Pram in the cataclysm shadow world he knew how to best support him." The food made by Desir and Pram’s cooperation received compliments from Romantica and Ajest, and it also made an impression on the villa’s chef."

After dessert, Desir came outside to get some fresh air." The breeze of the sea was cool." The fact that Romantica’s villa could look down at the beach was very fortunate."

Sunset time." The whole world was getting dyed by the golden light color."

“It’s amazing right?”

When did she come out? Wearing a dress adorned with frills, Romantica’s eyes were shining with golden light waves."

“It’s amazing." ”

“I get amazed anytime I see this." It really looks like melted gold flowing." ”

It was such a sight." The boundary between day and night." The unbelievable sight, before the sun hides, just barely peaking over the horizon."

“Desir, do you know why Deltaheim sea has that golden color, not a sky-blue color?”

“."."." It’s because there is mana in the sea that reacts to sunlight." ”

“Only local people know that." You really do know everything." ”

Romantica was disappointed since she failed to teach Desir something he didn’t know."

“Hey, Desir." There is a better spot than here do you want to go there?”

Romantica took Desir and walked the along the line of the shore." After walking for some time, they arrived at an acropolis that was half fallen apart." The rock that made up the acropolis looked like it was melted halfway and solidified." They climbed the fallen acropolis."

As if she just thought of something, Romantica said."

“You might not know this story." ”

“Go ahead." ”

“A very long time ago, they said there was a volcanic eruption here." ”

Desir had never heard of this story."

“At that time this place had been a flourishing city, but the city perished after the volcanic eruption." The eruption was so big that the volcanic ash blanketed the nearby sea." ”

Romantica was making a “You didn’t know this” face."

“Yeah, this is the first time that I have heard about this story." ”

Even Desir who studied every country’s history to prepare for the shadow world could not remember this specific event."

The pair approached a section of the path that was missing." First Romantica jumped than Desir followed."

“But, according to experts, magma never flowed under this land." ”

At that instant, Desir stopped walking."

“Expert opinion concludes that volcanoes can’t form here." But there is clear evidence of a volcanic eruption occurring." This acropolis is indisputable proof of this." ”

They finally reached the top." The view was amazing." The sky was splitting and the gold color spread everywhere."

“How an eruption can occur in a land that has no magma underneath will be a forever be a mystery." But every storyteller embellishes their stories." ”

“To make sense of the unexplainable events they come up with mythology." ”

That’s how these mythological tales were created." To take an unexplainable event and try to twist it to conform to reality."

“Along with a great many myths, one of them is about the great devil who scratched the land and destroyed the city." This story gave a name to this sea." A sea that was once destroyed by the devil, Eastakar Sea." ”

Desir followed through."

“Eastakar." An ancient rune with the meaning of disaster." ”

Romantica opened her eyes wide."

“Wow, that’s amazing." You really don’t have anything that you don’t know?”

Desir shook his head."

“No, I just heard it from someone." ”

“What, you know someone from Prillecha kingdom other than me?”

“."."." I don’t remember, it was such a long time ago." ”

Desir was sure he heard this story in his past-life, but he could not remember who he heard it from." After the golden light from the sea has faded away, shade started to appear." For some reason, he was bothered about who told him that story." There was only one thing that it could be." He painfully groped through his blood-filled memories."

“It had to be my hometown, Prillecha Kingdom." ”

Soon darkness came down." The slight voice near his ear was very painful." It sounded like it was barely concealing its sadness."

“Desir?”

“Near here there was my villa." Yes." Every evening there was a beautiful sea that was dyed with a golden color." ”

Desir felt his breath closing in." It felt like he was put into the endless deep sea."

“Are you ok? You don’t look good." ”

“I don’t want to die here." ”

He then realized." The sea dyed with the golden color, he had been here before." And it was far from a beautiful sight." With blood."

‘This was one of the shadow maze quests: Gigantic devil." ’

A place that was filled with humanity’s despair." Humanity had to continue struggling against this desperation." This place, Eastakar Sea is place that Romantica grew up and the place she died." If this is a coincidence, it is one hell of a cruel coincidence."

“Hey, Desir? Do you want to go to the hospital?”

When he saw green eyes that were filled with concern, he got ahold of himself." He couldn't make himself calm down."

‘The past is just the past." It hasn’t happened yet." ’

Desir breathed in and out deeply and tried to calm down."

“I’m fine." By the way Romantica." ”

However, when Desir looked at Romantica his lips dried out." The danger they will face."

‘I am not going to let anyone die." ’

When Desir was reborn, he made that promise." Humanity, Haverion academy, Desir’s party was included there."

“There is going to be a time when there is a danger you can’t handle." ”

After breathing deeply again, he continued speaking."

“It’s going to be a danger so great that you can’t even imagine it now." And when that time comes and I order you to run away, make sure to follow the order." No matter the situation." ”

“What do you mean so suddenly?”

“I want you to survive." ”

“Wow, such a coincidence? Same back at you." ”

Romantica was trying to take it as a joke, but she saw Desir’s eyes and realized that he was not joking." His eyes were filled with sadness and great loss." What kind of things do you have to experience to make that kind of a facial expression?

“Can you promise me?”

Shhaaa~

Romantica could not understand Desir, but his expression made her nod."

“Ok, I promise." ”

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**Episode 65 . The Competition (1)**

The ‘Outsiders’." They are the repulsive group antagonistic towards the Western Kingdom and Hebrion Empire." However, they can’t just be defined as a uniform group." The reason being that the ‘Outsiders’ are formed by lots of groups who disagree with the Western Kingdom and Hebrion Empire’s monopolising the completion of the Shadow Worlds." Even though they have grouped up to compete against superior forces, they only happen to share similar interests and ideals." Their method and ultimate goals varied."

“Recently, many ‘Outsiders’ are getting caught out." ”

An individual in a Pierrot mask opened the discussion." On the tip of his finger was a spinning trump card." There was an strong smoky odour emanating from the floor." The tavern was so dark that only vague outlines could be made out." There were four people gathered and all of them were wearing masks." They were the four leaders of the biggest groups in the ‘Outsiders’."

“Our boys are in the same situation." It’s as if they already knew our plan." ”

The woman wearing a mask adorned in: gold, silver, crystal, and feathers; opened her mouth." With her voluptuous body, there seemed to be a seductive scent wafting from her." However, the locals knew that you should not be deceived and approach her carelessly." There is a reason why she is known as the ‘Vampire’."

“20 percent of the lower group have already been eliminated." ”

Even the spies planted in the Kingdom and Empire have been getting caught."

“It has to be because our Revolutionary messed up." ”

The Pierrot mask’s tone was now somewhat playful." On his right hand, there were two spinning cards on each fingertip, making a total of ten cards."

“…”

“Haha." You said that you were caught stealing from the magic tower? You looked so confident before." What happened?”

The individual on the receiving end of this taunt, wearing a crow mask, scowled at the Pierrot mask." However, the guy in the Pierrot mask did not seem to care and continued talking."

“He even got captured alive? How did you train your underlings if this is the result?!”

The space near the Pierrot mask instantly shattered." High-class magic that interfered with space was activated without any casting time." However, the only thing that was broken was a floor board underneath the chair, that the Pierrot mask was sitting on." The Pierrot mask continued to lounge in his chair." It was not clear whether that was coincidence or if he dodged it." Considering his identity, the latter made more sense." As a citizen of the Western Kingdom, he was the assassin that killed the king of the Antanas Kingdom." His name garnered respect and praise in the darkness of society, where no light can reach."

“Perhaps the magic tower owner himself has interrogated him." As a Seventh-Circle wizard, he might have already torn his brain apart and analyzed his memories." Your underling continues to bring trouble, even after his death." Haha." ”

The crow mask leapt out of his seat."

“Stop… Let’s continue." ”

The one that organised this meeting was an old man in a skull mask." He was wearing a dark-grey robe." If it wasn’t for white hair that peaked out from above his mask, he would have looked younger."

“To talk about… a story from… the past…”

His voice trailed off away, so it was difficult to understand what he was saying." However, no one there complained." He was technically the leader of this group." Nobody knew who he was." Not even his name." No one even knew whether he was a swordsman or wizard." The one thing that was certain though, was that he was active before the first century."

“Revolutionary."."." we."."." should always remain in the dark."."." what you suggested, the way."."." was dangerous." ”

The guy in a crow mask refuted."

“The plan was perfect." The magic tower’s defence was the worst on that day, nobody would have expected that." ”

“But… somehow… somehow… they knew… I only care about the results." ”

The guy in the crow mask did not respond anymore." The cards on the Pierrot’s hand all stopped spinning." The old man with a skull mask continued speaking."

“On the other hand, this… might be a good chance for us." I’m not yet sure though." ”

“What do you mean old man?”

The woman in the flashy mask asked."

“While they are currently underestimating us… before they start to pressure us… it’s not a bad idea to do something big, to make a statement." ”

“Do you mean we should change our target?”

“Yes… that way… will be better." ”

“Well, that is great news." I was getting stiff." However, we can’t go against the Western Kingdom and Hebrion Empire." ”

Said the Pierrot." This was the true reason why the ‘Outsiders’ hid out of sight." Currently the Western Kingdom and Hebrion Empire were both stronger than any other force." Naturally, unlawful people and organisations, such as the ‘Outsiders’, had to keep a low profile and wait for their chance."

“Around this time… there is a meeting… in the Western Kingdom." ”

“Right”

“This is our chance… The leaders of the Western Kingdom… will all be gathered in one place… Killing them will maybe… overthrow the entire Western Kingdom itself." ”

He looked at the crow mask."

“I will give you the chance… to redeem yourself after your failure… Hand over that item Pierrot." ”

The Pierrot mask did not like this decision of the skull mask and immediately protested."

“Old man! Do you know how hard it was for me to get this?! After utilising the entire assassin’s guild, we barely managed to obtain this! This item cost me so much! This should be only used in specifics situations!”

“Sh\*t,! Ok! I’ll give it." ”

He then pulled out something and passed it to the crow." It was an artifact." It was shaped like a cube and emanated an ominous aura at first sight."

“Western Kingdom meeting… many rulers and influential people will gather there… Can you clean them up… revolutionary?”

Crow mask was referred to as a revolutionary." That actually explained his exact situation." At one-point crow mask was lauded as the best wizard from Hebrion Academy." Now he is just a forgotten name." A manifestation of Hebrion’s troubled history."

“Let him borrow it… You should take care of everything." ”

“I hope you do not forget Hebrion is next." ”

Crow mask replied while nodding his head."

“Sure, Hebrion is one of our oldest enemies." ”

And that concluded the meeting." One after the another they left the tavern." The street was still dark, but somewhat humid from the dawn light." There was a distinction feeling of poverty along this street." The Pierrot mask caught up to the crow mask who went out first."

“Hey, bro." I have some questions." You mind if I ask them?”

The crow mask tried to ignore him and continued walking."

“At this point, shouldn’t you just admit it? We are the same type." ”

That expression must have stirred the crow mask’s feelings as he responded in an angry tone."

“I hope you don’t take me as some kind of criminal like you." ”

“From attending this meeting, you are indeed a criminal." If either of us were caught by our home nations, we would definitely get executed." ”

‘Outsiders’ were basically a criminal group, and the people who had just gathered were the leaders of the ‘Outsiders’." The punishment towards them would surely be death."

The Pierrot mask pointed at the artifact that the crow mask was holding."

“First of all, by knowing what artifact that is, and still taking it, shows that you are evil without a doubt." ”

The crow mask replied while storing the artifact that he had received from the Pierrot mask."

“I have things to achieve, no matter the method." ”

“Since you believe that you are different from us? Do you think that you are the only one that aspires to achieve your own goals? It’s the same for that old man." That old man has goals and the determination to achieve them as well." ”

The Pierrot mask mockingly imitated the skull mask’s voice."

“Everything… will fall into… the Shadow World… as the Goddess desires." ”

It was not funny." It was actually rather unpleasant."

“Why are you trying so hard to bring me down to your standard?”

Even though his face could not be seen from the Pierrot mask’s perspective, the crow mask was sure that he was laughing." It was almost as if he had been anticipating this question."

“Hey, when I look at the justification of your goals, from my point of view they are not reasonable." On a daily basis, you act all noble and say that you will make the world a better place for the common people, right? Even though you are only doing this for your own benefit." ”

“The justification of my goals does not concern you." ”

“Ah, unfortunately, it does matter." If by some small chance said that you will work for the sake of the common people, I would have to cut your head off." ”

The Pierrot mask took one step forward." The distance between the two was small." It was close enough for the crow mask to attack and that meant it was close enough for the Pierrot mask to attack too." Just a knife, perfect for killing a pig."

“I don’t know who you are saying you will kill." ”

“If you want to test me, you can try it out right now." ”

He started to juggling his knife." It was as if he was performing some kind of a magic trick." He played with the knife’s sharp side with his finger." After seeing this unfold, the crow mask turned his back and started walking away again."

“It will be a small sacrifice for the greater good." I have already acknowledged that." ”

Not wanting to waste any more time the crow mask disappeared into the dark." Left alone, the Pierrot mask started to mumble to himself."

“Ah, as expected." It won’t work on him." ”

The Pierrot mask put his knife away."

“Well, I hope the real party starts in the Western Kingdom." ”

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**RMSBS - Episode 66 . The Great Council (2)**

In the early morning of the day of the conference, Zod came to meet Desir." He wore a neat black suit and held a luxurious cane." He didn’t appear to be applying much of his weight against it, as it just touched the ground." Desir’s party who had come to escort him couldn’t repress their astonishment over Zod showing up."

“You must be the party of my technical adviser." ”

Zod shook hands with each member of Desir’s party." Romantica especially couldn’t handle her happiness because Zod was the only Seventh-Circle wizard of this continent and as a result was admired by all wizards who aspire to reach the pinnacle of magic."

“It… It’s my honor to meet you! I’m Romantica Eru." I’m a big fan of you!"

“Romantica Eru… Are you the lady of the Eru household? We supply a significant amount of materials to the Eru businesses." ”

“All of the items from Matop are brilliant! And the recently released reacting magic light is especially wonderful."."

While Zod and Romantica were deep in conversation, Pram conversed with Desir."

“It is a shame that you won’t attend the Yellow Ocean competition." ”

Due to a conflict in his schedule between the West Kingdom conference and the Yellow Ocean competition, Desir couldn’t attend the competition."

“I’ll come to see the finals though." Of course, only if you make it to them." ”

“Hey, you!”

Romantica thundered at Desir understanding the implication of what he said, while simultaneous holding a conversation with Zod." Pram and Desir smiled."

After the greeting, Desir headed to the palace where the West Kingdom conference was going to take place." They would use Zod’s carriage to get there." As the carriage rattled, Zod handed over a note to Desir." It appeared that he had been dying to hand it over."

“Applying the concepts that you shared with me was a simple task." ”

During the time spent travelling to the palace, Zod talked in-depth on the theories he had been pondering over after considering what Desir had suggested." They had previously discussed the technologies several times through communication magic, but that was less effective than the present face-to-face meeting." They could exchange real-time feedback on their thoughts."

“Regarding the aurora system, it is a good idea to block a Sixth-Circle spell by offsetting its energy instead of interrupting its resonating frequency." However, the best defense magic we presently have is Fifth-Circle." It seems that we need to spend money to make this a portable solution." ”

“Spending money is required to get through this and there are people that will be interested in the result." As such, there is no doubt that it will be produced one way of the other." However, I’m not sure if we have the necessary experience in blocking Sixth-Circle magic." ”

As the conversation continued, they eventually arrived at the palace."

“I guess we arrived a bit earlier than expected." ” Desir said."

There was over an hour left until the conference would begin."

Zod proposed:

“It appears so." How about we have a talk with the Saint before the conference?”

“Did the Saint approve of this?”

Zod nodded his head."

“Yes, she agreed immediately when I brought up the issue of the Holy Kingdom falling, as you described it to me." ”

“I appreciate your help, as always." ”

“It’s not a big deal." I helped you a lot because you are very talented." ”

With Zod’s support, Desir had a chance to talk alone with the Saint." She was waiting for Desir in the stateroom." Saint Priscilla looked very naïve but Desir knew that there was more than meets the eye." She was always very crafty and intelligent enough to lead Artemis."

“It is my honor to meet the great sun of Artemis, Saint,”

“I’m also happy to meet the famous single-ranker of Hebrion Academy." ”

After having a simple greeting, Priscilla started getting to the point."

“I heard that the Shadow World that you attacked is related to the fall of the Kingdom." ”

“Yes, Saint." ”

“I’d love you to explain what happened there, to me." ”

Desir re-told what occurred in the Shadow World that he had cleared." He recounted the circumstances that resulted in the fall of the Kingdom, who he met, what quests he received and how they were cleared." Priscilla listened intently as he described all of this." She was clearly impressed by Wilhelm."

“He is the one that caused Artemis to be forever described as God’s shield." In an era severely lacking in technology, he achieved so much and had a very respectable personality." ”

Finishing the explanation on the quest, Desir passed on the last message that appeared when the Shadow World closed."

‘A great possibility there might have been." ’

That the kingdom might have been able to avoid falling if they could cut out the rotten parts." Heroes should be raised for the people and judge what should truly be judged." If the kingdom didn’t fall, it might have completed its role as the shield to prevent the spreading Judgement harming its people until today."

“A great possibility there might have been…”

The Saint sadly repeated."

“Therefore, it means back in the day, the kingdom had the power required to attack the Level 1 Shadow Worlds." ”

“Yes." It explains how the kingdom fell due to its internal struggles." ”

“I see." ”

She nodded." Shadow Worlds had rarely opened in relation to the Kingdom so far, and those that did, seemed to be distantly related to the cause of the fall."

The Shadow World that Desir’s party cleared did not just relate to the fall of the Kingdom, but happened to even overlap with the time in which it occurred."

“I have always wondered." The country that I served and the order that I led."."." I just did not understand how the Kingdom fell." Why did the Kingdom well-known as the strongest, not only fail to clear the Shadow World, but also fall to it? I now understand."."

“If my recollection was useful, I’m happy to have been of assistance to you."."

“Yes, Desir." You magnificently cleared the Shadow World." Hebrion has a bright future." ”

Said the Saint."

“I want to give you some compensation along with my gratitude." Desir, do you have anything that you want?”

“I don’t personally need anything; however, I wish Hebrion Empire and the West Kingdom Union could have a more amicable relationship." Not like the current competition in clearing Shadow Worlds alone to hoard resources." It would be much more efficient to clear these Shadow Worlds through cooperation." Before we can do this, I would like you to support the good relationship of the West Kingdom Union and Hebrion Empire." ”

“Who do you think you are? Are you the ambassador of peace from Hebrion?"

“I only represent myself." This was my own idea, Saint." ”

“Cooperation." It is tough concept." The confrontation between the West Kingdom Union and the Hebrion Empire." You know this." It would not even be strange to see them at war right now, if not for the common enemy that they are focusing on." ”

“I know." And that is why I beg you." If the relationship remains the same, the continent cannot defeat the Shadow Worlds when they inevitably increase in difficulty and size, someday." ”

“You have an interesting imagination." ”

Even if Priscilla dismissed Desir’s idea as just a figment of his imagination, Desir knew that it was an undeniable truth."

Shadow Labyrinths."

According to the previous timeline, there was less than 3 years, but she will only be further convinced that his is just a delusion if he continued with this tact." Instead he decided to convince her with another method."

“Saint, the Kingdom fell because of internal division." ”

As soon as Desir mentioned the Kingdom, Priscilla’s smile was wiped off her face."

“The Shadow World which overthrew the Kingdom was at the level where it could have been defeated by the Kingdom at that time." But they couldn’t beat it and eventually collapsed." ”

“The era when the Kingdom collapsed is completely different from now." We now prepare ourselves before opening any Shadow World and clear it perfectly with our preparations." Moreover, the Level One and Two Shadow Worlds which we assume opened in the past do not even open now-a-days." ”

“We should prepare for the worst, Saint." ”

The worst." Priscilla seemed to brood over what Desir said."

“I understand what you want to say." But frankly, this job is too big to prepare for based on only your words." None of the West Kingdom Union is influenced." ”

She felt something from his eyes looking at her and said while nodding her head."

“But I also agree on your idea to be ready for the worst." The Church of Artemis shall look for the method to cooperate with both Hebrion and the West Kingdom Union when we see any sign from the Shadow Worlds." ”

“That’s enough." I appreciate it, Saint." ”

The conversation was pretty much over." The conference would also start soon." It was finally time to head over to the conference room." Desir and Priscilla walked out of the stateroom."

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**RMSBS - Chapter 67 . The Great Council (3)**

Today’s security of the Frilleza Palace was much stricter than any other day." The number of knight guards was tremendous and each was trained to an incredibly high standard."

This is the expected outcome though, considering who was coming to the council." The five kings from the Western Kingdoms, Zod the leader of the Mage Tower, and other leaders whose influence reach every corner of the world."

This pressure was nothing compared to their political positions." Desir followed after Zod into the council room." The interior of the room was a wide oval with seats circumnavigating a panel that was placed in the center of the room." Desir saw many people had already found their place as he walked in." They were dressed up in elegant gowns and accompanied by their own maids and servants."

All of the seating was pre-assigned." Desir followed Zod’s lead and sat at his assigned seat."

“How long has it been since we last met, sir?” said the lady."

Coincidentally, the seat was right next to the Saint of Artemis, Priscilla." Zod answered insensitively."

“4 years 6 months 17 days and 3 hours and 12 minutes." ”

“Well, I wasn’t looking for that kind of response." ”

Five minutes before the council meeting started, the King Frilleza, who was appointed as the council head, walked in."

King Frilleza was small and fat." The belt adorned with dolphin engravings was buried in his belly." His face was swollen as if he had been drowned in the water for a long time."

“Now is the last chance to get away from this, Desir." You cannot escape once the meeting begins." ”

Said the Saint in a teasing manner." As they continued to chat, King Frilleza pronounced:

“We may now begin the great council meeting of the year 3616." ”

With the opening words of the King Frilleza the council meeting was officially underway." The format of the council meeting is such that when the chairperson raises a topic, each nation is allowed to put forward their own opinion on the matter." Then they all vote to establish agreement and further elaborate on the most desirable proposals."

There are often conflicts but the chairperson, King Frilleza, skillfully arranges and influences the discussion in more positive directions." The issues are diverse." Since the Western Kingdoms were established by five different nations, they talk about issues ranging from trade, to military, to technology, and even politics." Indeed, the Western Kingdom’s affairs were discussed from the lens of all fields, great and small."

Desir was a bit bored as the discussions lingered on trivial matters, but for him, this was an excellent opportunity to grasp the dynamics of the Western Kingdom." After such a long meeting and some discussion of the various issues between nations, a topic concerning the Shadow Worlds was finally raised."

The Shadow Worlds were the biggest problem of the continent and were actually one of the key areas of focus for the Western Kingdom’s Congress." The central panel displayed various things including: the achievements of the Avalon army in the Western Kingdoms, the difficulty levels of the Shadow Worlds, the rate at which they were appearing, and the amount of magic stones available from the completion of them."

The profits made by attacking Shadow World were distributed to each country in accordance with their contribution." For some countries this amounted to a considerable amount."

“This year, the Shadow Worlds were less difficult." If there was one problem, it was the Outsiders." ”

While King Frilleza talked, the panel showed an enlarged map of a mountain range in the Kingdom of Frilleza."

“The place shown on this map is where a Level 3 Shadow World appeared." At the time, we did not notice it appearing here and we only discovered it a month later… long after the attack was over." ”

The people gathered at the conference began to whisper amongst themselves."

“This is a significant threat to us." We didn’t even know of the existence of a Shadow World here." This must mean that the Outsiders potentially have strategies to block our detection technology." Their ability to complete Shadow Worlds may even be higher than ours." ”

Desir was listening intently." The Outsiders." They are fairly annoying beings." The Hebrion Empire and the Western Kingdoms managed the Shadow Worlds." That is why the Outsiders were desperate to complete Shadow World using nefarious means."

The Outsiders, however, had considerable power and often attacked low level Shadow Worlds before others could." They also raided the ruins of the Hebrion Empire, the Western Kingdom, and other places that had ore deposits." However, their actions were often performed inconspicuously." For this reason information pertaining to them and their operations was difficult to obtain."

King Frilleza said, gesturing at Zod, the leader of the Mage Tower:

“Zod Axalion, who is aware of this situation, will elaborate on this." ”

Desir’s eyes turned towards Zod."

“He understood this situation? The situation of the Outsiders?”

Zod got up and walked towards the pedestal with the careful help of his ebony cane."

“Nice to meet you, my name is Zod Axalion, the leader of the Mage Tower." ”

Zod coughed and then gestured in the air." The screen of the panel changed." On the screen was a view of the Eureli Branch and a magic stone."

“Two months ago, the Outsiders attacked our Mage Tower." What they aimed for was the second-class magic stone, the Tear of Reganel that we hold in our possession." ”

The second-class magic stone."

The stones come from Level 3 Shadow Worlds of the most challenging level, and as a result were one of the top magic stones."

“Fortunately, I was informed of the raid, prior to it occurring, and could safely prevent it." I was able to capture someone who I thought was the officer of the Outsiders." Our Mage Tower interrogated him and managed to obtain information about the Outsiders." ”

Zod cleared his throat and continued the story."

“From the information gathered, we were able to stop the planned attack ahead of time, and we were able to identify Outsider spies." ”

“Their numbers were more significant than expected, and they were infiltrating in a very clever way." The spies that haven’t been discovered may still be in the Mage Tower, and maybe even here in the Western Kingdom." ”

Uncomfortable coughs punctuated Zod‘s story."

“Unless we know the exact purpose of the Outsiders, this situation is a significant threat for us." The Mage Tower came to the conclusion that they should not be left to their own devices anymore." We would like to share all of the information that we have with the Western Kingdom and would like for all to take this opportunity to join us in the pursuit of the Outsiders." ”

It was at this moment that there was a man who raised his hand carefully."

“Can I speak, for a moment, Zod Axallion?”

“Of course, His Majesty, Divide." ”

“Thank you." ”

Middle-aged, wearing a stylish black suit, King Divide arose."

“I’m sorry to hear that the Tower was attacked by the Outsiders, but I want to point out that the premise of your story is wrong." First of all, I think it seems impossible that the Outsiders tricked our detection technology and attacked first." ”

“Because they are mere criminals, they can’t have that level of technology." ”

As the King voiced his concerns, some nodded as if they agreed."

“The Western Kingdom detection technology is state-of-the-art and required 20 years to develop and implement." It’s not a technology that those criminals can use or compete with." ”

“But the situation proves that it is a possibility." ”

“I‘m going to offer you a clearer possibility." Isn’t it more likely that this skill originates from somewhere else?”

The King, who paused, looked around the room." And in a firm tone, he announced:

“It’s the Hebrion Empire." ”

The chamber stirred once again." His words sure made sense." Indeed, the only kingdom that had developed technologically at the level of the Western Kingdom was the Hebrion Empire."

Desir barely stopped himself from getting up."

“The Hebrion Empire did this to get the reward of a Level 3 Shadow World." If it’s a stone from such a Shadow World then it’s well worth the risk obtaining it." That’s why they planned this in order to stay under our radar." And it totally makes sense." Are they not our enemies?”

His words served the purpose of emphasizing that the Hebrion Empire was primarily an enemy of the Western Kingdom and that this fact should not be forgotten." There were even some who seemed to sympathize with these feelings."

“I totally agree with your sentiment King Divide." There is no place that is capable of this except for the Hebrion Empire." ”

The meeting room quickly became noisy after each one of them uttered their opinions."

“Please be calm." Everyone." ”

The chairman, King Frilleza, tried to moderate the turmoil." But the murmur still did not die down."

Desir exhaled a long sigh."

---

Yellow Ocean Tournament."

The air was abuzz with the sound of shouting, clashing, and the chanting of spells."

[Burst Claw." ]

Second-Circle magic."

When Romantica unleashed magic, strong winds blew around her tearing everything in its path."

Rippppp!

The wind blew on a trajectory towards the opponent wizard." Huge scratches appeared on the marble floor."

The other wizard also cast magic in response to it."

[Arms Wave." ]

The floor of the competition hall rippled like a wave in the ocean."

[Material Burst." ]

Rippling floor and strong wind overlapped and exploded." The magic of both sides was cancelled out."

The shattered floor material began to gather in the air."

[Rock Guillotine]

Second-Circle Magic."

A huge lance made of stone formed and flew directly at Romantica."

Thud!

But ridiculously, the lance flew past Romantica and lodged behind her." Romantica had adjusted the trajectory of the missile."

Romantica pronounced, while flicking her hair:

“Unfortunately, trajectory magic doesn’t work against me." ”

In front of Romantica, a magic circle was forming."

“There’s no one out there that can compete against me." ”

Two Third-Circle bullets appeared."

When Romantica beckoned, one of the bullets fired."

Bang!

It was way more powerful than the defense magic could handle." The marble floor exploded creating a deep crater."

The opponent wizard opened his mouth in disbelief from that incredible display of power." He wasn’t even able to use a second defense magic."

As this was the case, Romantica shot another bullet."

The bullet flew and crashed into the body of the opponent wizard." He flew out of the stadium and fell flat."

Judges and medical teams ran towards him."

The victorious Romantica returned to the waiting room."

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**RMSBS - Episode 68 . The Great Council (4)**

Starting with Romantica, Pram and Adjest also easily won their matches." After clearing the round of 16, they all reached the quarter-finals." Those who participated in the Yellow Ocean Competition were all high-levelled, and making it to the quarter-finals meant that their skills were remarkably high." Pram, Romantica, and Adjest triumphantly left the stadium." Since the quarter-finals were scheduled to begin at 3:00, they had two hours spare to eat."

“I think that I’ve improved a lot compared to the past." ”

“Well, it’s obvious because you train so hard." ”

The council meeting wasn’t over yet, so they had to eat by themselves." They had seen a place for pasta on the way here before, so they decided to go there."

“But it’s such a shame that Romantica and Adjest have already met." ”

As Pram said, Romantica and Adjest met immediately in the quarter-finals."

At the time, Romantica said that there was nothing that could be done."

“Why shame? I actually wanted to, so it was a good opportunity." Wasn’t it, Adjest?”

“…well, at least once." ”

Adjest replied in a less enthusiastic manner." Pram asked Romantica:

“Don’t you feel frustrated when you fight against Adjest?”

“I’m pretty confident in my skills." Not that I can afford to underestimate her." ”

Romantica still remembered Adjest’s incredible reflexes when they played volleyball." Adjest was a magic swordsman." She did not only have skills as a magician but also as a knight, so no one could dared challenge her lightly."

Throughout all of the grades at Hebrion Academy, only a few people could overpower Adjest." Without Desir, she was probably the top of first-class singles."

Rumble / glurp

Anyway, such a painful comparison was of no use now." Romantica was very hungry because she used a lot of magic during the match."

“Anyway, I need to eat first." I remember it was around here…”

There were so many people in the street that there was barely room to even walk." The street was crowded with all of the people who came to either watch the Yellow Ocean Competition or spend their vacation visiting the beach."

Some people recognized Romantica, Adjest, and Pram." Waving at them to communicate their feelings." Some of these people cheered them on."

“Hey, Romantica! You should win! I bet all of my bar money for this month on you!”

“Ms." Adjest! I’m dead meat if you lose!”

“Pram, I don’t care if you win or not." Just don’t get hurt! You’re just too damn precious!”

Most of the encouraging words were related to betting." However, it was still pleasant to be recognized and famous by others." Romantica and Pram couldn’t hide their bashful smiles." While they were walking along the street with a much lighter step than before, Romantica who was at the front of the group, suddenly stopped and looked back." There was a man who just passed her." The man was wearing a hood, but shortly before passing, she definitely caught a glimpse of what was inside of it from the corner of her eye."

It was a crow mask."

“Is something wrong, Romantica?”

“Not really." ”

Romantica became a Third-Circle Sorcerer, and the biggest difference was that she could feel more mana around her." Previously, she only sensed the presence of mana, but upon reaching the Third-Circle, it felt as though mana would soon be in her hands." And then, for the first time, Romantica realized that mana had a slightly different nature for each person."

A small but subtly flowing mana for Desir." Adjest’s frigid-cold mana that seemingly stung like frostbite."

And…

‘It feels like I have felt this mana somewhere." ’

It was definitely the mana she felt somewhere." And it wasn’t too long ago."

‘Right, that time…’

The wizard, who led the men that attacked the Ellueli chapter of the Tower of Magic, also had this mana."

Romantica was in the Second-Circle, so she wasn’t sure if what she felt at that time was the same as now, but she was sure that the feeling from that mana was similar to the man who just passed by her."

Mana smelling like a sewer." It was a horrendous image that came to mind right away without even trying to remember." Romantic murmured to herself as she stared at the man who passed by her."

“The Outsiders?”

“Pardon? What are you talking about all of a sudden?”

Romantica spoke, pointing to a man wearing a hood."

“No, that man has mana that’s similar to what I felt during the Ellueli raid." ”

She wasn’t sure." She just had a similar feeling." But if Romantica’s assumptions are true…

“If so, it could be dangerous." ”

Adjest replied."

“The way that man walks… Very unusual." ”

It’s as if he’s ready for any attack." It felt as if he’s been forged with a knife."

“And he’s also hiding his mana." I can’t even tell how much he has." ”

Probably a very high-level wizard, far beyond their current abilities."

“Don’t think about it too much." It’s only a feeling, and perhaps he’s a grand wizard of some sort." ”

Romantica barely shook off all of the ominous thoughts." She wanted to get to the bottom of it, but she couldn’t blame the man without any evidence just based on her feelings."

“First of all, let’s get something to eat." There it is." ”

Romantica pointed at the sign of the restaurant that they just passed." The name of the restaurant was written in fancy print." Adjest and Pram no longer brought up the matter as if by prior agreement." The party went into the restaurant, and each ordered something that caught their eye." While they were eating and talking, the memory of the wizard soon started to fade away." Soon the topic moved to Desir, who wasn’t present at the moment:

“I bet he’s having a tough time." ”

Pram rebutted as Romantica made such a definitive statement."

“Don’t you think Desir is doing just fine? Desir has usually handled all situations that he’s found himself in perfectly." ”

It was the same in the promotion exam, and as well as in the Shadow World." Pram had placed his full trust in him." Adjest nodded in agreement."

“That’s not what I meant." Dad and I have attended a few meetings with powerful people and they always insisted on pushing their opinions since they were only interested in their own benefits." ”

“So, by now, there’s definitely going to be a lot of arguments in the meeting." They will be pushing for their own justice and profit." Our poor, common, party leader in such battle." Can you even imagine?”

“Do you think Desir is gutless?”

Adjest replied."

“Well… Right." That’s true." As long as there’s no topic related to Hebrion… Yeah, there shouldn’t be any issues." ”

When their main dishes came out Romantica concluded the conversation."

“The bottom line is, there’s a situation that Desir can’t solve so matter what." ”

The man in the hood headed off into the alley past the crowds." It was daylight, but it was a place with plenty of mold because the towering buildings didn’t allow enough sunlight through." Broken bottles were scattered over the street interspersed with loose rubbish."

“Hebrion…”

The muttering man’s voice was mixed with emotions." He thought of the three boys and girls he just passed by." The clothes they were wearing were obviously the uniform of the Hebrion Empire." The only way to have such a uniform at that age was if they attended the Hebrion Academy." They are perhaps the top-class pupils of the Hebrion Academy."

Above all, the man clearly heard the voice of one of the girls."

“She has good senses." ”

The girl had especially sensitive intuition." It was doubtful that she sensed dark mana from the man." It was fortunate for them that they did not chase the man there." Third-Circle magic swordsman, knight class swordsman, and Third-Circle wind wizard." That’s who they are." All together, they wouldn’t leave a scratch on this man."

‘I know I should kill even if they feel suspicious…’ but the man decided not to follow his instincts."

He thought that even if he doesn’t kill them right now, they will all die anyway." Leaving them alone now would only allow them to live for a while longer." The voices of people could only faintly be heard."

His body scattered like a mist and soon re-appeared on top of a nearby building." He now had a clear view of the scenery of the Kingdom Frilleza." Streets where so many people stroll by, buildings with varying signs… Then his gaze stopped at a particular place." The top of the royal palace was looming in the distance, shining down on all from the radiant sunlight."

He softly whispered, “Start." ”

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**RMSBS - Episode 69 . Terrorism (1)**

“Thinking about it, the recent movement of Hebrion was unusual." ”

The criticism of Hebrion from the West Kingdom Union was increasing in volume." It felt like war could break out at any moment with the current tensions in the room." Five countries consisting of the West Kingdom Union, two great business groups, and heads of Artemis and Matop were of attending this great council conference."

Among them, all of the leaders shared the opinion of King Divide; except for the Saint, head of Matop and King Prillecha." A majority of them were expressing their unconditional enmity for Hebrion." This left Desir in an uncomfortable position, due to his plans for peace and harmony between the West Kingdom Union and Hebrion." There was not enough time to unite these groups but the consequence of letting doubt fester and each group further dividing, would be history repeating itself."

“I apologize for showing you such an unfavorable sight, Desir." ”

The Saint gave an apology for the slander directed at Hebrion in the conference." Desir was thinking about other things but regained his senses after hearing her."

“No Saint, it is not you that needs to apologize." ” he responded with."

She smiled and asked."

“Where you thinking about something else?”

“Oh, well… yes." My thoughts just happened to drift…”

“That’s a good decision." You don’t need to mind this nonsense." ”

After all, the current measures that Zod suggested to deal with the Outsiders were shelved while they decided to interrogate the Hebrion Empire." It was a less than ideal decision from Desir’s perspective, but there was nothing he could do at the moment." His role was just to listen carefully to the conference."

Zod went back to his seat." The discussion relating to the Shadow Worlds was finished and they moved on to the next item in the agenda."

\*Tap tap\*

Desir tapped the arm of his chair with his other hand cupping his chin."

'So, he is worried about something." ’

He unconsciously changed his position several times in apparent discomfort." There was a growing feeling that was completely different to that stemming from the decision just made relating to the Hebrion Empire." It was an instinctive warning against an impending threat that would occur on a large scale."

“We have taken the back foot so far in these deals." As a result, the tariff for foods is going to increase a little bit in the coming year and…”

“Food is… the products…”

The voices became less distinct, like buzzing flies, making it hard to listen." Nevertheless, Desir kept trying to pay attention, as this was his first time attending." However it was to no-avail." He unconsciously ended up pondering over this growing feeling." It was just too ominous of a feeling to be continually ignored." It was a feeling that he hadn’t felt in recent days, but it was definitely something that he had experienced too many times to be counted in his past life."

On the battlefield."

Why did he feel this now, of all places?

Why?

Maybe he was still somewhat affected by that nightmare." This feeling must be anxiety." It must be because this is the place where she died." He felt a mounting pressure in his heart in-spite of his better judgement."

As Desir thoughts continued to swirl in contemplation of this issue, a very faint sound started." Almost like tinnitus." It was so small, like a water drop falling into the ocean, but it was definitely magic at work."

“Lord of Matop." ”

“What’s the matter?”

“Is there any magic active around this castle?"

“There are thousands." Simply speaking, even the elevator we took is also a magical device."."

“No, I mean defense magic as preparation against impact." ”

“The maximum level of defense magic is activated." It can withstand attack magic of the Fifth-Circle." What’s lead you to ask this all of sudden?”

Fifth-Circle."

It can safely be referred to as the maximum level of defensive magic in existence."

\*Flash!\*

A huge amount of mana started spreading out like a flood." Zod and Desir immediately focused on the source of the magic." Judging from the massive amount of mana collected, it was clear that magic was about to activate." They had no idea when this mana was collected or when the spell was prepared."

Desir started analyzing the spell and tried to calculate how to invert it, but the level of magic was Sixth-Circle." It was necessary to have enough time to invert Sixth-Circle magic, even if the person doing it was Desir."

However, the magic had already been fully invoked and ready for activation at any time." If so, there was only one hope."

“Lord of Matop!”

Zod realized the seriousness of the situation and arranged magic spells in front of himself." Under the control of greatest wizard, the magic was arranged, formatted and invoked." Staring at the magic forming around Zod, people in the room started stirring into action." One of them immediately threw accusations at Zod."

“Lord of Matop! What are you doing in the council meeting?!”

There was no time to answer each concern." Desir yelled at the top of his lungs."

“EVERYBODY DOWN!”

But the impact was much quicker."

\*Collapse!\*

The sound of a huge explosion resounded." It felt and sounded like the sky was tearing open!

With this gigantic impact, all the windows of the conference room and the wider palace shattered." The palace shook as if there was an earthquake." People standing immediately lost their balance and fell down, tumbling and rolling with the undulations of the aftershocks that rocked the palace."

A huge fire burst into existence and in quick-order encompassed the entire palace." As the temperature inside began to ratchet up, for the people inside, it began to feel like they were trapped inside a boiling blast furnace."

\*Crack!\*

While the thousands of layers of magic around the palace broke, debris from the activated mana started falling." With the broken defense magic acting as a source of fuel, the heat became even stronger." The flame looked overwhelming to all onlookers." People who were outside the magic formations were burnt to ashes without even a chance to scream."

Right before the last defense magic broke Zod lifted up his cane and shouted out an incantation:

[Will of Mahatma." 」

\*Crack!\*

From Zod’s feet, cryogenically cold air fanned out." Passing by people, the cold air slammed into the walls of the conference room, against the flames that engulfed the walls." The air itself cooled and solidified." Extreme cold and heat collided and battled against each other."

There was a rapid expansion in the air! The currents of air raged with an explosive roar."

After a while, Zod collected his magic back." The flame of such intensity that it appeared to threaten to burn down the world had completely vanished." But this only allowed a temporary measure of relief."

\*Rumble!\*

A heavy sound resounded." Desks and chairs were pushed to one side."

One could see the steel frame of the broken window jutting out like a skeleton from the partially destroyed palace." There were some unextinguished fires that continued to smolder from place to place, even after Zod’s magic."

Zod stopped the magic by a hair’s breadth, but the extent of his ability was to safeguard just the conference room." There was just not enough time for him to create a more elaborate and thorough defense."

The conference room, no, the whole palace was collapsing." As reality set in, some people began to scream."

“What happened?!”

“This is terrorism! This is terrorism aimed at the West Kingdom Union!”

“We must leave!”

People had to evacuate before the palace collapsed any further." They moved towards the exit in flurry."

Desir murmured to himself." It destroyed the thousands of defense magic formations that were protecting the palace in one-go and didn’t give Zod a chance to prevent damage beyond their room."

'Eclipse…`

It was a Sixth-Circle magic that was able to burn entire swathes of area." It was the magic that could reduce a big city to ashes if the caster carefully controlled its range of activation." For it to completely destroy so much of the palace, the area of activation of this spell must have been deliberately narrowed." Only the people in the conference room survived." Everyone else were likely burnt to ashes."

'Why does this ominous hunch always prove true?’

They weren’t able to stay here anymore." Desir woke up Priscilla lying on the ground." The edge of her dress was torn and her neat hair was also messed up."

“We need to leave before the palace collapses on us."."

“Let’s hurry." ”

Zod agreed with that."

As Zod, Priscilla and Desir were about to follow the line of people heading towards the exit, the space in front of them suddenly distorted as numerous black particles started to form the shape of a person." A man with a crow mask." He exuded a huge amount of power." It was equivalent to that of a Sixth-Circle mage."

He glanced at the escaping people and stretched out his hand." Magic started to active."

Zod quickly took the initiative to deal with him."

\*Clap!\*

A massive shockwave formed from the resonation of magic and dust was kicked up." Both Zod and the crow were safe."

The crow started to begin another magic spell at the same time as Zod."

The magic battle once again commenced."

Blasts of violent magic were exchanged dozens of times in short order." Zod got closer to crow mask while continuing to invoke magic."

Zod momentarily approached and tried to teleport the crow by grabbing his shoulder." He thought to change the battlefield by moving far away from here and finishing the battle in the open."

Their bodies granularized and ended up materializing less than 10 meters away." This meant that the crow was also a great wizard and that he had successfully resisted the teleportation of Zod, a Seventh-Circle wizard." It was apparently one of the expected outcomes though, as teleporting requires a high degree of concentration."

\*Bam!\*

A dust cloud billowed due to the battle of Zod and the crow."

“Shit." Who is this guy? Why is he not swept away by a Seventh-Circle wizard!” The Saint coughed out."

Desir immediately responded to the question."

“It’s because of us! We should leave now to get out of his way!”

That’s right."

Crow mask invoked a destruction magic without hesitation and Zod attempted to invoke his magic to offset and not to allow crow’s magic to properly activate." As a result, Zod’s magic was defensively focused." Although he was invoking his magic way earlier and the power of it was superior to crow’s, he did not appear to be over-powering the crow."

‘Fully analyzing it is the only way." '

If he inverted the magic causing it to invalidate itself, then he can emasculate the wizard in front of him." Zod was trying to get to crow’s core of magic calculation."

It was a very precise and highly encrypted magic." By the time Zod could get the rough hang of it and focus on solving it …

“…!”

Contrary to his expectations though, Zod’s magic was analysed." Because he never thought his magic would be analysed back, he neglected to properly prepare for this outcome, causing his defensive spell to fail."

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**RMSBS - Episode 70 . Terrorism (2)**

\*Crash!\*

Half melted parts of the palace structure transformed into dust that billowed out from the epicentre of the magic duel." Some of the few parts of the palace still standing proceeded to rain down as a backdrop to the fight."

Zod bitterly started arranging another spell." A momentary mistake had turned into a costly blunder."

The duel between Sixth-Circle wizards was finally coming to a-head." The average magic spell was about Fifth-Circle." Various lethal magical techniques typically employed by wizards had been ruthlessly exchanged."

As a result of their fight the collapse of the palace had accelerated."

In the meantime, at a distance not too far away from the duel, the VIPs of the West Kingdom Union had quickened their pace towards the exit staircase."

“What… is… a bolt… out of the blue…”

The King Prillecha had a large physique and as a result was struggling to keep up." After travelling a short distance, he was already gasping for air." Although one of the knights supported him, the speed at which he travelled continued to decrease due to his heavy build." Desir reinforced his strength with magic and supported the other side of King Prillecha."

“It’s ridiculous! This can’t be happening!”

“It’s so irritating!”

The kings representing the West Kingdom Union looked incensed at the gall of this attack." Their luxurious clothes were coated in dust and some of them had even been hurt as they fell down during the pseudo-earthquake."

One the most pissed off amongst them was King Divide who had been playing hardball against the Hebrion Empire just moments before." He couldn’t help expressing his displeasure, betraying just how upset he was."

“How dare they act so discourteous!? I can’t excuse this behaviour." ”

He glared at the fight between Zod and the Crow mask." Then he commanded the knights around him."

“Help Zod immediately and kill that guy!”

In accordance with his order the seven surviving knights charged at the Crow mask."

“NO!”

Their enemy was a Sixth-Circle wizard! Desir yelled but it was already too late." The Crow mask glanced at the people running toward him and muttered."

[SPECTRUM SHOWER]

Fifth-Circle magic."

A shiny light circle formed above Crow mask’s head." Their bodies were dismembered and disintegrated in an instant." An invisible ultra-heated beam was all that remained."

King Divide saw this desolate sight and hastened his pace while keeping his mouth shut."

The Crow mask was about to stretch his hand out to invoke another spell but he had to change his mind as Zod rapidly closed in on him."

“Where are you looking!?”

[HOWL OF MAGMA]

[BITCHANYEGA." ]

\*Rumble!\*

The confrontation continued." While the Crow mask and Zod were standing face-to-face, the VIPs of the West Kingdom Union were able to safely escape the conference room and flee to the lower floors."

Zod saw their departure and paused his battle with Crow mask." He shouted toward Crow mask."

“Who the hell are you?!”

The Crow mask started invoking another spell instead of responding to Zod." Zod bitterly mulled over this situation."

'He certainly is a difficult person." '

It was easy for Zod to destroy him if he really tried." He could just put him down with a strong stunning spell, but Zod needed to consider the VIPs of the West Kingdom Union." He couldn’t further destroy the palace by thoughtlessly using huge magic." The man in front of Zod was aware of this weak point too." Therefore, his magic was directed entirely toward these VIPs." Zod had been countering each and every one of them and faced him while controlling his power to minimise damage to the palace."

'Anyhow I can continue holding him off until they all escape…’

At that moment, the Crow finally spoke."

“You are so lackadaisical!”

While listening to him, Zod closed his eyes and expanded his sensory range to cover the whole palace, as he guessed something else was about to happen." He then opened his eyes."

‘Shit!'

The entrance to the palace."

He felt Fifth-Circle magic at the place that the VIPs were heading towards." It was hidden cleverly so as to not easily be found unless one was extremely focussed on finding it." It was definitely one of the Crow mask’s spells." But it hadn’t activated yet."

'Same magic as the first attack." '

It was the Sixth-Circle magic “Eclipse” which the Crow had used to attack the palace." There should be some sign of preparation for magic at that kind of level." However, it was activated and overwhelmed the entire palace with no forewarning."

The Crow mask must have somehow finished arranging and formatting the magic in advance to leave a spell that can be readily invoked at a moment’s notice."

'Wait… Is it an artifact with the capability to memorize?’

An artifact that is able to arrange and format magic in advance and activate the spell at a later date." Hebrion obtained an artifact like this by clearing a Level Three Shadow World decades ago, but it was considered a lost artifact in this era."

When Zod thought about that, he suddenly regarded the Crow in a new light." If it was what he assumed, the man facing him was much more dangerous than he originally thought."

'I should stop the trap first." ’

As soon as Zod tried to teleport to the lower floor to stop the magic that he had sensed, the Crow mask grabbed ahold of his clothes." They disappeared for a moment and re-appeared again at the same place."

“YOUUU!”

Zod could sense the people closing in on the entrance where the trap was laying in wait." He was starting to get desperate." But the Crow masked man in front of him continued to interrupt his plans to the end."

“."."." ?”

Suddenly, the sound of steps approaching the entrance stopped, and “Started… retracing their path?”

The spell waiting to be invoked was fully-analysed and inverted in a moment." Someone saw through it and deactivated it."

‘Was it Desir?'

People walked away leisurely." Zod felt elated."

“Is there another Sixth-Circle level wizard…”

He couldn’t read the face covered with the Crow mask, but the face would definitely be contorted in rage." Zod raised his power in earnest." As he no longer needed to hold back, destructive magic started arranging and formatting in front of him."

“So."."." Are you ready?”

“Unfortunately, I have nothing to do with you." ”

To the contrary, the Crow mask stepped back to increase the distance between them." His body then transformed into black particles and rapidly vanished."

It was teleportation without invoking." It happened so quickly that there was no time to interrupt." No matter what Zod did, he couldn’t have re-acted in-time."

'What…’

Zod smiled bitterly." The enemy had run away but it didn’t seem to be finished here." The damage was already done, and it seemed as if he had somewhat achieved his goals." As proof of his thoughts, black smoke continued billowing out everywhere in the palace."

“This was crazy." ”

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“How did you know there was magic placed there?”

These were the first words that the Saint spat out after they had completely left the palace through the fuliginous passage." She admired Desir’s capability." When people were just running towards the entrance, Desir suddenly stopped people and inverted the Fifth-Circle magic that had been placed there." If they had passed through carelessly, all of them might now be dead."

“Because there is only one entrance to the palace." ”

Thinking about it calmly, it was not a difficult inference." The attack magic covered the whole palace." It can only be judged that it was used to target and specifically kill the VIPs inside the palace."

Assuming that the purpose of the Crow mask was to kill all of the leaders of the West Kingdom Union, it naturally follows that the Crow would have spent a bit of time catering for the possibility of at least one target, of the many present, managing to slip through the cracks and head for an escape route."

There is only one entrance to the palace." It was simple to set a trap but also simple to read." Following this train of thought, Desir had to assume that there might be a trap at this escape." As the result of remaining vigilant, this assumption became a conviction."

He inverted the Fifth-Circle magic he found by fully-analysing it and allowing the people to leave the palace."

“You got out safely, my King!”

There were numerous traces of heroic battle outside the palace." Well-arranged roads were partially wrecked and trees were burning." The smell of blood had also spread." The dead bodies of the Outsiders and the castle’s soldiers sprawled in all directions." The knight troop might have been a feint to block the entrance of the palace."

It seems like the battle had just finished." All of the remaining troops of knights approached." They looked quite exhausted from this long battle." The VIPs of the great council conference blended into their respective knight troops." The knights were considered the pinnacle of security within the continent, so it was safe with them around."

Desir could finally take a moment to look around and gather his thoughts." Watching the people evacuating and the smoke rising from buildings within the city, Deltaheim, he figured out the palace was not the only place to get attacked."

It was terrorism on an epic scale." He could see the knights of Deltaheim were going to be fighting against the Outsiders for a while more." Desir asked one of the knights that was busy maintaining his weapons."

“How’s the battle going now?”

He looked Desir up and down, and was then about to ignore him due to the mistaken impression of Desir being just a boy." Luckily Priscilla was there and corrected the mistake."

“Answer his question." ”

He looked at Desir and Priscilla in turn." The authority of the Saint was overwhelming." When she pressed for an answer, he could only explain the current situation."

“In Deltaheim now, the packs of Outsiders are running on a rampage." The soldiers are fighting against them but they have razed major points of interest in the city and managed to split the military forces through vicious means." ”

Furthermore, the abilities of each of the Outsiders were almost at the knight level." The knights are an elite unit in combat, so they can fight back and hold their own, but these Outsiders were not at a level that general soldiers could contend with."

“We don’t expect them to cut us any slack though." ”

Desir had also handled some in the past, but it was tough to face the truth." They had successfully managed to terrorise the place where all of the kings and important people of the West Kingdom Union had gathered." This huge incident didn’t happen in his previous life."

It was an incident unprecedented in the long history of the continent!

If one of the kings representing the West Kingdom Union had died from the terrorist attack, then the union would have received irrevocable damage and the coalition would quickly crumble." It was a situation on the scale of destroying the West Kingdom Union itself."

And this event was still unfolding."

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**Episode 71 . Terrorism (3)**

‘This attack from the Outsiders means that they will start coming at us in earnest now." ’

The Outsiders should be aiming for the kings of the West Kingdom Union."

‘I can’t figure out their exact level of fighting strength." '

As mentioned in the meeting, the Outsiders had been in hiding and had been actively concealing their power."

“Our top priority should be the protection of the kings." We should leave here as promptly as possible." ”

\*Crash\*

What remained of the palace had begun to collapse." As if this were the queue, a scuffle broke out amongst the kings."

“Is this all there is to Prillecha’s enforcement of public order? This is an unacceptable situation, as a member of the West Kingdom Union!!”

The Divide Empire was way more powerful, as a nation, than the Prillecha Empire." King Prillecha was sweating profusely."

“This is a very unsatisfactory experience, Prillecha." I can’t rely on the troops you lead anymore." I’m going to move separately with my subordinates." ”

Desir chimed into their conversation."

“Please beg my pardon but your majesty, we can’t ensure your personal safety and security if you separate from us." ”

“You are… ”

“Desir Arman." ”

King Divide confirmed that he was the person who had saved them all by inverting the trap spell just a short moment ago and decided to at least hear out what he had to say."

“If we separate right now then the military powers we hold will also be distributed, and as a result this may give them the optimal situation to take us out one by one." ”

“Okay then." Do you have a better idea?”

Desir looked at King Prillecha furtively."

“Do you have any safe spots around here? A secret place that can’t be easily found." ”

King Prillecha replied."

“There is a shelter prepared for times of war." ”

Desir followed this up with King Divide."

“That’s great." Let’s wait this situation out." If it is the Prillecha Empire, they can certainly defend against this." ”

“You mean that we should rely on these guys again?”

“Yes your majesty." ”

“Unfortunately, I reject your suggestion." ” King Divide declared."

Desir’s eyebrows rose."

Considering what he had done – arousing the animosity to Hebrion and sacrificing his subordinates meaninglessly during the duel; he appeared to be rather head-strong and fool-hardy."

“Do you have any other plans?”

“."."." We will go to the teleportation gate." I’m heading back to the Divide Empire." ”

“Then Prillecha Empire… ”

“This is technically a foreign country for us." ”

He beat off the dust that covered his clothes."

“It is a shame to call a small country like this a member of the West Kingdom Union." They can’t even defend against trivial terrorism." ”

It was a huge diplomatic discourtesy." This noticeably changed the atmosphere and the other leaders of the West Kingdom Union started to become restless."

King Divide turned toward the commander of his forces."

“So how’s the situation at teleportation gate?”

“The Outsiders have a grip on it but if my king commands it, then we will confront them immediately." ”

“Wonderful." Let’s go through the gate with the troops." Is there anyone who cares to join us?”

Nobody raised their hand." As they continued to hesitate, King Divide expressed his anger at the perceived slight."

“How could you? Don’t you believe in the strength of my knights?”

Someone voiced their concerns."

“It is not that we can’t rely on your knights, King Divide, but the boy sounds more credible." ”

This was immediately refuted." It was quite a different atmosphere from when things previously revolved around King Divide, as was seen in the council meeting." King Divide turned around without any further hesitation."

“Then I’m going alone." ”

He left with his troops." The others decided to go to the shelter of Deltaheim according to Desir’s plan."

When he was devising this strategy, Desir was starting to worry about the involved parties." The Outsider’s attack was not limited to the palace but encompassed the entire city too." If so, it was better to stick together."

‘Outsiders are coming to attack with their strongest fighting force." It can’t be finished as simply as before." ’

Zod appeared in front of them via teleportation." Desir immediately questioned him."

“Did you get the Crow mask?”

Zod shook his head." Desir was surprised." How could Zod allow the Crow to escape? That Crow mask must be a wizard of immense strength."

Desir explained his plan to Zod, who had decided to join them." When he finished the explanation Zod nodded his head in agreement with the plan."

“Hmm." Didn’t you also have a party?”

Zod followed up with,

“Then let me take care of here." You’d better go, to secure the safety of your party." ”

It was a well-timed suggestion for Desir."

“Is that okay?”

“You can’t move as freely while being burdened with worries." Let’s do what we have to do respectively for now." ”

“I appreciate this, Lord of Matop." I wish you good luck in this war." ”

Leaving Zod behind, Desir started to retrace his steps." At the same time he operated his communication bracelet, a magic device located on his wrist, to contact Romantica."

‘I hope that they are safe." ’

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The curtains were shut." The air in the restaurant was laced with fear." Without any notice a group of people had suddenly stormed into the restaurant wearing masks." They had gathered the staff and guests together and ultimately occupied the building with no resistance."

“If you do anything suspicious, you’ll be decapitated." ”

A person wearing a skull mask threatened." It looked a lot like the symbol of the Outsiders."

Amongst the people gathered, there was Romantica, Pram and Adjest." It would have been dangerous for them to escalate the situation by acting rashly, so they immediately surrendered to the rule of the Outsiders."

Screams emanated from the cracks in the wall." Watching smoke rise from downtown, it was immediately obvious that the city had suffered a terrorist attack." As citizens of one of the kingdoms in the union, they were embarrassed by the thought that a capital had been attacked by the Outsiders." But after deliberating a bit more on the timing of the attack and why they targeted Deltaheim, they came to a realisation."."."

‘The great council." ’

They couldn’t think of any other reason than this to take the massive risk in attacking the capital." If so… the palace was where the great council was held… They started to worry as soon as they thought Desir might be in danger there."

“Hey, there! Stop wiggling! I will kill these kids if you dare move any more!”

There were four Outsiders here, and each of them was holding a hostage." They took the children hostage so that the adults couldn’t move." They kept checking the situation outside through a small gap in the curtains as the capital troops had immediately moved to repel and counter the Outsiders’ attack."

As befitting of soldiers guarding the capital of Prillecha Empire, a member of the West Kingdom Union, they moved swiftly." It looked like the Outsiders were keeping a close watch on them, as they had side-stepped into buildings to conduct guerilla attacks."

Romantica whispered."

“I don’t think they are that strong." ”

Pram followed up."

“It doesn’t seem that they are different to what we dealt with at the Ellueli Chapter of Matop." ”

“We can’t delay any longer." No one knows what they will do." ”

Adjest suggested."

“We need to subdue them all at once due to the hostages." ”

“I know." ”

Romantica concentrated on and surveilled them with her sensitive mana detection power."

“There is a wizard amongst them… he is the last one from the left." Maybe wind attribute." And the others… ”

“The rest of them are knights." Two are pawn level and the middle one is at knight level." ”

It was Adjest." She was also sizing up the power of the enemy."

“Let’s synchronise our timing and subdue the enemies all at once." Romantica, decapitate the knight with attack magic." Pram and I will take the others." ”

With a clear-headed direction from Adjest, Romantica decided to follow." She had to admit that Adjest was smart."

Romantica’s specialty was nonverbal magic." She didn’t even need a second to arrange and format Second-Circle attack magic." But there was still the critical matter of timing the release of it."

Pram, Adjest and Romantica exchanged glances and just as they were about to attack…

\*Ring!\*

Romantica looked at the noise at her wrist." It was her communication bracelet."

At the most inopportune moment!

“What is that?”

The Outsiders started focusing their attention on her."

Pram had to look down to cover his face and prevent himself from fainting." Adjest looked forward with undaunted eyes." Romantica’s communication bracelet kept ringing despite their efforts."

\*Ring Ring Ring!\*

“Is that a communication device? Did you get in touch to someone?”

“That’s impossible." ”

Romantica said without compunction." But her voice slightly quavered."

The Outsiders thought it was strange and they got up from their seats one by one."

“Hang up now." ”

“Now." ”

Romantica spoke in a halting way that hinted that she was close to tears." She looked exactly like a frightened girl."

“B… But you said that you would kill us… if I moved." ”

One of the Outsiders frowned."

“So annoying." Hey, take it off and bring it over to me." ”

“Yes sir." ”

An Outsider approached Romantica and checked her communication bracelet that was still ringing."

“It looks like jewelry though." Nothing like a communication device?”

“What is that though?”

“Wait." There are letters." Something H… He…”

He looked like he doesn’t know the letters well as he attempted reading it."

At that time, Romantica touched the foot of Adjest with her toe." It was the signal to move."

“Hebrion!?"

When the man finally read the letters, Adjest started to move." Adjest kicked away the closest man in front of them by turning her body." His body was floating in the air and struck the dining table." Food scattered everywhere."

In the next moment, the food was flung to the opposite side of the room." They were dragged along by the wind bullets that Romantica had invoked."

The hand of a knight-level Outsider that was grabbing a hostage and the remaining hand holding his weapons were smashed to pieces."

“Aargh!”

Blood splattered onto the floor as he screamed." The remaining pawn-level knight was surprised and approached them with a drawn iron sword."

“Y."."." You swine!”

He started to run towards them while brandishing that iron sword."

Pram moved." Before they knew it, the Blanchum rapier that shone with white light had appeared in his hand." With a clean thrust of it…

\*Crack!\*

Pram’s rapier broke the iron sword of Outsider and continued on its trajectory, stabbing into his shoulder." The iron sword couldn’t compete with the strength of Blanchum."

He struck the back of the man writhing on the floor with the back of his sword and made him cleanly faint."

“."."." Did we subdue them all?”

“Even the wizard." ”

In no time, there was a fallen Outsider, who happened to be the only wizard of the gang, under the foot of Adjest."

Everything was settled in a moment."

“That was a great acting performance, Romantica." ”

“No, it’s nothing." ”

The kids that were freed returned to their mothers."

Pram then faced the gathered civilians and gave them an instruction."

“Quickly join the people fleeing from here." ”

The door was opened and the people escaped."

‘Finally." ’

\*Ring." \*

Romantica’s communication bracelet was still ringing." It was Desir."

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**Episode 72 . Terrorism (4)**

The capital of Prillecha, Deltaheim, was facing a disaster of unprecedented scale." The Outsider’s terrorist attack aimed at the palace had been effectively carried out and the damage caused by it was severe."

The speed of their actions was high as it seemed like they had made exhaustive strategies from thoroughly investigating all of the major facilities in Deltaheim." In an instant they had destroyed the defense forces protecting these facilities and occupied them."

As a result, the defense forces of Deltaheim selected the stadium, where the Yellow Ocean Competition was held, to be the public shelter and also their temporary headquarters." Belatedly, they started carrying out measures, step by step against this terrorist attack."

However it was not going to be an easy task to recapture these occupied facilities." The Outsiders were a pack of mysterious people that deliberately obscured or hid their identities." Unless their purpose was clearly identified, the defense forces couldn’t recklessly lead their forces and repel the Outsiders."

Desir’s party reformed under this situation."

“Thank god you are safe." ”

Desir sighed in relief upon meeting up with Romantica, Adjest and Pram." He had heard that they had confronted some Outsiders and thought it was very lucky that they didn’t sustain injuries as a result."

As the public continued to gather here, Romantica shouted while directing the fleeing civilians towards the defense force."

“You all must evacuate with these guys and stay safe until things are settled here." ”

She looked around Deltaheim where flames continued to spread as far as the eye could see."

“How dare they do this… I can’t forgive them." I will help the defense force and protect Deltaheim with my all." ”

To Desir, Adjest and Pram, the things happening here had nothing to do with them." But to Romantica, this was her hometown." Her anger was only a matter of course."

Desir sighed."

“I knew you would say that." Adjest, Pram and I think we should help the forces defeat the Outsiders." If we turned our backs in a situation like this, we will definitely regret it." ”

Pram and Adjest nodded in agreement."

“I agree." I don’t think it is a good idea to leave this situation as is." ”

“Me too." ”

Romantica passionately rebutted them."

“I can’t let you get caught up in matters involving my country!”

“Romantica, as much as you worry about us, we also worry about you." We will never let you go alone." ”

“Yes Romantica." If something happened to you… ”

Since it hurt Pram a lot just thinking about the possibility, his eyes already brimmed with tears."

“Bu, But……”

“Romantica, don’t you know who Desir is? He will never change his thoughts after making up his mind on something." ”

Adjest’s response seemed like the clincher in this matter." Romantica’s head sank down to her chest and she choked out a response."

“… Thank you all." ”

Desir’s party agreed to repel the Outsiders, who had attacked the capital, by helping the defense forces." They went to the temporary headquarters and requested to join them on the field."

“We are a party from Hebrion Academy." All of us are single rankers and we would like to be of assistance in this situation." ”

After showing their uniforms and communication bracelets as proof of being Hebrion single rankers, the participation of Desir’s party was approved."

An officer was designated to give a simple briefing on the current status of affairs to Desir’s party."

“Nice to meet you." I’m Desir Arman, the leader of this party." ”

“I’m officer Donnel." ”

His tone was brisk and businesslike." He may have been influenced by the current state of tensions between nations, and as a result hated working with anything related to Hebrion."

Donnel spread a map." It was an ichnographic map of Deltaheim." Points were marked on it with various symbols to represent the current known positions of the Outsiders and the facilities that needed to be recovered."

“At present, we have successfully recaptured the communication department and are busy repairing it." The other facilities are also somewhat under-control, but there is just one place that we are struggling with." ”

In the middle of the map of Deltaheim, he pointed out one spot."

It was the teleportation authority offices."

“This area is occupied by the Outsiders." ”

The teleportation gate was used during visits from honored guests as well as for various military matters." It was enchanted to travel long distances in a moment." As a result many support forces routinely passed through there."

“This is why our reinforcements didn’t arrive." ”

It was said that this was where the Outsiders spent most of their effort to take as the terrorist attack first unfolded." As a result, the Outsiders continued to receive reinforcements through the teleportation gate causing this to be the place of the hardest battle in Deltaheim."

“From the coordinates set at the teleportation gate, it is possible that the Outsiders will setup a retreat route after inverting the magic." ”

It was not easy to invert the Fifth-Circle magic of the teleportation gate, but Desir recalled the crow mask and understood."

“Reclaiming this place and breaking the teleportation gate are the current plan of the defense forces." Please help the defense destroy it." ”

“If we break the gate, then the West Kingdom Union also won’t have access to supporting forces." ”

“It’s inevitable." There is no wizard who has the level of skill required to modify the coordinates of this teleportation gate." ”

“If that is the case, I can help." ”

Donnel immediately regarded him with a look of surprise."

“Are you at a level higher than the Fifth-Circle?”

“No, I’m not but I know how to do it." I’ve modified something at this level several times." ”

Donnel responded with a look of admiration."

“… I’d be very glad if you could do that." Things will turn out favorably for us if the coordinates of the gate can be reset." ”

\*\*\*

The sun blazed down." Sounds of yelling, screaming, magical energy bursting and other sounds synonymous with battle were carried around the capital by the wind."

The office of the teleportation authority was a huge two-story building, used for transferring VIPs and military in emergencies and as a result was protected by the highest level of defense magic available to the country."

A battle line had formed with the Outsiders in front of the teleportation authority." They had warriors with shields lead the line and wizards at their back to confront the defense forces." The number of them was small but they were much stronger than the defense force."

The balance of power in the confrontation between these two forces continued to see-saw back and forward." However, this was all overturned in a moment." The Outsiders suddenly shifted their focus to a single point in the defense force’s front and it crumbled under this pressure." An excessive number of Outsider warriors flooded forward like a deluge." The defenses were thrown back indicating that a corner of the front was starting to lose."

One of the Outsiders had a weighty shield and huge hatchet." When he charged forward with his shield raised, one of the soldiers on defense was flung into the air." This Outsider then smiled and came closer to the soldier left sprawled on the ground, while fondling the hatchet that he was holding." The soldier rushed to his feet and turned his back to start running." It was at this moment that the Outsider raised his huge hatchet above his head in preparation of chopping off the soldier's head." Unexpectedly though, the Outsider’s body flew backwards like a kite that had its string cut." Blood gushed out from the fist-sized hole that had appeared in his chest." He died so suddenly that he did not even have a chance to scream."

The surviving soldier was dazed and looked over his shoulder." There was a girl launching spells from far away, with a long silver iron rod resting against her shoulder."

It was Romantica."

\*Bang." \*

By consecutively invoking sniping magic, she had steadily helped the soldiers at risk out of danger."

“Yippee!”

She wasn’t alone."

A swordsman who demonstrated extremely rapid fencing with a Blanchum rapier, had been subduing the enemy with precise attacks." It was hard for the human eye to track the attacks of his sword." The Outsiders that the defense forces were struggling up until now against, easily fell apart in front of him."

A girl with grey hair was overwhelming." She attacked with both magic and fencing, and no Outsiders stood a chance against her might."

The Outsiders realised that those who had suddenly appeared in-front of them were the real threat." They readied to fire their best magic at them." Magic spells hung in the air as they were formatted and arranged."

“Watch out!”

Just as a soldier tried to warn the party, the magic that the Outsiders tried to invoke blurred and disappeared in a flash." They tilted their heads at this occurrence that made neither rhyme nor reason." The voice of a boy resounded."

“I fully analysed and inverted it! They can’t use that magic anymore! It’s fine to enter now!”

Pram and Adjest started interfering in the battle in earnest now." Only four people had joined the battle but the situation was entirely reversed." The defense force pushed the Outsiders back and started to advance on the offices of the teleportation authority."

The Outsiders were flustered and could only unwillingly retreat."

“Our reinforcements!”

“A Third-Circle wizard!”

Morale soared." Under the full power of Desir’s party, the Outsiders were taken down soundly."

“Pull back!”

The Outsiders finally couldn’t stand anymore and declared a full retreat." The defense force and Desir’s party chased after them but they came to a halt in front of the teleportation authority."

The teleportation authority was protected by strong defense magic." It was literally a fort in both a magical and physical sense."

The Outsiders had completed their retreat by locking its doors."

Desir turned to Adjest."

“Adjest, I will invert the defense magic." Blow the door off right after that." ”

“Leave it to me." ”

\*Beammm!\*

Desir detected the defense magic around the teleportation authority." He caught the skillfully crafted, complicated formations and started to craft a counter formation in his head." After analysing the magic, Desir laughed ironically."

‘It is a structure dexterously weaving reignite from its base to provide protection against physical impact." It is definitely a strong magic but it’s far too old-fashioned." ’

The difficulty level was quite high but it was fully analysed in less than 10 minutes as Desir had finished analysing the core formation of it."

\*Clank!\*

The links weaving the defense magic together were broken and the teleportation authority was defenselessly left exposed." Adjest’s freezing magic was invoked and the entrance to the teleportation authority was completely blown apart."

\*BOOM!\*

With the entrance pierced, an embarrassed looking group of Outsiders were revealed."

So as to not squander the opportunity, the defense force infiltrated the building."

“Everybody in!”

“Move forward!”

Desir’s party followed the defense force."

A battle broke out inside." The Outsiders couldn’t seize victory and were forced to continually retreat." There were only a few of them left."

The defense force and Desir’s party re-took the first floor in the blink of an eye, and moved forward to the second floor where the teleportation gate was located." This floor was shaped like a square, to allow for the easy movement of a large number of troops, and was centred around a teleportation gate."

A super-massive magic formation completely filled the room with a diverse number of formations."

“Is that what I need to invert?”

At that exact moment the magic formula turned red and the gate started to operate."

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**Episode 73 . Terrorism (5)**

New Outsiders emerged from the gate." They looked far stronger than the ones that they had been fighting against so far." These fresh Outsiders numbered twenty strong and wore the same uniform as the existing Outsiders." The warriors had black armour and were holding swords of decent quality, while the wizards were all at least of the Third-Circle."

It was an elite army of Outsiders."

They started slaying the defense force in a show of brilliance." It was impossible to repel them, let alone dominate them." There was almost no one in the defense force that was able to face them at their level."

‘Shit." We can’t hold for much longer if more strong people cross over again." ’

It was important to change the coordinates of teleportation gate immediately."

Desir commanded the party."

“Pram, Romantica! Protect the troops so that they are not lost pointlessly!”

“Gotcha!”

At one part of the battlefield where the fiercest battle was unfolding, Pram appeared." He dealt with one of the Outsiders with a single swing of his silvery rapier." He was definitely the superior force here."

Romantica was also curtailing the momentum the Outsiders." Due to the presence of these two, the defense force would not continue to crumble dreadfully, even if they couldn’t seize the initiative in the battle."

“Yaaap!”

They overpowered the Outsiders." With the exception of the new elite army, there were still plenty of Outsiders and disordered fights had developed as the battlefield spread out."

“I need to get closer to the center of the magic array of the teleportation gate to reset the coordinates." Cover me, Adjest."."

Adjest lead the way and Desir assisted her from the rear." By thoroughly analysing and inverting the magic of the enemy, Desir was intermittently taking care of the Outsiders with Third-Circle magic." His Third-Circle magic was super-fast and its power was way stronger than normal Third-Circle spells." He approached the center of teleportation gate while subduing opposing Third-Circle wizards one by one."

Outsiders realised that Adjest and Desir were heading towards the gate and immediately shifted their focus onto them."

It was a winnable fight at the beginning but the combination of a knight level and Third-Circle wizard attack from the Outsiders proved to be a formidable combination." Their strong opposition brought Adjest to a stop." There were only a few more steps left to reach the gate."

“It is enough at this distance." Please hold for 5 minutes, Adjest." ”

In front of the teleportation gate, analysis had begun." Desir had to reset the coordinates of the teleportation gate that the Outsiders had modified." Because the teleportation magic was a complicated and heavy magic that belonged to the Fifth-Circle, there was a huge amount of calculation required to analyse it."

‘Well, freezing-palace can’t be used." ’

Adjest was thinking about how to fight the Outsiders as one of them entered the reach of her sword." Freezing-palace was a magic that allowed one to infinitely invoke the desired magic within a designated area." As it was used simultaneously against multiple members of the Aman tribes in the Shadow World, it was powerful enough to handle the Outsiders despite being so unwieldy." Ultimately though, it was a difficult magic to use in such disordered battle." Due to it being an area-of-effect spell it was possible to catch both enemy and friendly forces in it." The use of freezing-palace in a battlefield like this might result in friendly-fire." This left just one strategy that Adjest could deploy."

‘Then, pure magic and fencing are the only way to fight this enemy." ’

She wielded her sword and swung it at the enemy in front of her." Her counterpart was holding two swords, one in each hand – one was a short sword and the other a long sword."

As soon as she avoided the sword from her side by ducking her head the other sword immediately followed up."

Her sword and the Outsider’s collided against each other." Adjest’s power was superior but if she pushed carelessly, she may end up giving up ground as the attack interval of the Outsider swordsman was very short due to his use of two swords."

Adjest adjusted her hold on the sword."

\*Grip\*

And she swung."

Fast."

Much faster."

With her natural physical ability she swung the huge sword at a tremendous speed."

The Outsider crossed his swords in a fluster to block her attacks."

\*Wham!\*

Sparks flew from the exchange."

The Outsider flew back but stood up after rolling once in an admirable display of acrobatics." But there was no time for him to take a breath." Adjest didn’t allow him any recovery and continued to press the attack in earnest."

He was furious and snorted." While licking his bloody lips, he yelled."

“You are strong! Strong! Very strong!”

“…”

The swordsman displayed a very irregular fencing style." The trajectory of his sword was extremely diverse, constant and rash as his sword flowed in a flexible manner, apparently without any concern for the inevitable accumulation of wounds."

Adjest thought that this exchange was very annoying." Amidst the continuous attacks, Adjest turned her eyes towards the wizard behind her for a brief moment." She realized that he had been busy forming a spell to invoke."

[Thurman Lightning]

It was an electric Third-Circle magic."

Adjest raised her sword to face against the Outsider’s sword and stretched her free hand out towards the wizard." She shoved the swordsman away by strongly pushing the sword facing her in an outwards facing arc whilst also invoking a magic ice dome to protect her and also redirect the approaching magic."

\*Bump!\*

The ice exploded." The lightning had gathered inside the ice dome and was returned at the caster." The Outsider was infuriated while shaking off his burnt-black hair and clothes." He started invoking a second magic."

“Let me enjoy this more!”

\*Whoosh!\*

A sword passed by Adjest’s hand."

\*Patter." \*

Blood dripped onto the floor." The cost of losing concentration in a duel was immediately paid in full."

“… I have no more time to spend hanging out with you." ”

Adjest didn’t have the time to spend playing any further with him." During the fight with him, the wizard was invoking more magic and Adjest couldn’t handle both of their attacks together."

Adjest decided that she couldn’t stall any longer."

[Magic-sword: Frozen Wave]

“… !?”

Following the trajectory of the sword that Adjest swung, the air was frozen solid." The Outsider swordsman intuitively felt the danger that magic-sword presented and rapidly retreated."

‘I predicted that you would step back, of course." ’

Adjest had actually been aiming at the wizard forming his magic." The swordsman who had been trading blows with her had stepped back after quickly realising the change in the situation, but the wizard behind was not as quick." Because the wizard was fully focused on his Third-Circle magic, he couldn’t figure out why the wind started to blow irregularly." However, regardless of the situation, the wizard had just finished the Third-Circle magic and invoked it at Adjest."

A sphere of electricity sped towards Adjest emitting a threatening noise." Adjest continued swinging the magic-sword towards the wizard, naturally meeting the electric sphere without hesitation."

\*Buump!\*

Adjest frowned at the feeling of a twinge in her hand, but the concern was only momentary as her sword successfully slashed through the oncoming magic."

“What the…?!”

When the magic that the wizard had toiled on invoking dissipated with one cut of the sword, he was left visibly disconcerted." He was now in a completely defenseless state." As he was about to turn-heel and flee, Adjest instantaneously approached him."

“… !”

There was no chance of him matching her speed." She punched the wizard in his solar plexus with her hilt."

\*Whack\*

A small noise resonated as he collapsed onto the ground." The wizard couldn’t bear the acute pain and had passed out with his eyes rolling back into his head." This was the end of the wizard." The voice of the remaining Outsider reached Adjest’s ears."

“Haha, I will finish it all here!”

The swordsman was running towards Desir while she was busy handling the wizard."

[Ice Lance]

It was a piece of cake now to deal with the remaining man, as the wizard was now out of the picture." The two ice lances that Adjest had invoked pierced up out of the ground in front of the swordsman."

During the brief moment that the swordsman hesitated."

[Grease]

Adjest closed the distance in an instant."

Drawing closer at ludicrous speed, the swordsman flinched."

“Eh? Eeeeeh?”

This was enough to ensure defeat." Adjest flew straight and collided directly into the swordsman." He was blown back towards the teleportation gate." The two swords he held fell onto the ground with an unpleasant noise."

Adjest punched his stomach as he tried to attack again."

“Ugh!”

His upper body folded in pain." However, the swordsman had secretly gripped a dagger hidden at his waist." Adjest didn’t allow him the opportunity to produce the knife and attacked his lower-middle body with a vicious kick."

“Ughhhh!”

The swordsman screamed at the pain that bloomed beyond his expectation." Adjest then kicked him straight in the face as he held her legs in a last-bid to get up and turn the situation around." Her kick had apparently connected with his nose." With the noise of the dagger dropping to the ground, blood started to pour down his face, also revealing that his two front teeth were broken." This was finally enough for him to black-out."

“… Finished." ”

She shook her hands."

“Restoration of coordinates has been completed." Good." Now when the gate is restarted… ”

Desir’s analysis and inversion were finished just in time."

\*Hummmm!\*

The formula buried under the teleportation gate started to change colour from red to blue." The gate allowing the Outsiders continuous reinforcement was now shut." The Outsiders couldn’t hide their embarrassment at this strategic failure." The commanders who lead the defense force found that the battle was now in their favour and raised their voices."

“Defeat the remnants! They have no more reinforcements!”

“Whoooop-!”

As long as the defense could hold out until the supporting troops arrived, they would win." With the situation reversed morale was now sky-high on the defense force’s side."

The battle was almost over." Desir looked at Adjest." He sincerely thanked her for her efforts in holding against those Outsiders."

“Let’s clear all of the remnants first." ”

“Got it." ”

The final stage of the battle." Whilst handling the Outsiders that troubled the defense forces, Desir recalled the man in the crow mask who hadn’t shown up here." After the first terrorist attack, he actually hadn’t appeared at all."

‘I don’t think he retreated…’

Where in the world did he go?

It would be an unsolved mystery until he appeared again."

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**Episode 74 . At the End of the Nightmare (1)**

On the 500th year of Rowelius, the Dark Age had begun." The appearance of the beings called demons brought despair to the world." The standoff between demons and mankind continued; the civilization of mankind crumbled as a result." The story lost without trace to time and only passed down through word of mouth from generation to generation." Some scoffed at the story as a classic myth, but some believed." For those few, it was the history that definitely occurred."

\*Footsteps\*

Within the royal castle that had collapsed into ruins, there was a man walking through the charred remains." He was wearing a Crow Mask." As he was walking, the debris that blocked his path was getting swept aside, clearing the way forward." He arrived at the center of the royal castle and placed his hand on the ground." All of a sudden, a rune appeared and pushed him straight into the air." It immediately lost its strength and dropped him back onto the ground."

Suddenly, the door to the underground path appeared." The hidden way that Frilleza royalty weren’t even aware of." It took him a very long time to get to this point, gathering all of the stories and evidence that was only passed down through word of mouth from generation to generation." The breakthrough clue was the commonality of a place in the stories where the ocean radiated a golden hue and was named Isthakar."

Disaster."

The great demon referred to in times past as Disaster was fast asleep within this land." The ancient people were not able to destroy the great demon and only managed to place it in slumber within the depths of the sea." They also placed a seal on-top of it." As for the foundation of that seal, the ancient people raised a structure to protect it." At a later date one of these ancients, who had originally put the great demon under this seal, established a royal castle and named the lands surrounding it the ‘Frilleza Empire’." But now, this place could no longer serve its original purpose and laid waste." Currently, the royal castle was completely destroyed and the entire people of the nation were scattered all over the place focussing on other matters."

There was no one left that could interfere." Without hesitation, the man wearing a Crow Mask walked down the stairs in the pitch-black darkness." He stopped at the place where pulsating magic was drawn and drew something from the inside of his clothes." It was a staff with many black jewels embedded."

It was naturally an artifact." It was a treasure obtained through attacking and clearing a 3rd class Shadow World." Very few knew the purpose of it." One of those exceptions being himself."

Millions of souls were captured in that staff, and he believed it to be the catalyst to wake up the demon." The Crow Masked man stood in the center of a rune and stuck the staff right in the middle of it." Red mana started flowing out like blood." It was about evening time when the attacks from the Outsiders were starting to abate." The sky was radiating bright light as if it were mixed with gold."

When the Western Empire’s most elite, Avalon Army, arrived through the newly reconnected space travel gate, the vanquishing of the remaining Outsiders was easily accomplished." The situation was quickly concluded as soon as the Outsiders realized that there was no longer a possibility of hope and surrendered right away."

The stadium, which was used as a temporary headquarters, was filled with guards and refugees." The guards seemed exhausted but appeared proud of the fact that their defense was successful against the intruders."

“Hey, try some of this." ”

“This as well." It’s cooked to perfection." ”

“Oh." No, thanks." I’ve had enough." ”

“It’s okay." It’s all good." ”

The guards handed their portion of rations to their foreign allies."

The foreign allies, who put on awkward smiles after politely attempting to decline their favors, finally caved in and started to gracefully accept the hospitality." The favors eventuating into the sight of ever growing mountains of food." The allies? They were students of Hebrion."

The party of Desir."

Even they were showing signs of fatigue from the long, drawn out battles." They small scars and wounds covered their bodies, and the exhaustion they emanated made it all the more evident." But just like the other foreign allies, they seemed very happy stuffing their faces with the food on offer."

“I have heard that you were quite famous in Hebrion." ”

“You guys were great!”

The Desir’s party was getting quite the welcoming from the soldiers of the Frilleza Empire." It was obvious as the officials, who initially didn’t welcome them as they were from Hebrion, now treated them as VIPs and with respect."

There was nobody who didn’t know their names."

They especially had quite the following amongst the soldiers who had witnessed the assault on the Teleportation Authority offices."

Desir’s party received so many gifts that it literally formed a mound on the stadium seats."

“My mom will go crazy if she heard what happened today." ”

Romantica looked ecstatic." And rightfully so, as she had fended off the threat to her hometown with her own hands."

“Ah, here you are." ”

A deep and calm voice came over." As Zod approached, Desir’s party sprang to their feet ending their momentary rest."

“No, no." Stay comfortable." Priscilla." ”

“I’ll take care of this." Guys, could you gather up here?”

A lady came over to where Desir’s party was and focused on the condition of Pram and Adjest, who had attained a number of small wounds." When she closed her eyes, the light started to gather at the wounds."

“Ohhhhhh." ”

A roar spilled out from the soldiers who witnessed it as they gathered around the party." Healing." The reason that Priscilla was referred to as the Saint was because of this exact ability." Many sorcerers were able to expedite the natural healing process, but her magic was on a different level entirely."

It was magic that actually healed the wound as if it never existed." This was the ability that only she possessed in this world." The bleeding immediately stopped and new flesh rapidly regenerated."

Even if they were in a critical condition, the moment her hand touched the wound, everything would return to normal."

Soon after, Pram and Adjest’s wounds completely disappeared without any trace."

“They were light wounds, so it didn’t take too long." ”

“Thank you so much." ”

Adjest showed her gratitude." On the other side, Desir and Zod were having a conversation."

“You did great." The King was very grateful." Perhaps this will improve the relationship that the other nations have with Hebrion." ”

Perhaps this was a fortunate thing after all."

“If you need anything, don’t hesitate to find me." ”

“Are the kings still in the bunker?”

“They will stay there until everything is completely resolved." Because… ”

“It’s because of the Crow Mask hasn’t surfaced yet." ”

“That is correct." ”

Zod nodded."

“We are still unsure what the Outsiders’ intentions are based on their actions so far." I don’t think they will fall back since they are already in too deep." ”

“So, you are predicting that he will be on the move soon." ”

“… Since the Outsiders are completely wiped out, there is nothing that he can do." The Avalon Army is guarding the bunker, and since I cast protection magic at that location, we should be able to respond quickly." ”

“I hope that is enough… ”

“We can’t guarantee anything." ”

Desir couldn’t shake off his unexplainable anxiety, even though everything was going well."

The Crow Mask."

Although it was for a very short moment, Desir was able to witness the magic that Crow Mask cast." His magic was very sophisticated and complicated." He was a sorcerer with great power."

‘But he can’t possibly defeat Zod with just that ability." ’

Also, all of the Outsiders who were led by him were utterly wiped out." He no longer had any army to mobilize at this point."

\*Boom." \*

It was a very suffocating and ominous explosion."

Their uneasy gazes that had begun to tremble all gathered on the location of the blast."

Desir shifted his gaze to Zod."

“Did you hear that?”

“…Certainly." ”

The explosion came from the shore."

“Can this be… ”

Desir got up from his place of temporary rest." His heart had started to pound." Something was about to happen."

“Look, look over there!”

There was uneasiness around the stadium." People started looking up at the sky." Within the space of a moment or two, the sun had started to transform into a shade of black from its originally golden hue."

“… !”

A premonition suddenly struck Desir and he quickly left the stadium." The entire world was turning gray." He started running towards the shore where the explosion came from." Streetlights and the surrounding scenery became a blur in his eyes as he rushed past." He was running out of breath, but he couldn’t afford to think about that." And he thought."

‘The Crow Mask is finally on the move." ’

It must be him." It had to be him."

But what is he trying to do?

Is he deploying a Sixth-Circle magic?

That might actually be a better situation, Desir thought."

This place was being protected by the Seventh-Circle sorcerer Zod, and if anything, there was Desir’s ability to invert spells as well." They were prepared to respond." Nothing could possibly penetrate their defense." But what if it wasn’t magic? What if it wasn’t magic and a totally different type of threat?

“Please." ”

\*Roar." \*

Desir finally arrived at the shore." The sun was about to set." The waving ocean was supposed to radiate golden rays of light."

Except it wasn’t."

What was supposed to be a golden ocean was turning black as if squid ink was mixed into it." The black sun." This place was gradually losing its colour and turning black and white."

The scenery."

The Sun."

The view."

He knew."

A horrible memory suddenly resurfaced."

“… this can’t be." ”

Reflexes were faster than consciousness." His pupils widened." His mind was in constant denial and kept telling himself it was only a dream."

\*ROAR." \*

Mountains were crumbling down." Cliffs tore apart and collapsed from the intensity of the waves crashing into them as eerie screams emanated from the Earth." Something monstrous was slowing emerging from the ocean."

Reality currently felt like a bad dream." But, the figure in front of his eyes, so vivid as if it just crawled out of a nightmare, was indeed real."

“WHAT… WHAT IS THAT?”

“NO, NO WAY." THE SHEER SIZE… ”

Romantica and Pram screamed as they just arrived on the scene and came to terms with what they were witness to." Adjest aimlessly gazed at the figure without any words." Zod just touched his staff with unease and other mixed emotions on his face."

“Is… that a demon?”

It had to be about 10 meters tall." Runes of slaughter were carved into its teeth and it had a mane of hell fire around its neck."

It was one of the great demons that had destroyed much of ancient mankind long ago."

“Dadenewf, the Demon of Destruction…”

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**RMSBS - Episode 75 . At the End of the Nightmare (2)**

The demon from the legend." The one who once belonged to the highest level of the Shadow Labyrinth had appeared." Shattering the entire cliff the demon rolled its gigantic eyes to spot the city near the shore." Then it slowly moved its massive legs." It was a walking disaster." As it took a step the ground shook and everything nearby was wrecked." All of the parasols that beautifully embellished the beach just hours before were crumpled and destroyed." On approaching the half-collapsed castle the demon came to a complete stop." The castle which had been half-melted and of which there was scant amount of it still standing, would have originally served to repel the demon." Perhaps due to memories from its past, the demon struck down what remained of the castle." The castle which had stood there for hundreds of years further fell to pieces and was left completely shattered."."R0000aaarrrr" It was a shout as powerful as thunder." The sea that used to shine like gold became pitch-black as the sky lost all light, not even stars could be seen."."Where in the world did a monster this strong come from?!" Later, the capital's defense forces and Western Kingdom's foremost champions, the Avalon Army, formed into lines and took up strategic positions on the walls of Deltaheim." But they were all rooted to the spot from a strong sense of dread, after seeing the demon that felt like a great plague, slowly but surely close in on the city." The commander of the Avalon Army was petrified." He was a well-renowned veteran who had participated in numerous Shadow Worlds, but even he had never seen a monster of this size in any of them."."If that thing approaches here."."."." It's over." There were so many citizens still taking refuge in the city." There was no place to retreat to." It was under these circumstances that the commander was forced to make a decision, knowing full well that any choice that he made would be deemed reckless in hindsight."."Block it!" The gates opened and the Deltaheim troops rushed out to fight against the beast." In the castle, wizards formulated magic for invoking and archers nocked their arrows." Soon the sky was filled with bolts and magic." But nothing worked against it." None of the magic or arrows could penetrate Dadenewf s skin." Instead, they bounced off pitifully without even leaving a mark behind." The soldiers swung their swords and thrust their spears."

The army clad in steel could not cut through the hide of the beast, but rather broke their weapons trying." With a single swing, numerous soldiers were cut down by Dadenewf, as if they were nothing more than a bunch of flies." a The troops were devastated and morale quickly ,711),, plummeted." It was as if they were the pathetic moths diving into a brilliant flame, their sole purpose in this battle to be meatshields and buy a miniscule amount of time before inevitably being slaughtered." Desir and his party were looking at the scene unfolding before them and could not hide how dreadful they felt." They also realized that all of the demons that they had encountered in the Hebrion Academy tests were a joke in comparison to this one." Its size, power, and pressure were all incomparable —the demon that blindly sought destruction and wholesale slaughter."."I've gotta go help quickly."." Romantica was clearly overwhelmed but she tried to get herself moving after seeing the demon heading towards the castle."

Desir stopped Romantica." His dark black eyes were shaking."."There's nothing you can do."." Sadly, Romantica already knew that." She pointed to the people who were blocking Dadenewf."."Them too."." But Desir turned down Romantica." Are you saying that you want to be killed over there?"."I'm not going to ask you to help me." It's already enough with what you've done before." But this is my hometown." I can't just sit back and watch!" Desir absolutely understood how she felt but he could never send her into that field of slaughter." And he also knew how selfish he was being." But to him, there was something called responsibility, that he had to protect her even if he had to trample over and ignore her feelings." Desir continued in a voice that could barely be discerned."."Remember the promise we made."."."A promise?" Instantly, Romantica remembered the promise that she had made; to unconditionally drop everything and run away when they encountered an unmanageable threat." That's what she had promised him." Romantica replied in agony, as she weighed up the promise against the unfolding situation."."But Desir."."."."."Mister Desir, they will collapse if this continues, then all of the city will collapse as well." They need our help."." Pram supported Romantica, but Desir was determined."."They will." But it's not on us." We can't do anything here."." Pram couldn't say anything to this."."Aargghhh!" At that time, there was shouting mixed up with the sound of wind that blew over from the shore." 611k-Desir's party sensed something odd and looked at Dadenewf." Dadenewf opened its gigantic mouth and everyone could feel the destructive magic power that gathered before rapidly beaming out." Soon afterward, a high-intensity heat wave shot out from Dadenewf." \*Brrrzp\* Everything in the path of the heatwave had been erased." The ultra high-intensity beam left a distortion in the air from the heat wave that passed through."

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"Tower Master!" Zod hesitated for a moment but after seeing Desir's eyes full of confidence, he soon made up his mind." He started invoking a teleportation spell."."I told you that this wouldn't work."." Unfortunate as it was, Crow-Mask was stronger at teleportation than Zod." As soon as Zod started formulating his teleportation magic, Crow-Mask began analysing it and invoking his own magic." As the power of Crow-Mask started to undo Zod's spell, his body that had started to break down into dust immediately began to reform." His magic was clearly interrupting Zod's spell." However, Crow-Mask suddenly looked at Zod." Zod must have been processing teleportation magic while also analysing Crow-Mask's counter magic." 'When exactly was my magic inverted?' Zod's teleportation magic was invoked to completion." Dazzling light filled everyone's vision." When Crow-Mask opened his eyes again, he was already in the middle of Deltaheim city."."Interesting."."."." Crow Mask once again gathered his magic power and began to cast a teleportation spell." But this time, his body did not disintegrate into dust." It was the same as before." His magic did not move to the next step as if there was a well blocking it." Feeling strange, he looked at the boy in front of him." The boy looked like a magician of the Third-Circle at best." Someone so insignificant that Crow-Mask could not even deem him as someone to care about." That boy was inverting his magic." Crow-Mask opened his mouth."."You're the one who undid the magic I set up in the palace

"Yes, it was me."."."The amount of mane you're holding is just terrible, but you're pretty good at analysis."." Then, the gaze of Crow-Mask moved towards the clothes that Desir was wearing." The Hebrion Academy."Clothes Line"." That's the defense suit that is only assigned to the single rankers in Hebrion Academy." Crow-Mask understood the situation and gave up on teleporting to Zod, while at the same time reaching out to Desir."."I have changed my mind." I will deal with you first."." 'Gravity Control' Enormous gravity pressured Desir and his surroundings." \*Crack\* The sidewalk couldn't hold-out and began to break." 'Gravity Reverse' Desir reversed the gravity in a narrow area around himself and escaped from the area of effect of the (7,, gravity spell." As Crow-Mask invoked his next spell, Desir soon read it 'Night Claw' Crow Mask stretched his hand out towards Desir and made a slicing motion in the air with it." It appeared as if the air itself was cut in a straight line coinciding with this cutting motion." \*Slice\* Desir leaned down and a row of trees immediately collapsed behind him." Desir had managed to dodge this spell by the narrowest of margins." Desir quickly analyzed the opponent in front of him." 'He is a Twin Class wizard who can simultaneously use the attributes of space and fire in his magic." But is space magic the type of magic that he specialises in?' Space magic does not have any magic that can oppose it." This magic also happens to be superior to any other magic in terms of its destructive power." The only thing that Desir could do at this moment was to figure out the path of Crow-Mask's magic and dodge

'I can't be too close to him, but I also can't be too far away either." I need to maintain a reasonable stand-off distance to have any chance at opposing him." ' While Desir was strategizing Crow-Mask continued to(a invoke a spell."

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**RMSBS - Episode 76: At the End of Nightmare (3)**

[Dimension Burst]

The Fourth-Circle teleportation magic."

\*Crack\*

With the noise of glass breaking, Desir's surroundings started to collapse." Endless explosions continued to overwhelm the senses and before long the magic had almost reached Desir."

[Raise Earth]

A magic spell firmly in the territory of a Third-Circle." It built walls by shaping earth that had been raised." Unfortunately, these walls were not enough to withstand the continuous explosions." They were quickly demolished."

\*Smash\*

One of the pieces of the wall hit Desir's arm and the force activated the `Clothes Line’s` defense magic." Unconsciously, Desir touched and felt out the affected arm." If it wasn't for the `Clothes Line`, he'd probably have lost his arm."

Crow Mask was a magician that belonged to the highest class, the Sixth-Circle, and Desir was only a Third-Circle magician with the support of an Artifact."

At this moment, all Desir could do was gather all of his strength, leaving nothing in reserve."

‘Let's do a little bit more… just a little bit more…’

\*Thud!\*

The conclusion of this fight was inevitable, with one side attacking unilaterally and mercilessly, while the other side was preoccupied with just blocking." It was hardly a fair match." The inevitability of Desir’s defeat was so apparent that even a layperson would recognise this after seeing it with their own eyes." Desir intrinsically knew this fact as well." Thus, his only objective was to delay Crow Mask from reaching and interfering with Zod’s work."

\*Rumble\*

[Destruction Area]

The Fourth-Circle spatial magic."

When Crow Mask cast his magic, enormous energy gathered and built up around him." In a matter of moments, the magic had destroyed the roads and shattered buildings as if it would swallow the entire city." Crow Mask’s intention was to use this in a head-on confrontation with Desir."

\*Boom\*

All of a sudden, the magic that had fanned out from Crow Mask disappeared."

[Inversion]

The flow of this battle had turned on its head."

‘You've already reversed my magic…?’

No matter how good he was at reversing, it was nearly impossible to analyse and inverse the high-class magic in just a few seconds." However this boy in front of him was surely capable of doing it."

"… He's been figuring out the structure of my spells since he first saw my magic."."

Desir had been analyzing Crow Mask's magic formula ever since he came to the council room and battled against Zod earlier." He wanted to be prepared for this kind of situation." Crow Mask quickly changed his magic formula." The flow of the magic cast - was entirely changed and a totally new method of magic appeared." Even Desir couldn’t defend against this as he wasn't capable of converting Sixth-Circle magic on first sight."

But that assumption lasted very shortly." His magic didn't last any longer and was soon inverted."

‘The inversion is getting faster…!’

This time, even though the structure of the formula was not even fully analyzed yet, the inversion was quickly completed." It was because Desir had read the basic logic fundamental quirks to the spells that Crow Mask had cast." This was a problem endemic to humankind due to their lack of flexibility and imagination." No matter how Crow Mask tried to change the strategies of his magic, the necessary foundation of it had not been changed."

Structure of magic."

The idea of a magician."

Paths of development."

As time went by, the flow of became more familiar to Desir." As a result, the speed of his reversing only accelerated." People say that battles of high-class sorcerers are like a chess game – players assume, read, and challenge each other's strategies."

Magic battle."

Desire had a relatively poor mana pool compared to Crow Mask, but he was confronting high-class magic very calmly." On the other hand, Crow Mask had ever decreasing time to cast his magic before it was inverted." He was being fully read." His thought process was being analysed and countered by Desir."

‘…It is only a matter of time before all of my magic gets blocked." ’

Crow Mask started to break out in cold sweat." Little by little, he realized the momentum was shifting against him."

‘I've never had this kind of battle before." ’

It was quite different from the battle with Zod." Zod and Crow Mask had equally competent mana pools." So, it was really up to who developed and deployed the more powerful magic in a more effective way."

But the battle with this sorcerer was clearly different." A fight that depended solely on inversion." No matter how strong the magic ⎯ since the formula was being inverted ⎯ there was nothing he could do."

It felt as if Desir was slowing taking over."

Crow Mask would be defeated when all of the magic he had at his disposal was analyzed and inverted by Desir." Crow Mask changed his opinion of Desir."

‘This is an oppponent as strong as Zod." ’

Low magic power."

Low circle."

The physical attributes were also terrible."

\*Crash!!!\*

But, he made up for all of these weaknesses with only his prowess in: inversion, judgment, and battle experience." He made up the power difference by predicting what his opponent would do and even attempted to counter it." He freely used all kinds of different magic." That alone was greater than a Sixth-Circle ability in terms of magic dueling."

[Devour la gravitia." ]

\*Paaawww!\*

The magic missed and hit the fountain." The water fountain broke, and the stream of water shot up in the air and soaked Crow Mask’s robe and feet." Desir didn’t just sit down and miss that golden opportunity."

[Freezing Field]

The flooded floor started to freeze and Crow Mask’s feet and robe froze since they were in contact with the water."

Desir continued to invoke magic." He invoked magic with all of the power that he had." The crest on the back of his hand flashed."

[Ice Orb]

An attack magic that poured out countless ice bolts." A myriad of ice bolts shot out and nailed against the body of Crow Mask."

\*Crumple\*

With control of the magic that he could counter with wrested out of his control, the ice bolts started dug into Crow Mask’s frost-covered body."

One, two, three, and soon tens of ice bolts." Now, the figure covered by ice arrows could hardly be considered a human body." It was as if he had transformed into a snowman."

“…this tickles." ”

The snow covered figure exploded." And…

“GASP!”

\*Crunch!\*

In an instant a jolt of pain plagued Desir’s body, wreaking havoc with his nerves." The barrier fragments of the `Clothes Line` were circling in the immediate surrounding." A surge of pain coursed through Desir’s body, threatening to reap his consciousness." He felt his vision slowly fading to black." The whole world felt like it was turning upside down." Desir’s body flew back and tumbled towards the corner of the building."

\*Crack\*

The crunching sound of bones vividly rang throughout the surrounding area." Desir spat out blood as his organs felt like they were shredded and he fell down to the cold stone ground." Desir’s `Clothes Lines` nonchalantly chirped out a warning."

-Warning." Less than 10 percent of the `Clothes Line` mana remains." Defense ability shutting down."

It was the force strong enough to overwhelm the defensive power of the `Clothes Line`."

“I didn’t expect to use this here." ”

Crow Mask’s robe was a-light and it made short work of melting the ice covering it." He shook off the ice particles as he was walking across the water puddle left from the ice." Desir could only look at the magic Crow Mask was invoking in his hand."

The magic that was going to be deployed from Crow Mask’s hand was something bizarre that he had never seen before." The formula in his hand was making geometric formations and spinning endlessly."

[Supercube, Tesseract]

The formula was continually changing."

“…against a half-assed sorcerer like you." ”

Desir got up, wiping the blood from around his mouth." He felt burning pain from what must have been several broken bones." His thought process never stopped or slowed down as he surveyed the damage."

‘What in the world is that."." ?’

Something fell on top of Desir's shoulder." It was a partially destroyed piece of stone construction." Desir turned around." The top portion of the building he collapsed against was destroyed, and rubble was tumbling down, littering the ground." The building was ruined beyond repair." Desir was at the periphery of this scene of destruction."

‘He didn't have enough time to cast high-circle magic…’

Even if he was casting magic while defending, he could've only had about 10 seconds, but the magic deployed was well above the Fifth-Circle." The building was completely demolished and he was critically wounded with the `Clothes Line` defense utterly diminished even though the magic didn't fully hit him."

Desir bit his lips."

‘… Is it vision magic?’

It was a magic that he couldn't even understand the governing principle of."

Crow Mask reached for Desir." The Tesseract started shaking again."

"…!"

Unexpectedly, Crow Mask sensed something and quickly developed defense magic."

At the same moment, a shock rang out loudly." Something flew towards his defensive magic." It was sniper magic." Crow Mask turned and stared in the direction that the sniper magic came from." Then there was a tremendous amount of fighting aura."

\*Swoosh!\*

The noise was so loud that it could hurt ears by itself." It was a lightning-fast sword."

“You get away from Desir!”

It was Pram's sword, reaching the super-sonic realm, moving at an astonishing speed."

Crow Mask had cast his Fourth-Circle magic in between attacks, but Pram broke through the flame wall without hesitation." Crow Mask couldn't avoid it." He was not allowed any time to react." Pram’s sword stabbed into Crow Mask’s side."

“This is dangerous." ”

He invoked special movement magic without any preparation time." He instantly felt his body begin to break down into particles."

… And Desir’s inversion immediately followed up." Crow Mask’s special magic was interrupted." Crow Mask’s body immediately formed again." An ice palace appeared above him."

[Freezing Palace]

“…!”

Hundreds of ice spells rained down on him."

\*Kaboom!!\*

The area around him was devastated." Fortunately, there were no civilians nearby."

Desir lifted his head." Adjest and Pram stood in-front of him, demonstrating a unified front protecting Desir."

“You guys… how…?”

“We’ve been following your location via the communication device." ”

The communication bracelet had a location tracking function between party members."

Pram grabbed his sword." His face crumpled into a frown and his eyes betrayed how furious he was."

“…you left us because we were not competent enough, Desir?”

Pram asked, while remaining vigilant and guarding against Crow Mask." His face was as red as fire; and his breath was as rough as a bull."

Desir had never seen Pram as angry as this."

“I thought you couldn’t handle it." ”

“But… But! We were so worried." Did you know that?”

“I’m sorry." ”

Desir had nothing to say." Adjest glanced at Desir and found that he was covered in blood."

“You’re right." We are absolutely not enough to fight with a demon." But, Desir, look at you." It’s not only us who couldn’t handle the situation." ”

“… Oh… Um." ”

“Well." Enough." ”

\*Ring\*

At that moment, a message arrived from Romantica who was observing them and preparing to snipe Crow Mask."

“ Will you tell us to stay out here, Desir? We’ll be very disappointed." ”

Everyone was thinking about Desir." They were worried about him."

“The formation has been deployed as you have trained us for." We have deployed a sniper, and Pram and I will lead the charge." ” Said Adjest."

“Well, this is the party that you have taught and trained." Can’t you believe in us at least once?”

Desir looked into everyone’s eyes, and soon found his answer." What he saw told him that they would rely on him, but would back him up at the same time."

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**RMSBS - Episode 77: At the end of Nightmare (4)**

\*Thud\*

Huge nails piercing through the air were blocked by a shield." It was the Avalon Army of the Western Kingdom leading the frontline." Holding their shields up high against Dadenewt, they were all at around the level of knight class soldiers."

“We can’t let it advance any further!”

Frilleza’s defense force were assisting the the Avalon Army as well." The composition of their forces were mostly ordinary soldiers though, but at this time, their morale was as high as the city walls." Their hearts were a flame with the desire to defend their home against this new threat, having just beaten the Outsiders."

As the knights and soldiers fearlessly fought their corpses piled up, naturally forming barricades." While they delayed the advance of Dadenewt, the magicians were casting spells from the rear." Third-Circle magic, with some Fourth-Circle magic mixed in, flew through the air demonstrating the overwhelming might of the Avalon Army."

\*Boom\* \*Boom\*

It was raining magic."

Numerous magic spells exploded across Dadenewt’s body, momentarily screening its body from view." The unprecedented plethora of magic spells ignited hope for the knights in the frontlines, but…

“Rooooaaarrrrrrr!”

After the smoke faded away, they couldn’t believe what they saw."

Dadenewt’s body was untouched, without so much as a single scratch." The huge body seemed as good as new."

To make matters worse, a wave of heat emanated from its mouth." The scorching wave of air forced everyone nearby, including the battle-hardened knights, to cover their faces." The commanding officer, Kelly, who was situated in the frontline was in a state of shock."

‘What on earth is this devil…?’

The Avalon Army was a troop of veteran soldiers that had fought against the Shadow Worlds on an innumerable number of occasions." However, even their full powered offensive couldn’t make this giant demon so much as twitch."

[Order Blade] did not do anything to it, and all other magic simply bounced right off."

They had never been in this kind of fight before." They couldn’t see a path to victory." They simply didn’t know what to do." The scope of this disaster was beyond what they could wrap their heads around."

“Arrrgggh!”

One of the knights screamed as his body was pierced by a giant finger nail." His body was rapidly stained by the blood as it spread everywhere from the wound." There was an ever increasing number of soldiers dying at the shore in a similar manner."."

The knights and soldiers were barely holding their line of defense, and morale was slowly declining." Unlike them, Dadenewt looked to be in perfect condition." A mixture of sorrow and resignation had started to appear on the faces of some of the defenders."

The demon itself was an impregnable fort, and as it moved, it left a trail of slaughter in its wake."

“Is there really no way to block this?”

The barricades they had constructed during the fight, and had paid for with the blood of their brothers in arms, were about to be demolished."

The demon roared." Then the rune on its body started to glow red, as if on fire." Commander Kelly immediately knew what this meant, after previously experiencing it, and was about to order a retreat."

But before that, a huge explosion hit Dadenewt's head." Dadenewt's neck, which had not moved even a bit from the earlier volleys of spells, was bent at an unnatural angle." Thanks to this, the heatwave from the mouth was shot towards the sea." The sea appeared to part, as if fleeing from the massive heat beam." This was a testament to the power packed into that attack." The dark night sky became bright as daylight."

And most importantly, there were no casualties." Not a single person on the battlefield was hurt from this attack."

Dadenewt rolled its eyes around seeking the origin of that magic spell." It was a power strong enough to actually hit and damage it for the first time."

The magic came from Zod Axarion."

The one and only great Seventh-Circle magician." The leader of the world-class Mage Tower." Unlike other magicians, he stood in the middle of the chaotic battlefield."

“Axarion!”

“I will cover you." Continue the battle." ”

“But there are so many injured…”

“Don’t worry about that." ”

A woman's voice came from behind them." It was Priscilla who was revered as the Saint of the Church of Artemis."

She heightened her concentration by closing her eyes." A white light spread out from her body and enveloped the bodies of the knights fighting against Dadenewt."

Their wounds all healed in seconds." Small wounds didn't even take a second to recover." Severe injuries also healed in just a few moments." Even the wounds of soldiers who were on death’s doorstep closed and healed." Within the space of just a minute, even they could get up and resume battling."

[Wide Recovery]

It was indeed a power strong enough to be called a miracle." As a result, the frontline of the battle had stabilized and recovered a little bit."

Priscilla sweated like rain, and the color of her face quickly deteriorated."

Zod turned towards her."

“Don't push yourself too hard." ”

“… I won’t." ”

Zod looked at Dadenewt and again cast magic."

It was in this way that the battle continued."

\*\*\*

Romantica looked into the scope of her magic tool calmly." The battle continued to unfold in-front of her." Adjest, Pram, and Desir were locked in combat against Crow Mask."

The fight was one-sided." Even though Adjest and Pram had joined in to support Desir, they were all busy defending and running around avoiding Crow Mask’s attacks."

‘That unique type of magic comes from his right hand…’

It was a very odd technique." It endlessly rotated as it changed its shape."

This unknown magic technique was instantaneously pouring out incredible flame in great volume." In a moment, the whole group of buildings nearby collapsed as the streets shattered."

‘If I go against him in a direct match my 'Clothes Line' will break right away." ’

If it were Desir at any other time, he would probably have already reversed that magic, but this time he’s struggling just to cast magic while defending himself and his team."

\*Crash!!\* \*Bang!\* \*Whomp!\*

It was once a busy street, but now all of the buildings lining it were shattered and destroyed beyond recognition." The skeletons that were once hidden now revealed for all to see."

The magician standing before them was mighty indeed."

‘What I can do is…’

Aim for the moment of inattention."

Romantica felt a cool sensation from the rifle as she held it against her cheek."

Crow Mask had noticed the first sniper shot and cast defense magic in time." His reflexes and intuition were indescribable."

‘But I can't give up now." ’

The same attack wouldn't work again, against him." This one shot was her best chance." Romantica wanted to pull the trigger so many times already, but she controlled her impatience and continued to take great care."

Through the scope, Romantica spotted Crow Mask simply avoiding Adjest’s attacks."

He continued to act as if all of the damage done by Desir and Adjest’s magic attacks didn't even faze him."

‘Is that coat enchanted with Fourth-Circle magic defense?’

It must be similar to the ‘Clothes Line’."

However, even Crow Mask had to be careful of Pram’s attacks." Blood was dripping from his side." Pram’s Blanchium sword was able to penetrate defense magic and hurt him due to its special nature." As a result, Crow Mask invoked space magic to blow away Pram and maintain a safe distance."

Desir and Adjest also knew about this, so they tried their best to keep Pram close to their enemy."

Adjest unfolded [Frozen Palace] magic." She tried pressing Crow Mask with her most exceptional magical ability through hundreds of projectile ice magic."

However, Crow Mask was not only good with spatial magic but also a sorcerer who was well versed in the magic of fire."

[Linear Ray]

Crow Mask invoked magic that melted Adjest’s ice magic and [Frozen Palace] surrounding them." In a straight up confrontation, she was no match." The pillars crumbled down and the chandelier fell to the ground."

All of a sudden, spatial rifts appeared and arranged themselves into a particular formation while flying towards Adjest." Spatial magic had been invoked."

“Gasp!”

Adjest raised her sword and hastily invoked defense sword magic."

[Magic sword: Whisper of Kizard]

The most potent Third-Circle defensive magic."

Desir invoked additional defensive magic."

[Wind Coat]

Intense shockwaves shot into Adjest."

\*Boom!\* \*Bump!\* \*Bang!\*

She was pushed far back."

Luckily, she didn’t seem to be harmed." It was all because Desir helped her out at just the right time."

Desir helped Pram and Adjest by fending off the magic that was cast towards them." At the same time, he was continually trying to reverse Crow Mask’s unusual form of magic."

The tesseract that was shifting shape near Crow Mask’s hand was roughly a Sixth-Circle technique."

It changed every second and seemed to have thousands of possible permutations, but in order to reverse it, it was necessary to interpret each permutation." It would drive one crazy just attempting to reverse the magic one permutation at a time."

‘not to mention… me." ’

The tesseract type of magic was indeed powerful, but it obviously consumed a great amount of power." It was visible from the movement of Crow Mask that he was starting to get exhausted from maintaining it."

In addition, due to the continued struggles of other party members, he let his guard down against the sniper."

It was the perfect opportunity for Romantica." She held her breath and lined up the target in the crosshair." Crow Mask’s spatial magic was about to be invoked once again."

‘Now!’

She pulled the trigger." The Third-Circle magic that she had loaded, [Storm of Avaros], was compressed and fired with the help of her rifle."

The magic bullet with the penetrating power of the Fourth-Circle streaked through the air and crashed into the target."

\*Kabooom!\*

A small storm erupted." The strong gust of wind ripped through everything in its path." Crow Mask’s body flew in the air and crashed into the rubble of what was once a fountain."

Finally, Romantica inhaled deeply."

‘Was it successful?’

The dust storm settled and the figure of a man appeared." The edge of his robe was slightly torn and he was covered in dirt."

Immediately, Romantica’s hopeful mood morphed into disappointment."

‘Is he really a monster?."."." Wait." ’

However, something was definitely different this time." There was a small crack on the mask."

\*Crack\*

The cracking increased in volume without anyone even touching the mask." And it finally tore in half and fell to the ground." His bare face had appeared."

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**RMSBS - Episode 78: At the End of the Nightmare (5)**

When Crow Mask was flung into the fountain, Desir immediately realized that it was due to Romantica’s sniper shot."

The snipe was successful." Although it failed to end Crow Mask, it had dealt him some serious damage." He now limped and the enchanted defense magic on his clothes seemed to no longer work." Moreover, the attack had revealed Crow Mask’s face."

After the mask fell off, a hideous face was revealed." The skin was all red and his face was covered with scars from severe burns." It was impossible to find any unblemished skin with the exception of a small part on his cheeks." His face looked like that of the corpse of an immolation victim."

Crow Mask lifted his left hand and covered his bare face." Through his fingers ferocious, beast-like eyes blazed like a naked flame."

“You… your scar…”

As Desir started walking towards him, Crow Mask stretched out a hand towards Desir."

Spatial magic was invoked." Everything near Desir was instantly destroyed." As a result, Desir had to retreat, increasing the distance between himself and Crow Mask."

“She’s actually a Fourth-Circle sniper instead of being just a Third-Circle magician." ”

Crow Mask looked at the direction of the sniper." He used his Sixth-Circle mana detection senses and located the wind element magician who was aiming at him." He was angry and stretched out his hand in the direction of the sniper."

“Block it!”

At that moment, Pram dashed towards Crow Mask." Crow Mask had no choice." He turned around and faced Pram."

\*Crack!\*

Pram hit the ground to narrowly dodge the attack but his Clothes Line was left tattered from the attack that had just brushed past his body."

Adjest also moved forward to intercept and attack Crow Mask."

[Magic Sword: Ice Wave." ]

As the Tesseract spell continued to change its structure, it unleashed defensive magic and Adjest’s sword twisted after meeting that force."

Even though Pram and Adjest couldn’t leave significant wounds on Crow Mask, it wasn’t entirely in vain." Crow Mask had no choice but to focus completely on the group in front of him."

Crow Mask swiped his right arm to the left in order to deal with Adjest."

\*Crash\*

The resulting spatial magic destroyed a wide area but Adjest was no longer standing there."

Crow Mask had lost the initiative and was falling into the pace of Desir’s party." His actions became predictable and straightforward." It was too easy for Adjest to avoid such attacks."

Adjest jumped into the air and sailed over Crow Mask’s head before landing elegantly." She then pivoted on one foot and slashed the side of Crow Mask’s leg."

\*Crash!\*

Flame rose along the path of the sword." The Tesseract quickly switched from attack magic to defense magic to block further attacks from Adjest." As the Tesseract morphed once again, the ground started splitting apart under Adjest’s feet." A cloud of dust shot up as she attempted to flee from the affected area." The surface of the ground was not only demolished but parts of it were also left raised."

Adjest shot up into the air with various debris as she failed to escape in time." Crow Mask cast a spell at her as she sailed through the air."

‘Being hit by this spell is inevitable." ’

As the thought passed through her mind, she saw some conveniently located debris and repositioned by jumping off of them." Pram had come to her aid."

As Adjest crossed her arms, Pram kicked them and bounced off backward." Crow Mask’s magic sliced the air between, where they had been just a moment prior."

Both of them landed at the same time and dashed towards Crow Mask." Adjest started casting magic immediately."

“Icy cold gust spears through the heart." ”

[Ice Lens]

Second-Circle attack magic." The icy spear flew towards Crow Mask."

\*Thud!\*

It crashed into him."

Adjest’s magic demanded all of Crow Mask’s attention." The cloud of dust billowing up into the air from the further cracked ground obscured all vision."

At that moment Pram stealthily moved into Crow Mask’s blind spot." Pram held up his rapier and raised it to the back of his head, as if he was holding a javelin." It was a skill that he had practiced numerous times." Pram’s sword pierced through the air at the speed of sound as he disappeared from sight."

\*Zap!\*

Crow Mask’s robe was torn and a bloody, red line was left behind." Adjest was already in a position to capitalise on this sudden gap in Crow Mask’s defenses." Without enough time to even let out a scream, Crow Mask’s Tesseract begun to shoot out magic."

\*Kaboom!\*

Pram and Adjest tag-teamed to keep up a continuous assault on Crow Mask." Within the space of a couple of seconds, tens and hundreds of strikes landed on him."

He couldn’t do a single thing in response."

Because Crow Mask’s one hand was occupied covering his face, his movement was limited and he looked uncomfortable." He needed both hands to properly defend, but he still held his hand up to cover his face, as if ashamed of revealing his face." Slowly, more scratches and wounds appeared on his body." He couldn’t bear it anymore and started to shout."

“You pieces of trash." Hebrion’s hypocrites!”

It was a huge cry of hatred for Hebrion Academy."

At the same time, the Tesseract subtly changed and assembled in a new way."

Dark red light burst out." He was using all of the magic power that he had saved for the battle against Zod."

“Back off, Pram!”

Pram and Adjest stopped their sword strike mid-swing and immediately backed off." It was merely an application of the magic but the Tesseract rotated at a tremendous speed."

The light glowed and…

“What…?”

It withered away." The various pieces of the Tesseract that had formed into a new pattern had started to break down and disappear."

“… It’s over." ” Said Desir."

He had successfully inverted the magic, countering all of the possible permutations."

“… Over?” Crow Mask mumbled."

“Yeah, you lost." ”

Even the vision magic was fully-analysed and no longer usable." All of the methods he had at his disposal were now countered." No matter what magic he invoked, it would all be read and inverted." Crow Mask had nothing left."

“…”

He looked at Desir." Desir could feet the hatred deep in those eyes."

“Why did you do all this?”

“… This world has been a series of absurdities." You know better than most, if you are a Hebrion Academy student." ”

Crow Mask looked at the Clothes Line that Desir and his party were wearing."

“It’s not only Hebrion Academy." The same is true of the Hebrion Empire and even the entire world." Foolish aristocrats impose their standards and absurdity on everyone else." ”

Desir couldn’t say anything in response because he was absolutely right." Those words tore down reality."

A noble world."

The Beta-class students at the Hebrion Academy were not getting a decent education, just because they were commoners." This was the reason why Desir created a party."

“This world is a collapsing sandcastle." And the people who live in the castle… Someday, everything will fall apart." And that’s what I desire." ”

That logic."

That reason."

It was the slogan claimed by a group in the past not so far from now."

“Revolutionary Remnant… was it?”

Twelve years ago, a single student from the Hebrion Academy, held up a republican flag and founded a revolutionary army." They called themselves Republicans, but other people called them Revolutionaries."

And then the Hebrion Empire was plunged into civil war." The war divided people into nobles and commoners, and caused tragedy to both sides." The civil war eventually ended in royal victory and the revolutionaries were all executed."

“The structure of this world is so wrong, right from its root." And you can’t argue with that." ”

“You’re right." But no matter what goodwill you have, it can’t be justified." Look around you." Is this the answer you found?”

“It’s sacrificing the small for big." The fall of the Western Kingdom is only the beginning." I will completely destroy this absurd world and create true equality." ”

Pram was appalled at Crow Mask’s objective."

“Desir, we don’t have to listen to this nonsense anymore." Let’s arrest him right now." ”

Crow Mask heard him and murmured."

“You can’t stop us." ”

At that moment, the sky which had been darkened with the appearance of Dadenewt, suddenly regained its brightness."

“Did they defeat the demon?”

Desir refuted."

“No, that’s…”

\*Booooom\*

It was a flame." No, it was lava resulting from a huge explosion."

Volcanic ash poured down from the sky as if it was snowing." They all looked up." Then, as if the stars had begun to fall, raindrops fell from the sky."

It was a scene that could only be described as apocalyptic." It was as if it was the end of the world."

“Eruption Phase…”

Desir muttered, astonished."

“Seems like the great leader of the Mage Tower can't even stop the demon without any preparation." ”

Crow Mask continued while laughing."

“I'll return exactly what you said before." ”

His body faded." Pram and Adjest rushed to catch him but his body had already started to turn to dust."

[Memorize]

There was no time to invert the magic." It was magic that he had previously saved to instantly cast."

“It’s over." ”

With those final words, Crow Mask disappeared." Dark particles floated in the air."

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**RMSBS - Episode 79 . His Decision (1)**

The harbor of Deltaheim was crowded." It was almost impossible to move through the throngs of people that had gathered." The Outsiders had destroyed the railway to block all reinforcement and supply routes from outside the city." The only way in and out now, was by boat."

Due to the Yellow Ocean Contest there were more visitors than usual."

A number of merchant ships were docked side by side and the line of refugees heading towards them was exceptionally long." There was a bit of a tussle to get on board quickly but it was an immutable law that the high class boarded earlier than them." Therefore the general populace could only finally board after all of the royal families and nobles."

As some ships were escaping amongst the chaos, a huge roar followed by a shock wave traversed the sea." Some people fell down after losing their balance."

People looked up to the sky as it suddenly brightened, as if changing from night-time to day-time."

The sky suddenly filled with burning rocks."

“Wha, what is that…” Uttered someone from the crowd."

Disaster had arrived at the city of the merchants and rich, Deltaheim."

\*Booooom\*

The harbor was under attack."

“Screeeech!”

“Help me!”

Something swept across the refugees." Merchant ships were critically damaged and some of them were even partially destroyed and immediately sunk by the burning rocks that were raining down from the sky."

“Oh my god, oh my god." ”

Some passengers decided to jump into the sea."

Other people died instantly." And the rest could only despair amongst the flames as they burnt to death."

The harbor was rapidly consumed by pandemonium."

A blazing rock flew towards a mother and son." It couldn’t be avoided." She knew that she could do nothing but embrace her child in their last moments."

\*Bump\*

However the rock was shot down by wind bullets that were flying out from somewhere before it could reach them." Dark debris scattered over the sea."

[Ice Crown]

At the same time, water soared from the sea and created a crown of ice." It kept people safe from the debris of broken rocks."

It was Desir’s party."

They came to the harbor where the refugees were most concentrated, to reduce the casualties, as soon as Crow Mask withdrew."

Adjest invoked defense magic to cover the refugees, while Romantica intercepted the rocks from her vantage point that allowed her to see the entire harbor." They were trying to minimize the injury of refugees."

“Everyone get on board!”

Pram assisted the soldiers with the refugee evacuation." The situation was quickly stabilizing as a result of the party’s combined effort."

Because the feeling of imminent danger was fading, the refugees seemed to recover little by little from the panic."

The mother embracing her child held its hands again and urged it to walk quickly towards the ship."

“We can’t finish the evacuation at this pace." ”

This was Desir’s opinion after taking in this terrible sight." He was working on magic to block the rocks that Adjest couldn’t."

Romantica responded while unleashing sniper spells."

“I think so too." ”

Not only the harbor, the entire city was devastated." An observatory erected to view the sea was split into two and the debris from it had struck the mall." The upper part of the stadium, where the Yellow Ocean Contest took place, was blown away and flattened."

No building was untouched by the shower of rocks that imparted as much force as miniature bombs."

The flaming rocks continued to pour down without end."

All of the buildings were collapsing around them."

Screaming and various explosions could endlessly be heard." Mixed amongst this cacophony were the once calming sound of waves crashing against the shore." Faint and distant on the now grey beaches."

Dadenewt was a major disaster."

As Crow Mask had said earlier, Zod couldn’t easily end this disaster without preparation."

In the past, skilled expeditions rushed into the Shadow Labyrinths but they only managed to deal heavy damage to such demons." It was impossible to stop demons with only these people present."

The eruption phase was also just the beginning." It was the foreshadow of Dadenewt beginning its activities in earnest." While just this foreshadow of its true power was horrendous, if Dadenewt appeared in its original form then Deltaheim would simply be burnt off the map without a trace."

Many people had already died."

When Desir finally decided on the best course of action, he turned towards Romantica."

“Romantica, let’s move out." ”

The evacuation was almost finished." She took her eyes off her rifle."

“I agree." I’ll burn and die if I stay here much longer." My power has also reached its limit." ”

After continuous sniping, Romantica only had enough power for one or two shots of Second-Circle magic."

It was the same with Adjest, who was busy protecting the refugees with her magic."

They had reached their limits from battling the Outsiders and then dealing with Crow Mask successively." It was not strange for them to be exhausted."

Desir contacted Adjest and Pram."

- Everybody did a good job." Now we’ll evacuate too." Everyone join the procession onto the ships."

Adjest stopped using magic." The structures made of ice collapsed."

Until now they had held up great." A lot of people could get on board the ships while they were blocking the rocks."

There were still about 2,000 people left on the harbor." Although the number was not small, it was much better than before."

Adjest and Pram who helped the evacuation of refugees closer to the boats, joined the queue much further up than Desir and Romantica who had helped from the rear."

They gathered all of their remaining power and smashed the rocks on trajectories that would harm the refugees on the boats."

That was the best they could do."

About five minutes into the final part of the evacuation process, Desir suddenly lifted his head to locate Pram and Adjest." It was hard to see them as they had joined the queue way up in front."

“As there are so many people, to prevent us missing each other, I will bring back Pram and Adjest from the front." If I take too long, then don’t wait and just get on board." ” Desir explained."

Romantica responded in a rather cold tone."

“Oh well, my life is mine to protect." Of course I should run." I’m just a bitch running away even when my hometown is devastated." ”

“I’m so sorry but that’s…”

Romantica cut off Desir who was attempting to make excuses."

“Well, it’s fine." In fact, you are right." I know it’s reckless." I was just grumpy." Go and find them quickly." ”

\*Smile\*

Romantica laughed as her lips formed a crooked arc."

The boy and girl, covered in soot and ash, stared at each other as if looking for something in each other."

“Aren’t you going?”

“I will." ”

Desir started moving away."

“It won’t take me long." ”

When Desir vanished into the crowd, Romantica was left alone."

She was not just waiting."

Whenever her power recovered a little she helped smash the rocks flying towards the harbor."

Fortunately, because the number of refugees left in the harbor was considerably reduced, the area left to be protected was also reduced." It now seemed to be relatively safe."

“… ?”

However the movement of the queue suddenly stalled." Listening to the gossip from the front, it seemed there was a fight." It was natural for people to be on edge during crises." Refugees also happen to get into fights easily, even with light arguments."

At that particular moment though, Romantica felt an ominous sense of foreboding."

‘Is he caught up there?’

It also made sense for Desir to be involved, as he always seems to be at the centre of each mess."

When Desir, who said he would just bring back Pram and Adjest, was starting to run quite late Romantica began to worry more."

She stroked the rifle several times, that Desir had given her."

‘Was he just delayed?’

At the time Romantica was concerned about finding Desir, someone touched her shoulder."

‘He might be finally back." ’

Romantica took a deep breath through her nose in an attempt to blow him out of her concerns." She then turned to see the face of the man who had touched her."

“So you are here, Lady Romantica." ”

“Butler?”

It was the butler of the Eru family." He was wearing a neat suit."

“I have been searching for you for some time now." You happened to be here, after all." Come on." Hurry up." ”

When he finished talking, he began to walk out of the procession and head towards the ship."

“Wait! Where are we going?”

The butler realized something was off from Romantica’s reaction and tried to explain to her."

“This ship for refugees is actually an Eru merchant ship." You definitely deserve to be on board first as you are the lady of Eru." ”

“I understand." But I’m waiting for my friends." ”

“You can see them soon again if you are on board." Please hurry out of here." The Baron is worried." ”

When she heard that her parents were worried, she had to agree with the butler."

‘Well, Desir told me to get on board if he was late." ’

She followed the butler and passed the procession." She quickly reached the place where refugees were causing trouble."

“You hit first!”

“Look who’s talking!”

They never stopped cursing at each other, even though people around them were forcing them apart."

Romantica passed by them and walked onto the ship." But she didn’t leave the deck."

“Oh! You’re already here." ”

About five minutes later Pram and Adjest approached Romantica." They were surprised that she beat them to board first due to originally being so far back in the queue."

Desir was not here with them."

“Where is Desir?”

“Wasn’t he with you, Romantica?”

“No, he said he went to find you." ”

“But we haven’t seen him." ”

Desir had disappeared without a trace."

Romantica looked around." Almost every refugee had boarded but there was still no sign of Desir."

He was not here."

He was not anywhere."

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**RMSBS - Episode 80 . His Decision (2)**

\*Bwaaaa\*

The ship's horn sounded." It was the indicator that the ship’s departure was imminent." Romantica started to become impatient."

“That idiot! What the hell are you doing?”

Romantica turned on the communication bracelet." The communication bracelet had the ability to search for the location of party members." They had just used it to track Desir when he teleported with Crow Mask."

She searched for the location of Desir and it wasn’t long before the result appeared." Desir was on board, in the cabins somewhere."

Romantica frantically ran into the cabin area."

She jumped down the four steps in a single leap and barged through a group of people that were loitering in the hallway." She quickly apologized to those bumped without slowing down and reached the point indicated by the communication bracelet."

She couldn’t help being resentful for the success of the Eru business at that particular moment." The ship was so large and as a result, Romantica had to traverse the hallway that connected the long line of cabins."

The positioning function of the communication bracelet couldn’t provide an accurate location." This meant that she had to open each cabin door in search of Desir."

Romantica didn’t hesitate."

She opened the door of the first cabin." The couple inside were shocked and could only look at her with eyes filled with surprise." Desir was not there."

“Sorry." ”

\*Slam\*

She closed the door to the first cabin."

It was the same story for the second cabin."

She closed the door to the second cabin."

It was in this manner that Romantica opened cabin doors in an attempt to search the entire living quarters for Desir."

From the corner of her eye through a nearby window, Romantica saw that they were leaving the port." She quickened her pace."

And…

It was finally the last cabin."

Just before the door opened, Romantica calmed her breathing." She had to be calm enough to give him a proper scolding."

“Hey, Desir! Are you trying to play hide and seek with me… ?!”

The last door was opened but there was no one inside." Very slowly, Romantica entered the cabin." There was no sign of anyone having used the room." This was the only cabin that was left clean."

Looking around inside the empty cabin, Romantica spotted the Hebrion Academy communication bracelet laying on the desk."

“…”

Romantica picked it up and took out her own communication bracelet." She closed her eyes for a while before opening them."

Then she attempted to call Desir."

‘Please don't ring." ’

\*Rrrrring\*

The communication bracelet in her other hand started to ring."

“…”

Romantica barely suppressed the wave of emotion rising within herself." She stomped out of the cabin and back to the deck of the ship." While she was searching the cabin area, the ship had left the port."

Romantica stormed over towards the butler." He seemed rather dismayed at her unlady-like behaviour." Her face was screwed up in rage."

“Oh, my lady." What is wrong?”

Romantica immediately responded."

“Now answer my question straight." As soon as possible." ”

“Oh, young lady,”

“How did you know that I was evacuating and that I would be at that part of the queue?”

“I, I went down and kept looking all over for you." ”

“Do not lie! It doesn't make sense to look for someone so far back in the queue!”

\*Swish\*

Ash has been falling down from the sky this entire time." Adjest, Pram and all of the refugees including Romantica had been outside for most of this time were covered in it." The constant movement of people also prevented it from fully settling onto the ground, increasing the amount of it floating in the air."

However, the butler’s clothes were so neat." Nobody could possibly think that these clothes belonged to a person that had been wandering about outside."

In other words, he had been in the merchant ship the entire time."

He was the butler of the Eru family, and he must have been the first to evacuate with the family."

The butler was left speechless at Romantica pointing this out."

“Be honest! Right now! No matter what he said to you, I will jump off of this boat if you don’t tell me the truth!”

Against an irrationally rageful Romantica, who was likely to follow through on such a threat, the butler had no choice but to break his promise and tell her everything."

“At that time a black-haired friend, whom you have previously asked me to escort, told me where you would be." But my lady, I swear…”

She didn’t need to hear any more."

Romantica immediately ignored the butler and brushed past him to climb onto the ship’s railing."

“Oh, my lady!”

\*Scream\*

Just before Romantica’s body fell into the sea, Adjest managed to just grab ahold of her."

Romantica quickly tried to throw off the clothes line, but Adjest pulled her back up one step faster." The momentum of this movement had both of them fall backwards onto the deck of the ship."

“Get away from me." ”

“Find your sanity, Romantica." ”

Romantica attempted to rid herself of Adjest’s grip while Adjest attempted to subdue her." The two of them rolled around several times during this struggle."

“I told you to let go of me!”

“If you promise to be calm, I will let go." ”

“You know that I won’t make a promise like that!”

Romantica continued to struggle to get out of Adjest’s grasp but she couldn’t resist her through force."

Adjest finally had the complete upper-hand in the scuffle, and prevented all further movement from Romantica."

Romantica could only direct her anger at Adjest through interrogation."

“Did you know about this?”

Adjest responded."

“Yes." ”

“When did you find out about it?!”

“From when Desir slowed down the evacuation by starting a fight." ”

Starting the fight."

Romantica felt as though someone had smashed her on the head with a hammer."

The fight during the evacuation was Desir’s doing to give himself enough time to conceal the communication bracelet." And Romantica had to waste time searching for it until the ship had already departed."

‘Stupid bitch’

Romantica reminded herself." She couldn’t forgive herself as she figured out just what Desir had done."

While almost crying, should could only continue shouting at Adjest."

“You knew! Not like the stupid me, you knew much earlier! Why didn't you stop him? WHY!”

In contrast to Romantica’s frantic tone, Adjest’s tone was level and calm."

“I didn't notice it." I was asked by him." ”

“What?”

For a moment, Romantica’s struggling stopped."

Adjest’s continued."

“He asked me to stop you and Pram from following him." ”

\*\*\*

Desir ran along the coast."

The entire area of Deltaheim was obscured by the ash in the air that was as thick as fog."

He ran while coughing over and over again and futilely attempting to cover his nose and mouth against the poisonous air particulates."

As Desir passed through, a dead body came into view." The body was partially covered by rubble from a nearby stone construction."

‘Hopefully he did not feel a thing and died in a single blow." ’

Faced with such a terrible scene, Desir’s steps slowed-down and he eventually came to a complete stop." He had no words to adequately describe what lay before him." It was terrible, but at the same time, it was an alien yet familiar landscape to him."

He had previously lived a life of death." And he had witnessed so many of those deaths first hand."

Friends who had shared school days and childhood memories together." Juniors who followed him exceptionally well."

And Romantica."

Among the many deaths, Desir especially couldn’t forget the death of Romantica."

Perhaps it was because her situation was similar to his."

The story ended with a sad ending."

Romantica Eru had talent and a future more brilliant than anyone else."

She was also the lady of a baron family, so she could join the Alpha Class at Hebrion Academy without any problem and later enter the Blue Moon Party which was considered the best of the school."

After a long time, however, it was discovered that Romantica was the daughter of a baron who had bought the title with money." The Alpha Class nobles did not acknowledge her anymore after that."

Unable to endure the savage Alpha Class brutality, Romantica finally moved down to the Beta Class, but no one accepted her there too."

There was nowhere else she could be."

In the Beta Class, Romantica's talent went uncultivated and her future had gradually stagnated." By the time she graduated, she was only at the Third-Circle."

And then the Shadow Labyrinth appeared."

Romantica entered the Shadow Labyrinth as a member of the Western Kingdom Union, where she met with Desir again who was from the same Beta Class."

Desir, being in a similar situation as her was unfortunately an inevitability."

In such a terrible battlefield they became each other’s emotional support." They survived for each other."

And eight years after the arrival of that Shadow Labyrinth… In the end, Desir could not protect Romantica."

“… I will not allow that to happen again." ”

Desir, who had returned to the past, had made that vow."

This was not only for her."

Adjest and Pram."

Zod and Priscilla."

Residents of Deltaheim and visitors from all over the world."

The heads of the Western Kingdom Union gathered for the purpose of the council."

All of them couldn’t avoid death unless they stopped Dadenewt."

The situation was currently heading towards the worst outcome."

‘I must stop this." ’

To slay the devil, its inner core must be destroyed."

In the Shadow Labyrinth, when faced with Dadenewt, legion-sized parties of wizards unleashed freezing magic to weaken Dadenewt’s power while knights equipped with Blanchum rapiers destroyed Dadenewt’s body to find the core."

Luckily this time, Desir knew the approximate location of the core." However, the problem was that he didn’t have enough power to penetrate the body of Dadenewt itself."

Desir looked down at the palm of his hand."

‘I must stop it." ’

I will stop it."

Desir clenched his fist." He decided to implement his trump card, the measure of last resort that he had kept in reserve thus far."

[Proverb]

Magic that had been arranged in a way that fell entirely outside of the existing magical system used by humanity."

It had a power different to standard magic."

At the end of the Shadow Labyrinth, Desir discovered the spell by inverting the [Proverb] of the Meteor-Rank Dragon of Destruction, Bhromier Napolitan."

It was a huge and powerful magic indeed." But there were so many risks involved as a result."

He wondered if his body would be able to withstand the magic of [Proverb] that deviated from the existing laws, but now was not the time to worry about that."

‘I definitely need to kill it." ’

\*Booom\*

The closer Dadenewt got the greater the heat and the more violent the ash suspended in the air became."

Desir clenched his teeth."

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**RMSBS - Episode 81 . His Decision (3)**

The beautiful coast was now covered with red lava." The troops that had been holding out against Dadenewt were now nowhere to be seen."

The result of this eruption phase was more than half of the vanguard being left incapable of combat." The vanguard had lost all semblance of control over Dadenewt." They retreated."

Priscilla had also over exerted herself and was left completely exhausted as a result."

At this point, Zod ordered all of the remaining soldiers to retreat."

Dadenewt had completely burnt the coast." Searing lava and blackened marks was all that remained."

Only Zod and Priscilla remained on the walls of Deltaheim to confront Dadenewt and buy some time."

But this arrangement could not last long." Despite the magic of Zod, Dadenewt gradually approached the city."

\*Baaammmmm\*

Zod was invoking Sixth-Circle magic." Up until now, he had been limiting himself to the Fifth-Circle due to the potential of allies being caught up in the collateral damage."

Zod’s formation of Sixth-Circle magic while continually invoking Fifth-Circle magic was enough to draw the admiration of many wizards."

Zod lifted his cane."

When Dadenewt reached the wall, Zod’s Sixth-Circle spell was invoked."

[Time when all things fall asleep]

It was one of the highest level freezing magics." A spell that brought about absolute sub-zero temperatures where all molecular activity stopped within a fixed area."

The flowing lava that covered Dadenewt’s entire body was cooled down." In just a moment, the lava froze and hardened." Soon, the movement of Dadenewt slowed down and came to a complete stop." It now looked like a statue caught in the middle of winter."

It was the first time that Dadenewt’s movement was significantly hindered."

The Saint looked back at Zod flashing a flirtatious look."

“This is great, Zod!”

Zod shook his head."

“No, I didn’t defeat him, I've blocked its movement for a while." ”

\*Crick\*

The ice began to crack as if to disprove Zod’s assertion." Eerie noises filled the air."

“How long can the magic last?”

“5 minutes? 10 minutes?”

Shortly afterwards, Dadenewt would break the ice and resume activity."

Even the Sixth-Circle magic was only enough to buy some time."

“How can I defeat him? No magic I know can beat it." I’m not sure but if it’s the Seventh-Circle magic like ‘Nuclear Stream Buster’… it may work." ”

Zod checked his own state of wellness."

“I don’t have enough magic power left." ”

After a series of fights, Zod didn’t have much magic power left." And after everyone was evacuated, he also had to leave enough power in reserve to escape himself."

‘It would have been better if I hadn’t wasted power on Crow Mask…’

In addition, Zod’s magic, which had been enhanced to an unprecedented level to push back against Dadenewt’s advance and allow people to evacuate, was now showing its limits."

‘So now…’

He glanced back and saw a Deltaheim that was so damaged and filled with collapsed buildings that it could no longer be called the capital of a nation."

It was a city full of vigor and abundance just a few hours ago."

The city which was still alive after the assault from the Outsiders was now completely destroyed by just a single monster."

“This defense has failed." ”

“Then…”

Zod calmly concluded."

Deltaheim was over."

At that moment he received a communication via magic." It was from the unit of the Avalon Army that had retreated first." When the communication magic ended Zod turned to Priscilla."

“The kings of the Western Kingdom Union, who had taken refuge in the air-raid shelter, have now safely escaped to the harbor." Most of the citizens have also escaped unharmed." It’s our turn now." ”

That’s right."

It was time to run away."

Priscilla confirmed that Zod was formulating teleportation magic."

“I know what you mean, but it’s time to avoid it." ”

There was no way to stop Dadenewt now." With this experience, we need to be prepared."

“If all of the civilians have been evacuated… okay." Let’s get out of here." ”

“Good idea." ”

\*Crick\*

There was a huge crack in the ice surrounding Dadenewt’s body." The Sixth-Circle magic was now at its limit." Fortunately, it was enough to buy time to invoke teleportation magic."

“Huh?”

The situation had suddenly changed."

The ice surrounding Dadenewt started collapsing at an abnormal speed." The source was near the waist." After observing it casually, Zod was left surprised."

‘Wings?’

\*Rumble\*

A new part was sprouting out from Dadenewt’s body." It was a pair of wings with a span of tens of meters." The huge wings spread wide through the ice as if they had been in bondage until now." Lava splashed in all directions."

It began with cracks in the ice surrounding Dadenewt’s body." Fragments were sent flying." The ice melted in the heat and began to evaporate."

\*Bump\*

The next thing liberated was the face." When Dadenewt moved its neck, the hardened lava and ice shrapnel fell off and once again lava exploded outwards and encased its body like skin."

The Devil of Destruction, Dadenewt revealed itself."

It spread out its wings and howled toward the sky."

“Aaaaaaaaaah!”

“Huh!?”

“Ahhhh!”

The trapped heat exploded out." Even though the distance was still quite far between Dadenewt and the wall, in the intense heat, Zod covered his face subconsciously." His face flamed up, as if he was sunburnt." When he touched his face, he felt how irritated it was, now covered with minor burns."

He had magic covering his entire body to keep out the heat." While the ambient temperature had actually been quite hot so far, he had not sustained any damage from it."

But now, Dadenewt had raised the temperature with heat great enough to beat the ice magic with just a roar."

“Huh, you’ve become stronger… ?”

Thoroughly appalled at this turn of situation, Zod could only laugh in vain."

“It’s… It’s really beyond imagination." ”

It flapped its wings but still could not fly." This was due to its lower body still being frozen." But the speed at which the ice was breaking showed that it was only a matter of time until it found its freedom."

And when that happened, Dadenewt would be flying destruction incarnate."

The goal was…

‘The refugees…’

Dadenewt was no longer heading towards the collapsed city." Its gaze was now directed at the series of ships leaving the harbor port."

Dadenewt’s goal was to kill humans, not just to cause mindless destruction."

There was no such thing as a mindless creature."

“If it does, all of the boats that have escaped the city will be within the range of Dadenewt." ”

Zod and Priscilla suddenly turned their heads to the voice that came from behind them."

It was Desir." His head was gray all over, lightly dusted with ash, and his body was covered with wounds from the battle with Crow Mask."

Priscilla approached him while invoking her magic." His wounds began to heal little by little as a result."

“Why are you here?”

Priscilla dumbly enquired."

“Now that Dadenewt has revealed itself, we can’t run away." If we don’t stop it here, a lot of people will die." ”

If Dadenewt left here for his friends and the refugees, not only countless ordinary citizens but also the leaders of the Western Kingdom Union Council would be condemned to a certain death."

If all of the kings who ruled the continent died here, the existing world order would fall and chaos would inevitably descend."

And that chaos was the aim of the Outsiders."

“I won't let it do that… Desir, take Priscilla and leave in a hurry." I’m going to keep it occupied." ”

“Zod!”

Priscilla shouted at him after seeing Zod’s determination."

“No, I have a way." ”

Zod tilted his head at Desir’s words."

“How can you bring it down?”

He pointed at Dadenewt."

The devil that the Seventh-Circle wizard, Zod had struggled to defeat."

The being that had excellent defense against Fifth-Circle magic, practically ignoring it due to the natural structure of its body."

Zod has never met an opponent of this level." It was such a powerful demon."

Even so, the Third-Circle wizard, Desir claimed to be able to beat it."

Desir responded."

“Give me all of the remaining mana on you." ”

“… Do you know what doing that means?”

“I know." ”

Using all of his remaining mana." That meant Zod could no longer invoke magic to escape from the demon."

He had no idea what Desir was trying to do, but his death would be confirmed if he failed."

“… What is the guarantee that you will succeed?”

“I can't say for sure since it’s my first time trying." ”

\*Boooom\*

There was no time." The time given to Zod was just too short."

“Even if I trust you and give you all of my mana, how are you going to hold on to that mana? Your magic circle won’t last." Your body will collapse." ”

“There's a Saint." ”

If it’s her recovery magic…

“I think you can survive it if you use all means." ”

“… Are you sure?”

“Of course." ”

Desir was sincere."

Zod turned his head towards Priscilla."

“Precilla, what’s your opinion?”

Priscilla was also one of the people who would be sacrificed if Desir failed."

She spoke in a calm tone that gave off a feeling of invincibility."

“I saw this boy for the first time today." It makes no sense to leave my life to something I can't be sure about… but he seems to mean it." So I’m going to follow Zod’s decision that falls under his domain of experience." ”

“Is that so?”

Zod, who left a single phrase behind, grabbed his walking cane."

The cane of the best wizard in the world."

It was a cane with considerable power in of itself with a first class marquee magic stone inserted into it."

The internal mana was no longer shining because it had been completely exhausted, but when Zod grasped the cane, the mana stone at the end of the stick quickly regained its original light."

“If anyone saw this, they'd call me crazy." ”

And he handed it to Desir."

It was proof of his trust, to leave all future possibilities to Desir."

“Please." ”

Zod decided to believe in Desir."

All that was left now was the repayment of that faith."

“Thank you." ”

As soon as Desir took the cane, a great deal of mana began to fluctuate."

He raised it high towards Dadenewt."

----

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**RMSBS - Episode 82 . His Decision (4)**

Magic has changed little by little with the passage of time." Awareness, cost and formatting method have all been slowly improved upon."

But in its long history there was only one thing that would not change."

In order to use magic, mana from the surroundings must be processed by the mage." This was an unchanged fact in what was an otherwise constantly changing system."

In the past when endless wars were waged, each country needed more power and the best way to produce that power was to figure out new ways to process mana more efficiently."

As a result, a number of magic systems were derived and ultimately fell out of favour and died." The most evolved magic system in-use nowadays was based around the application of mathematical formulas."

Mathematical formatting involves the calculation of a specific array of mana to actuate specific spells."

Naturally, this raises the question of whether a magic system based on maths would be the most powerful magic system, seeing as it is the latest magic system in a long line of magic systems?

The answer is that it most definitely is not."

In the distant past, there was a magic system used by races that were collectively known as magical lords." These existences have been completely lost in the annals of time, falling out of the collective memory of mankind."

[Proverb]

Desir started to clear his mind of all distracting thoughts."

The pain from the heat and his concern about the wellbeing of his party." All of those thoughts were pushed somewhere else for the time being."

He steeled his resolve for the mammoth task he had taken on."

Thousands of hectares of vast open space unfolded within his senses."

Desir focuses all of his senses on just one being."

And he started to arrange a spell using the draconic magic system." He had gained this in the past by inverting a dragon’s magic."

\*Rumble\*

The magic spell arrays appeared in the air surrounding him." Initially, the magic appeared one or two letters at a time but within the span of a minute had rapidly increased to such a speed that the human eye could no longer keep up."

The symbols and patterns filled the air to such a degree that they began to overlap in a pure black mess, as if the magic could never tolerate sharing such space with anything else." Just like those prideful dragons, this magic system simply oozed such pride and arrogance."

Mankind’s best anti-mage had staked his life on this magic."

“------------." ”

An unrecognisable voice came out of Desir’s mouth." It was as if hundreds of people started whispering at the same time."

At the same time, the spell in his head unfolded into reality."

As the technique was invoked, Desir’s body tensed up." Excessive mana overwhelmed him and his mana circle was overloaded and destroyed continually while the cells in his body were burnt to ash." Just when it seemed like he would fall apart, he would be healed back to normal, allowing this cycle of never-ending pain to be continued ad nauseam."

He struggled to maintain consciousness." No matter how strong his mental fortitude was he could not maintain his sanity if he kept experiencing the pain of his whole body collapsing."

Without Priscilla, he would have instantly collapsed and his life would have been extinguished." She put all the power she had into restoring Desir."

Desir’s body repeatedly went through cycles of destruction and recovery, each cycle taking mere seconds." But he continued to arrange the magic even as he struggled with the pain."

As the spell continued to be arranged, innumerable formations continued to appear in the air, densely packed around the cane that Desir held up."

Watching it all, Zod stared at Desir without even a thought about closing his gaping mouth."

Desir’s magic was in complete contrast to all of the learnings of the established modern magic system." What he was doing was at the level where the most a wizard could do was stare at it dumbfounded."

But standing at the pinnacle of magical research, Zod Exarion was an exception." He felt like he was witness to a masterpiece beyond the level of anything achievable by a human."

Zod followed Desir’s magic with his peerless intellect and wisdom and every time he gained a bit of enlightenment of what was unfolding in front of himself, his admiration of it could only increase."

“Beautiful." ”

The extremes of beauty existed within the never-ending pursuit of magical efficiency by humans."

\*Grrrrrr\*

The roar shook Zod awake from his reverie." He looked at the source of the noise, Dadenewt."

It was finally freed from its icy bondage."

Dadenewt shrugged and spread its wings to fly up into the sky." It had long forgotten about the three humans on the wall, distracted by the horde of humans escaping by ship."

“Kiyaaaah (Screech)!"

\*Booom\*

As Dadenewt flapped its wings, hundreds of flaming rocks fell down on the city, harbor and evacuating ships."

Desir’s warning was not an exaggeration." Compared to before, its attacks were bigger and definitely far more destructive." Ships that were not prepared for the falling rocks were sunk or wrecked." Smoke started to rise from the many structures and few ships that had caught fire."

There was a faint scream carried by the wind."

“…”

At least the number of ships not yet destroyed was much higher than those sunk thus far." Their only saving grace was that Dadenewt’s attacks, while destructive, were not very accurate."

But to Dadenewt, what was a consolation for humanity, was actually a source of joy for itself." It was a devil that revelled in destruction and misery, after all."

Its giant body started turning."

“Grrr?”

The Dadenewt, that was attempting to fly towards the ships, momentarily paused."

Its eyes swiveled to gaze upon the walls of Deltaheim."

\*Wingggg\*

Desir’s magic was still being arranged." A plethora of magical arrays that one could instinctively feel the danger from at a glance." His arrangement by way of verbal technique continued."

The devil’s body shook after seeing this."

Fear."

It was a threat that even this great demon had never encountered before." Its devilish instinct was ringing, telling it that danger was imminent."

Dadenewt roared at Desir."

“Khewahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh." ”

An enormous power began to concentrate in its mouth." A mighty spell with the power to melt mountains and destroy an entire city began to arrange."

\*Kaboom\*

Dadenewt’s surroundings began to vibrate."

The massive mana flow manifested as a physical phenomenon in of itself." And it was the same with Desir."

Space was trembling."

“This… is my limit… Desir." ”

Priscilla squeaked out in a tiny voice." Her face was blue." Although the energy in her eyes was somewhat diminished, one could still make out her ferocious will to survive."

The collapse of his body started to accelerate as a result of the restoration and resilience weakening."

\*Crumble\*

But."

Never-the-less

‘I must defeat you here." ’

Desir didn’t weaken his grip on Zod’s cane."

As Dadenewt screamed and expelled its fire attack, a faint voice leaked out from the cracked lips of Desir."

[Earth Nourishing the Sun (地滋氣太陽具現)]
\*\*\*
Far away at Hebrion Academy."

Professor Brigiet, who was watering the pot plants in her classroom, suddenly felt something and approached the window."

A warm breeze blew and tousled her well-groomed hair."

\*Whoooosh\*

Leaves from various plants and trees from the garden were carried by the wind."

Brigiet’s gaze was focused on something that could not be seen in the far distance."

\*\*\*
On a mountain much closer than Hebrion Academy, but still far from Deltaheim, a man was standing on a street." From Deltaheim, he would be seen as just a dot in the distance."

The man, wearing a hooded shirt, stared at the horizon of the ocean while forgetting to cover the burns on his face."
\*\*\*
The start was just a dot."

A dot of ultra-high temperature plasma continued to be compressed at high pressure."

A temperature of up to tens of millions of degrees and a massive pressure converging at a single point that accelerated the particles caught within."

The particles that were accelerated to such an extreme began to bump into each other at such velocities that they began to fuse."

The mass lost in this process was released as energy in the form of heat and light."

\*Wuuuung\*

The body of Dadenewt swelled up as if about to burst." The dot was swollen and was now as big as a fist."

The amount of light had doubled." The brightness was so great that it could no longer be looked at with the naked human eye."

Countless particles accelerated, collided, and gave off an endless amount of energy."

The nearby ocean had split, pushed back by the force of the spell."

Dadenewt’s body which was stronger than anything was divided and split up." An enormous amount of light spilled out of the cracks on its body that had appeared."

“Khhh!”

Reactions began to take place in the rocky ocean as the intense light bursting out from the cracks covering Dadenewt’s body, hit it."

The color of the deep dark ocean had changed to gold even though there was no sunlight." The water that looked like melted gold was greatly agitated by the huge amount of energy poured into it as a byproduct of the magic."

“Kaa-aa-aa-ah!”

Dadenewt twisted on what looked like a dazzling golden furnace." The rocks and magma that made up its body sloughed off."

The ocean finally swallowed up Dadenewt."

“…!”

The only thing left was a sense of tranquility so great that it felt like the world was finally at peace."

A golden sea of stars sparkled like starlight." The world was plunged back into a pitch black darkness."

Dadenewt was nowhere to be seen." All that could be seen was magma that encircled the entire city, devastating debris and a terrain so destroyed that it looked as if it had been inverted." These were the only remaining signs of the resurrection of a devil, a so called disaster."

The crashing sound of the sea trying to fill the void left behind, like a wound to its own body, resonated all over the world."

Desir closed his eyes." He felt as if he had been thrown into an endless pit." The last thing he saw was the appearance of Zod and Priscilla approaching him."

----
QC: Dr." Lock, Drei

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**RMSBS - Episode 83 . His Decision (5)**

[A wizard from the Hebrion Academy raises their sword against the enemy." ]

[August 5 at 2pm, Capital Deltaheim of Prilecha Kingdom." The date where the Yellow Ocean Competition was in full swing." ]

[August 5, The Outsiders carried out a terror attack in Deltaheim, the capital of the Prilecha Kingdom, during the Yellow Ocean Competition and while the Western Kingdom Union conference was being held."

Judging by the coordination of their movements, the attacks are speculated to have been premeditated and planned over a long period of time."

The damage was severe but the defense had the upper hand with the dispatch of the Avalon Army." This seems to have been enough to put an end to the attack."

But the Outsiders didn’t give up and ended up also summoning an ancient devil through artifacts that are believed to have been stolen rewards from Third-Level Shadow Worlds." This devil tried to exterminate all human life in and near Deltaheim."

Sir Jane Austen, a well re-known historian, testified that it was a mythical creature called Dadenewt whom we have record of appearing in ancient times."

It was a desperate situation in which everyone in Deltaheim had no doubt of their own imminent death, but fortunately this disastrous outcome was avoided."

All due to a boy single-handedly stopping the devil."

This boy, Desir Arman, is a first-year single-ranker who is currently attending the Hebrion Academy…]

After reading the article Romantica folded up the newspaper and put it to one side."

There was a pile of other newspapers and the contents of the front page were essentially all the same."

[The party led by Desir Arman helped refugees]

[Desir Arman, who is he?]

[A wizard from Hebrion Academy, another Seventh-Circle wizard?]

[Technical consultant of Magic Tower, center of the Hebrion miracle]

Romantica took a deep breath before exhaling."

A lot of things happened in short order after Desir slayed Dadenewt."

First, Desir became a hero in the span of a few hours."

In a way, this may be natural as Desir was from the Hebrion Empire that had a relationship like that of cats and dogs with the Western Kingdom Union." He managed to save everyone by putting his own body on the line."

It would be rather strange if he garnered no attention as a result."

The problem however was that the rest of the party members: Adjest, Pram and Romantica; likewise caught the eye of the public."

It was impossible to know just how many reporters mobbed the party, hoping to get some kind of scoop or soundbite." Some of the journalists even chased them into the hospital."

Romantica couldn’t help remembering that commotion and involuntarily shuddered."

‘…’

Of course, being famous was not all that bad."

If it were any other time, she would have arrogantly enjoyed her meteoric rise to fame."

If only everything had been as usual."

She looked to her side with a somewhat subdued stare."

In her gaze was the one mentioned by countless media outlets."

Desir Arman."

He had been unconscious for two weeks."

“You finally… till the end…”

Desir, who toppled Dadenewt, fainted on the spot and the Western Kingdom Union took him in as an honored state guest and transported him to one of the leading hospitals of the continent."

Adeina Kingdom, a country with the most advanced medical techniques and technology."

Every year Adeina Kingdom produced excellent doctors and they consistently made a name for themselves across the continent."

It was also not too much of a stretch to say that most of the hospitals that exist on the continent were founded with the support of such doctors."

Since being treated at the Royal Hospital of Adeina, the best of them all, it was apparent just how good they were."

At the time of admission he was in a terrible state."

Most of his organs were either completely destroyed or completely dysfunctional and his mana circle was also heavily damaged." He was in such a precarious state that he could barely breathe."

Fortunately, thanks to the support of the Western Kingdom Union, they were able to quickly move him to the space transfer gate that was only made available for VIPs." Their quick action managed to avoid a crisis and he was able to swiftly receive treatment at Adeina Royal Hospital where the best medical staff was always on stand-by."

The Saint, Priscilla, also cast her healing on Desir’s body whenever she recovered a little bit of her strength, even though her own body was a mess too."

However, despite such efforts, Desir’s condition did not improve." His body condition appeared normal, but they couldn’t figure out just what was keeping him from waking up and returning to normal." They could only assume it was a magical side effect of the spell that he had invoked."

“… I will kill you when you wake up." ”

Romantica grabbed her chest and pledged dolefully."

While thinking back to her first encounter with him, they always had a kind of bad relationship."

In retrospect, the first encounter she had with Desir began on the wrong-foot entirely."

At that time, Romantica was a Second-Circle wizard and Desir was a First-Circle wizard."

She judged everything too superficially and ended up looking down on him." She actually didn’t know anything about him." Of course, anyone in her position would have done the same."

However, Desir beat her with his limited ability." He should have shown some kind of arrogance from defeating the person who had openly despised and derided him, but he didn’t."

‘You just black-mailed me." ’

Of course it wasn't because he looked down on her."

After the entrance test, Romantica was black-mailed by Desir and ended up entering the party that he created."

Until then, he was a man whom she really didn't like anything about." With his ability to properly react to every situation, his strangely well-informed understanding of her and even his eloquent manner of speaking, she ended up not able to beat him."

However, despite such complaints, Romantica did not leave his party that she was forced into." Mainly because she was so concerned about the anxiety and consideration he showed to her."

‘I just don't know anymore." ’

She would never know." But the only thing Romantica knew for sure about him was that he was always sincere."

Desir did his best for Romantica." Come to think of it, it had been like that since the entrance exam." He took it upon himself to teach her, no matter the occasion, even during the hyper competitive tests of the academy."

“You’re such a fool." ”

She ended up rejecting the offer to join the Blue Moon party and she remained in Desir’s."

She did her best and became a single-ranker."

She learnt a lot and experienced a lot."

She knew that Desir was constantly covering for her and helping her to address her short falls."

She knew he always tried his best for her."

She knew that she relied on him."

Romantica started to feel a new kind of feeling well up inside herself."

Whenever she thought about him, she caught herself doing so and tried to think about something else."

And…

“…”

Her eyes found their way back to Desir."

\*Zzzzzz\*

A sound of regular breathing." There was still no sign of him waking up."

“I just cannot understand you." ”

Looking at Desir, Romantica spoke aloud to no-one in particular."

It was a lie."

She knew that she somewhat understood his intentions."

He tried to save the people, the group, and her at the expense of his own health."

No, this is not right."

She couldn’t tolerate it any longer."

“… Why does it need to be like this?”

Her voice cracked as she covered her face with her hands."

She didn’t want him to see her crying." She felt so miserable."

“Why don’t you think about the feelings of the people supporting you… Why don’t you think… of my feelings…”

\*Silence\*

There was no one there to answer that question."

Romantica remembered the promise that she made with Desir by the golden sea."

If he told her to run away, she would run away."

And she had kept her promise."

Because she knew him that well, she kept the promise."

That’s because she understood that he didn’t want her to die."

“Did you think I’d be happy because you did that? You have the wrong idea." Because as much as you think about me, I think about you." I don’t want you to die…!”

The tone of her voice rose." She felt a surge of emotion from venting her anger."

It was anger." But it was not aimed at Desir, but instead at herself."

Romantica knew that Desir had taken this action because she was not strong enough to be with him."

She could only think about how she was just too pathetic for him, not even able to be just a bit useful to him."

“I’ll train harder." ”

Romantica pledged."

“I won’t even criticize you." I’ll do whatever you say." If you say to die, then I will die." ”

Romantica bowed her head almost as if she was collapsing."

“I will try hard and be a colleague who is not ashamed to be seen with you." I’ll be your strength." I mean, so…”

Tears dripped down onto the sheets."

“So don’t do this again." ”

Romantica’s whimper filled the quiet room."

Feeling a sense of warmth from her hair, Romantica raised her head." She saw Desir staring at her through her tears."

“I promise, Romantica." ”

He brushed Romantica’s hair out of the way in a gentle fashion

He continued doing so silently until she stopped crying."

September 27th." The clock had just struck noon."

\*\*\*
Less than a minute after Romantica informed Pram and Adjest, by their communication bracelet, that Desir had woken up, a commotion sounded in the hallway and the door violently burst open."

“I'm so glad you’ve woken up!”

Pram ran up and jumped onto the bed to hug Desir tightly."

He buried his face in Desir’s chest and would not let go." He was like a puppy that saw its injured owner." He seemed to be quite worried."

Desir gently stroked Pram’s back in an attempt to calm him."

Again the door opened and a calm voice emanated."

“You’ve done more than I thought possible, Desir." ”

It was Adjest."

Suddenly, Pram and Romantica stared at Adjest in unison." It was because she sympathized with Desir's actions that she ended up helping him trick Romatica and Pram."

That’s why Desir had to desperately defend Adjest by saying that she was innocent and only helped at his request."

The furore continued for quite a while, but eventually they came to terms with it and could understand why Desir did what he did." They could only nod and accept it, after making their displeasure known."

“Are you alright? You’re crying." ”

“I’m fine." Well, it was Pram after all who exhausted himself taking care of Desir all night long." ”

“Romantica! I told you not to mention that!”

Noisy." It was a pleasant atmosphere."

It was in this atmosphere that they could have a pleasant conversation." Desir had just woken up, so he was content enjoying this moment."

“I’m sorry for interrupting this happy reunion." ”

It was Zod, the master of Magic Tower." He was in formal attire."

“I’ve got something to discuss with Desir." Could you excuse us for a moment?”

----

E: Things aren't looking so good for those of you on the."Desir x Adjest" ship."

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**RMSBS - Episode 84 . His Decision (6)**

After Adjest, Pram and Romantica left, only Zod and Desir remained in the room."

The only Seventh-Circle wizard in the continent and master of the Magic Tower."

It was obvious that what he went through to reach such a position was unimaginable to normal people."

As a result, he was always unflappable… no matter what kind of a situation he found himself in." He would always appear calm without a hint of tension."

But Zod, the master of the Magic Tower currently looked very nervous."

The room was completely quiet."

\*Clap\*

As soon as Zod clapped, the faint noise from the activity in the hallway could no longer be heard." Desir immediately grasped the fact that he had invoked a [Silence] spell."

Zod, who invoked the Second-Circle magic without arranging and formulating it, pulled a chair closer and sat down on it." His eyes never left Desir."

They made eye contact." The intensity of their gazes were such that it felt as if they were peering into each other’s souls."

After a long silence, it was Zod who first opened his mouth."

“So, I take it that you haven’t told them yet?”

Desir nodded silently."

“So you knew all along after all, Zod." I didn’t want to spoil the mood earlier." I thought it would be better to tell the others after I’ve had a chance to confirm the state of my body." ”

“Recovery is going to be impossible." ”

Zod’s tone was assertive, as if he was declaring a certainty."

“As judged by the best doctors and Priscilla, it’s impossible to restore your left eye with modern technology." ”

There was no sight in Desir’s left eye." It was completely blinded." Mentally, it felt like something vital was missing."

“Is this an artificial eye?”

Desir touched his left eye." There was clearly something there." If the eye socket was empty then his party would have instantly figured it out."

“It’s not artificial." The organ itself is not physically damaged." ”

Desir got out of the bed and walked over to the mirror."

At first glance, nothing seemed to be wrong." But on closer inspection he could see that his left eye was out of focus."

When he spread his right palm and covered his right eye, he couldn’t see anything,

Zod continued to speak while observing Desir."

“The treatment was perfect, but your vision could not be restored." The doctors did their best to figure out the cause, but in the end, they couldn’t." ”

Desir uncovered and slowly opened his right eye." The headache that threatened to split his head had returned." He still felt the pain from his entire body being broken as if it was being torn apart."

[Proverb] a draconic magic."

Desir could grasp it through fully inverting it in the Shadow Labyrinth, but casting the spell was a different story." He now had first-hand experience on what it actually entailed."

Draconic magic was obviously more powerful than any man-made magic, but it was never a magic that humans could use." There was a cost to using a power greater than one could control."

‘It’s an unforgiving price." ’

Those who didn’t know what Desir used was draconic magic, would not even be able to fathom what condition it left him in."

Desir knew with his intuition that this was the price of entering the dragon’s realm of magic."

He had used power well beyond the realm of what humans could wield and then paid the price for it."

But Desir sighed out of relief."

‘Is it just this much?’

He thought it was a rather cheap price to pay." It would be enough if only one eye could save everyone’s life." If so, he was satisfied." He had absolutely no regret."

He believed this from the bottom of his heart."

‘Rather, the problem now was…’

Zod looked at him with a grave expression." From his attitude it was clear that he had something else to say."

Seeing Desir’s expression as if he could read him as clearly as an open book, Zod slowly opened his clenched jaw."

“Desir, I have something that I need to check with you." ”

As Desir expected, his visit had another purpose."

This was the true start of the conversation he had come for."

“What should I start with first…”

Perhaps because the long battle had consumed excessive power, Zod seemed much older than before."

“You can never be said to be responsible for the happenings at the Magic Tower." You warned us about the imminent threat of the Outsiders and even helped us repel them." Ultimately you protected the Second-Class magic stone." But to be honest, I suspected that you were an Outsider at that time." ”

The circumstances appeared to match up so well in hindsight."

“You said that you knew by espionage… but that’s pretty unreliable." Rather, it was much more credible to judge you as an Outsider that planned to earn my trust." As a result, I didn’t want to get involved with you and offered to pay money to quickly finish it." ”

Desir remembered the proposal of Prelude, the wizard from the Aureli branch." Apparently, it was Zod’s order."

“But you…”

“I suggested chess instead of money." ”

Zod recalled that unexpected situation and his expression looked brighter for a brief moment."

“Yes, chess! That was really unexpected." There was no room for me to refuse it." My curiosity was not to be suppressed by reason." It was strange that you decided to pick chess instead of money." ”

The excitement in his tone gradually subsided, and soon became sharp like a knife."

In that tone, Desir could figure out what Zod was trying to get at."

‘Zod is interrogating me." ’

Now Zod was stepping towards checkmate through skillful manipulation of his chess pieces."

“You beat me and you made a deal with me." Aside from the stupid smokescreen proposals, such as sponsorship, what caught my attention was the technology you presented." The technology you proposed was several generations ahead."

“When it comes to magic, I’m confident that I won’t lose to anyone." ”

It was time to pretend." There was no reason to appear shaken."

“Well." You weren’t such a good wizard until you entered Hebrion Academy." ”

Desir’s act immediately crumbled." He was truly shaken."

“How could such a normal person before entering Hebrion Academy, acquire the ability to invert spells? How could you know about the plans of the Outsiders? How could you acquire and understand advanced technology that could only appear many generations from now? No matter how much I investigated it, my questions about you have not been solved." ”

“… You did quite the background check." ”

He thought Zod was suspicious but he didn’t think he would investigate his past this thoroughly."

Zod justified himself as Desir visibly showed just how betrayed he felt."

“Don’t look at it like that." As a master of the Magic Tower, I did what I had to do." I must remove anything that might endanger the Magic Tower." ”

There was no change to Zod’s expression, but Desir felt the atmosphere subtly change into something that can only be felt on the battlefield."

The mana inside the room was moving." In other words, Zod was preparing to invoke magic before Desir could invert it." Zod recognized that Desir would notice the threat."

“This is a warning…”

Zod continued."

“You know… I hypothesised the following." The real student, Desir Arman, is actually dead and now an Outsider is impersonating him." If so, Professor Bridget, who recommended you to come to Hebrion… I guess that I don't need to say anymore." ”

Desir was able to immediately understand what Zod meant."

Zod was heading straight for an incorrect conclusion to explain this unusual situation."

“Here, I will ask the question point-blank." Who are you?”

Desir was seriously conflicted."

It was impossible to make a lame excuse to Zod." But no explanation would be able to convince him." There was no hole to hide in that would allow him to escape this question."

‘If I don't explain myself here, I will be designated as an Outsider." ’

Not only that." The same would be said about Professor Bridget." Desir’s only recourse was to tell Zod the truth."

It’s a story that Desir had never shared with anyone."

‘Returning to the past." ’

It was a fact that no one would ever guess this unless Desir told them directly."

Desir agonized."

‘Shall I tell you? That I came from the future?’

‘Do I have to share everything from the Shadow Labyrinth to the present?’

‘I shouldn’t share this." ’

Desir hadn’t told anyone about what had happened to him." It was because of his concern over the unintended consequences and how the untold number of changed variables would ultimately affect the end result."

Variables should be left unchanged as much as possible." For him, knowing the future was the most powerful weapon of all."

If the future changed due to changes in these variables, he would lose the most powerful weapon he possessed." It was something that he should not allow at all costs."

The variables already changed were enough to make Desir sick with worry and he wanted to refrain from changing them any further."

‘I can tell you someday, but not now." ’

Soon afterward, Desir shook his head." Zod replied with a grave tone."

“You can’t answer." ”

“… I’m sorry." ”

In the end, Desir decided not to speak." He carefully looked up at Zod to gauge his reaction." Zod was strangely composed." When Zod reacted differently than expected, Desir queried him."

“Are you not going to question me further?”

“I would have if it were two weeks ago." ”

2 weeks ago."

It was precisely before the awakening of Dadenewt."

“But what is the point of doubting you now?." You tried to save a lot of people by sacrificing yourself, and in the end you managed to prevail over such adversity." There are no dumb Outsiders at your level of skill." ”

Zod smiled."

“My intuition tells me to trust you." And when I gave you all of my power, I decided to believe this groundless intuition." ”

His intuition as a wise man was telling him that Desir was very reliable."

He would never know the circumstances surrounding Desir but he could see his heart."

He wanted to save people at his own expense." It was a fact that no one could deny."

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TLC: DujMain

QC: Dr." Lock, Drei

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**RMSBS - Episode 85 . His Decision (7)**

“…”

Desir was left embarrassed with Zod’s sudden confession."

This was a side of Zod that Desir had not seen in his previous life, even after accompanying him for many years."

Desir only saw Zod acting as the master of the Magic Tower, cold and calculative in all circumstances, and as the Seventh-Circle wizard with an insatiable curiosity in finding the truth of all things."

If he was planning to give up this easily, what was the purpose of the conversation thus far?

After considering it for another second, Desir voiced his doubts."

“If this is true, everything you have told me so far…”

“I was just testing you." I wouldn’t care whether or not you tell me." ”

All of his threats to Desir had been an act."

Desir was perfectly deceived by his skillful acting."

Desir responded in a heavy voice."

“Mr." Zod." ”

“Haha… I’m sorry." But I give you my word." I won’t ask about your identity anymore." Everyone has their own secrets that they can’t share with anybody." I also have a bunch of secrets that I don’t want anybody to know." ”

In Zod’s own words, Desir imitated his tone and solemn posture."

“I’m sorry that I couldn’t tell you my identity, but I give you my word." If the day comes, I will tell you everything." ”

\*HAHAHA\*

The two faced each other and laughed."

“I hope that day is not too far away." ”

Zod’s smile was amazingly warm." It was like the smile of a grandfather looking at his grandson."

“Is that all you wanted to say?”

“No, there is one more thing." It’s about the Outsiders." ”

Desir instantly recalled what happened around this time in his future."

It had all unfolded in a rush."

The Great Conference of the West Kingdom Union." The Outsiders carried out a terrorist attack on the conference and they managed to summon a devil, Dadenewt."

Up until that point, they had only been a trivial faction that committed minor misdeeds, but it was at this point that they became active in earnest."

Those who tried to overturn the status quo and spread chaos were clearly a destabilizing force." In particular, the Crow Mask that led this movement was especially dangerous."

“Through these events, I can see that the Outsider’s power is considerable." They have been successful at concealing their power up until now." ”

Above all, the Crow Mask that was leading them." A Sixth-Circle wizard, of which there are few on this continent, who used space magic, a Sixth-Circle spell."

He was powerful enough to interrupt Zod’s use of space magic."

Desir could not understand how such a person could manage to hide his identity without even a hint at what their real name was."

“The revolutionaries…”

The Crow Mask was a remnant of the Revolutionary Army."

In the future, Desir was told that the remnants of the Revolutionary Army that survived during the civil war of the Hebrion Empire became the Outsiders, but he never thought that he would encounter them this way."

They commit indiscriminate acts of terrorism with absurd justifications."

‘A group with that kind of motivation was even more dangerous than a regular criminal syndicate." ’

Those who move based on faith are scary." It was because they believed their actions were right that they could justify any and all actions." They even slaughtered citizens while saying that they resurrected Dadenewt to sacrifice the few for the sake of the many."

‘I can’t tolerate this." ’

The only thing that can be said about them is that they are completely crazy."

The main purpose behind one’s actions cannot be described in just a few words."

What they enacted was not a revolution, but an obvious massacre."

‘And they must have recognized me as an enemy by now." ’

Desir felt that he would inevitably meet them again someday."

With a lighter tone than before, Zod broke Desir’s ruminations."

“Nothing to worry about." There have been some positive changes as a result of this." ”

“Oh yeah? What do you mean?”

Zod picked up one of the newspapers at the bedside and handed it over to Desir."

[Wizard from Hebrion Academy raises a sword against the enemy]

“The mood is now different in comparison to the time before the Great Council." Not only the citizens of the Western Kingdom but also the kings of the nations realized the seriousness of the Outsiders." And thanks to you, the impression of the Hebrion Empire was dramatically improved." ”

Desir smiled."

“Is that so? I’m very glad." ”

“If the talks goes well, the front lines between the Hebrion Empire and Western Kingdom may be united." ”

“I hope that happens." ”

Zod stood up."

“I’m all done now." I’m going to let you go." Take care." ”

“Thank you, Tower Master." ”

As soon as he opened the door, the silence magic disappeared."

The long and tiring conversation had finally come to an end."

Desir lay down on his fluffy pillow to digest the contents of that heavy conversation."

‘Improvement of the relationship between the Western Kingdom and Hebrion Empire…’

It was a relief during a time of misery."

Desir fell into deep thought."

‘But they are not the ‘true’ enemy that we need to be concerned with." ’

Despite the emergence of the Outsiders as a threat, the ultimate enemy remained unchanged."

The Shadow Labyrinth."

The worst disaster that was fated to appear in the future."

Desir had yet to talk about the real enemy." This was because he had determined that there was no reason to spend the effort convincing the others without explaining how he was a returner." Trying to explain how he knew this would only cause confusion."

‘It’s time to calmly start preparing." ’

He would gather up his party and train them further to increase their power." Of course, he couldn’t forget to train himself." His own power would be a decisive factor in this coming disaster."

Putting this plan into action would allow Desir to reach the end goal, step by step."

With this plan, Desir felt he could overcome any danger."

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In a secluded village in the Prillecha Kingdom."

Someone traveling to the capital would encounter this village on their journey." This town was frequented by tourists and merchants who stopped to take a break from their travels."

There was nothing to write home about this village and it was not very big, but it at least was known for its one specialty."

Dark Beer."

There was only one tavern in this village but the taste of dark beer was well renowned in the nearby towns." The taste was good enough that people from nearby villages would even stop by specifically for this beer."

“Hey, Hans." Did you hear the news?”

It was a very hot evening." Heat intensely radiated up from the ground and the air was especially muggy." The villagers dealt with the heat by rushing to the pub and drinking the cold dark beer."

It was on this day that the pub was a bit noisier than usual."

It wasn’t just because of a few rowdy foreigners." Some news from the capital had arrived and turned the village upside down."

They gathered at the tavern and shared their merriment at the good tidings."

“What happened?"

Hans, who ran a mill in the neighborhood, looked at his friend in a way that showed he didn’t know what he was talking about."

His friend pounded his chest in sheer frustration at someone being this much out of the loop."

“Oh, this guy! Haven’t you even read the newspaper? Just what have you been doing?”

“Ehhhh, you know how my work has been recently." ”

“Were you sick? Well, you shutdown your mill for a few days… That Outsider gang… The Outsiders." They broke into the capital…”

The friend brought his hand to his ear, as if to tell Hans to listen carefully to his surroundings." When Hans stopped talking, he could hear the conversations of the people around him."

“The Outsiders have invaded the capital." ”

“The Hebrion boy… … ”

“Hero…”

Everyone in the tavern was talking about this one person." This could be expected though." It was an event of such significance that it would inevitably be recorded in the history books." Rumors of what had occurred were already spread across the continent."

Hans was still listening to what his friend was telling him." When the friend’s story concluded, he was left absolutely amazed."

“The boy defeated the Outsiders." ”

Everyone spoke up after listening to him, adding a word or two of praise for the hero or disdain at the Outsiders."

“Well done." ”

“Damn, they are so annoying! I’ve heard that the amount of damage that they’ve caused so far to the Magic Tower is astronomical." ”

“I’ve heard they stole technology?”

“We paid them back in full, this time." ”

Then he nodded."

“So this is why fewer traders had passed through the town recently." ”

“It’s because the capital has collapsed and is not a place to do business right now." In addition, more and more trains are being used in recent years." There are going to be fewer foreign visitors to the village in the coming years." ”

Hans listened to the story and grabbed a cold beer." The beer had a nice texture."

Excitedly, his face turned red." The dark beer produced here was also famous for its high alcohol content." From drinking a single glass, no matter how strong the person was, they would definitely get drunk."

Hans’s gaze that swept throughout the tavern ended up catching on a particular person."

“Who’s that guy?”

He pointed at someone in the corner."

In that particular corner of the tavern, there was someone sipping beer." He wore a hood and the shadows it left were so dark that it was almost impossible to see his face."

He was sitting alone and drinking."

Perhaps because of the bleak atmosphere he gave off, no one had tried to get close to him."

He looked unpleasant."

Hans’s friend lowered his voice."

“… He’s a stranger who’s been staying here for a few days." No one has seen his face." ”

Because of the incident in the capital, the merchants who used to visit hadn’t come recently." Not to mention the tourists and other travelers."

It was therefore not weird for the villagers to look at him with suspicion while reluctantly welcoming him into the village."

A friend whispered into Hans’s ear."

“Actually… someone has reported him as a potential Outsider." We should get a response by tomorrow." ”

“Ha, you’re saying he’s an Outsider?”

“Keep your voice down!”

A friend pushed Hans’s head down while furtively monitoring the hooded man’s movement for any change." However, he was still sipping beer as calmly as ever."

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TLC: DujMain

QC: Dr." Lock

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**RMSBS - Episode 86 . His Decision (8)**

Hans admonished his friend for being so pathetic."

“Do you think an Outsider is silly enough to drink beer in a public tavern like this?!”

“It isn’t bad to be vigilant… Hey, where are you going?”

“I’m going to give that stupid foreigner a real taste of our town." ”

Hans shook off his friend’s hand and asked the owner for two glasses of dark beer."

It was the first foreigner to visit in a long time." He seemed like a wanderer but he appeared to be interested in some of the conversations in the tavern."

“Hey, dude." Can I join you?”

It was a polite question, but it didn’t require an answer." Hans sat down without waiting for such an answer." He then pushed away the beer that the hooded man was drinking and replaced it with his dark beer."

“It’s on me." Get rid of that pale, smelly beer." This is the good stuff." ”

At that moment, the quiet man’s mouth opened."

“… Go." ”

“What?”

“Take your friend and leave within 30 seconds." ”

“… ”

Hans was embarrassed." He had done this foreigner a favor and in return he received a deportation order as compensation."

“You are a rude man." Where are you from? From the North? Oh, I see." You’re from…”

“Too late." ”

\*Bang\*

Suddenly, Hans looked over his shoulder at the source of the noise."

There were two people striding through the wide open door."

An insidious voice echoed in the tavern."

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to my show!”

The man who had spoken was rather tall and wore a nice suit." But unusually, he had a funny Pierrot mask on his face."

However, in contrast to the ridiculous mask, the people in the bar had goosebumps on their arms for some reason." There was a leash dangling from his hand and it was connected to the neck of the middle-aged man who came in together with him."

“I, Pierrot, will be running this show." Nice to meet you." ”

The gorgeous clothes of the middle-aged man were dusty and torn." His obviously once muscular body was now wrecked from torture, like a tattered piece of cloth."

His dignified appearance was gone, now replaced with uncontrollable trembling and a look stricken with terror."

Hans recognized the face of the middle-aged man and inadvertently revealed his shock."

“And let me introduce my assistant! Great Kingdom of Steel, King of Divide! Your Majesty Colora Ahs F Waldersch!”

Nobody responded." No one dared to meddle in the unfolding situation."

Silence." Everyone was frozen in horror and could say nothing."

The sound of flies buzzing in the air seemed louder than thunder."

With a gesture that he was playing, Pierrot Mask un-summoned the bondage that tied the king’s hands and took off the eye patch that covered his eyes."

The eyes of the King of Divide were finally revealed." They were filled with tears."

“Hey! What are you doing now…”

Someone woke up but he didn’t have enough time to finish his sentence." Something sparkled in Pierrot Mask’s hand before blowing past the neck of the unruly onlooker."

Blood gathered in a line in the air."

The wire was too thin to easily identify with the human eye."

No one saw it as it was flying."

It was an overwhelming action."

“Hiccup… !”

Nobody dared to scream." It was because Pierrot Mask looked around, non-verbally communicating a threat that the same would happen to anyone else that made a sound."

“Okay, everyone, take up a weapon." Anything that can hurt others is fine." Knife, chair, ah, a good choice." But don’t even think about moving." ”

\*Rustle\*

People were busy finding a suitable weapon."

In short order, everyone present was holding something that could be used as a weapon." Even Hans had something." He spilled the beer out of the mug and broke the glass making a sharp piece that he could use like a knife."

Hans glanced at the man wearing the hood, but he was still sitting." The Pierrot Mask acted as if he was not there and continued directing his show."

“Well, maybe you all know each other here due to being from the same village." But tragically, only one person can leave here alive." My assistant here is going to participate in this competition as well." ”

The King of Divide grabbed the dagger and walked out." There was no pride in his eyes at all." Instead, they were filled with the desire to live."

Everyone was eyeing each other."

“Starting is always hard." Good." The first person to kill will be the exception." I will send them out first." ”

Hans tightened his grip on the glass shard."

How can this man be subdued? If he pretended to fight moderately and then suddenly poked a non-fatal place with his shard, he wouldn’t be able to stop the quick attack from the wire."

Hans’s friend approached Hans with a bottle opener in hand."

“Friends, calm down." ”

“You heard him too." ”

Hans put down his weapon first and once more eagerly said to his friend."

“Put down the weapon”

“I want to live, Hans." ”

He rushed towards Hans." Blood splattered and screams broke out everywhere." Pierrot Mask exploded into a fit of laughter while watching the tavern suddenly turn into the site of a battle royale."

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The bar was quiet." No one was alive." It was so terrible to see."

“This is a bad habit of yours." ”

“You think so?”

The Pierrot Mask sat next to the now un-hooded Crow Mask."

“I wondered if you were planning to stop me or not." ”

Crow Mask answered."

“I’m not going to get caught up in your pace." ”

With his answer, Pierrot Mask opened his eyes for a brief moment before laughing in satisfaction."

“You sure have changed." ”

“Is that a complaint?”

“No, I like it." Really." It is clear that you are no different from us." ”

Crow Mask no longer denied what he said."

Was it because it was too much of a bother to refute it, or did he finally acknowledge it in his heart?

He switched topic without responding to Pierrot Mask."

“Get to the point." ”

“I failed to kill all of the kings who attended the conference." But I do have some profit from the attempt." The capital of the Prillecha Kingdom has lost its function and is badly affected economically." I also succeeded in catching one of the kings of the Western Kingdom Union." ”

He pointed at a dead body."

The King of Divide, Colora Ahs F Waldersch."

He struggled with a dagger to survive." He slaughtered people and did his best to take their lives."

Eventually it was all futile."

In the midst of so many mishaps his face is perfectly preserved."

“You can’t imagine how easily things were though, thanks to him moving separately from the rest." ”

King Divide separated from the kings of the Western Kingdom Union." That was the biggest reason for him becoming a target."

He was overconfident in his power."

Pierrot Mask prodded his body with his toe and smiled."

“It could be fun to do things with it." ”

Crow Mask didn’t like the man in front of him."

This man’s behavior was always dirty and disgusting."

“So, I heard Dadenewt was resurrected…”

“It was destroyed." ”

Pierrot Mask tilted his head."

“What? How was it killed? It should have destroyed at least one kingdom." ”

“… There was a powerful wizard." ”

“Zod?”

“No, a more dangerous wizard." ”

“Are you sure that the kid in the article killed the demon? The kid who can’t even arrange Fourth-Circle magic." Least to say Seventh-Circle magic?”

Pierrot Mask had the same level of contempt that Crow Mask had upon first meeting Desir."

“His magic ability has already surpassed Zod." And at a young age he is good at fighting too." He’s not an easy man to be trifled with." He also used a spell that I couldn’t understand." ”

With a single magic, he killed Dadenewt that even Zod had a hard time with." The power he used was above the Seventh-Circle."

They would never understand how to arrange magic at such a level." But what was clear was that he was the enemy of Crow Mask

“So you dealt with him directly." What was your impression?”

Pierrot Mask seemed to be very interested in hearing this information."

“Overall, it’s clear that he is below me." But in the use of spells, there are few people in the world that can achieve as much as him." The absence of higher-tiered spells that I initially thought was a major weakness ended up being a triviality to him." ”

Crow Mask continued."

“He is the highest risk factor." More so than Zod." He will be a big stumbling block in future plans." I hope we get rid of him quickly." ”

“I’m very impressed." Stronger than Zod." ”

“Do not think he will be easy." ”

“Don’t worry about it." ”

Pierrot Mask drank the beer in front of him."

“We’re going to move even more destructively to imprint fear of us on everyone." It will be incomparable to what we have done so far." And at the same time…”

The gaze of Pierrot Mask turned back towards the King of Divide."

“We are going to dig deeper and more secretly into the heart of the enemy to destroy them from the inside." ”

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**RMSBS - Episode 87 . In Between Summer and Winter (1)**

The temperature in the air had been steamy hot, but as soon as October arrived it immediately cooled down catching everyone unaware."

In the garden of Hebrion Academy, the flowers and plants bloomed in such vivid shades of red and green that one could easily mistake these plants as being painted."

With the conclusion of summer break, it was naturally time for the fall semester to start."

“It’s second semester already." Time sure flies!”

With the commencement of the semester, all of the students who had left for the break had now returned." As a result, the mood in Hebrion Academy was one of youthful excitement."

No matter where you went in the campus there were students walking in groups of three or four." Amongst one such group, there was one boy with dark hair that stood out amidst his peers." He was wearing a Clothes Line that showed his status as a single ranker."

Naturally, it was Desir Arman."

He had returned to school for the new semester and felt all of the attention directed at him from the crowd." Students whispered as he walked by." Some snarled at him while others simply gossiped about him." It was so much attention… too much really."

Of course, not all of the attention was positive." However, it clearly proved that Desir was now really famous." Some students would even come up and ask for his autograph." This unbridled curiosity continued until the opening ceremony was over."

It was evening by the time the assembly concluded." At Hebrion Academy, whenever there was an event like this, all of the students gathered at the main hall and had dinner together."

Desir could only see with one eye." And due to that fact, he could no longer gauge the distance to objects in-front of him very well." He was currently walking down a flight of stairs, heavily relying on the rail." Before making it very far he ended up losing his balance." He almost fell, but at that time, someone happened to be nearby to offer their assistance."

“Be careful, Desir." ”

It was Pram Schneider." He looked up at Desir and smiled at him."

“Thanks, Pram." ”

“I’ll help you walk." ”

Desir felt he didn’t need such help." Pram approached him, but he politely refused."

“No, thanks." ”

“You might fall!”

Pram wasn’t one to easily give up on such things."

“If you fall and get hurt while I stand right next to you, I’d be living in a nightmare of a guilt-trip from not being able to save you…”

“Relax! Relax, Pram!”

Desir hurried to comfort Pram before he could become depressed and out of sorts."

“Then, does that mean I can help you?”

“… Fine." Then if you would, please Pram." ”

“Excuse me." ”

Desir realized that Pram had tricked him as he saw Pram with a smile so radiant it was as if he had never been sad." However, it was already too late."

Pram linked arms with Desir."

“Now you can lean on me." ”

Pram was a thin person, but he was a very steady support for Desir." He also constantly checked on Desir’s wellbeing and comfort."

Pram already knew about Desir’s condition." After Zod left, Desir explained his condition to the party."

After walking down the stairs and outting both feet back onto flat ground, Desir turned to Pram."

“Thank you." ”

“No problem." Allow me to assist you when you walk back up." ”

They hurried over to the banquet hall." For dinner there was: corn salad, rye bread, and vegetable sandwiches." This was unusual as they were all used to eating from the luxurious menu on normal school days." Of course this caused some complaints from students and quite a few of them immediately left the hall."

Desir and Pram didn’t care." They nonchalantly picked up some salad and rye bread before moving on."

“You’re here." ”

Desir and Pram found Romantica and Adjest were already settled, so they sat down next to them." After a short exhange of greetings they started eating."

Romantica wasn’t happy about the food here either and muttered."

“I don’t know why I need to put this low quality food in my mouth." Is this the result of some kind of conspiracy?”

“Nonsense." ”

This was the highest educational institution of the Hebrion Empire." The empire’s very own noble heirs attended this school." It would not have been possible for corruption of that magnitude to occur here."

“To be honest, this is probably not the result of a reduction in quality, but more about a change in diet." ”

Meat was thoroughly excluded from this new diet."

Romantica shook her head."

“There must be something else at play." Is today somehow special?”

“I don’t think it is anything to do with the first day of the semester." ”

It was then."

“All of you are here!”

It was Ladoria Doriche." She is a sophomore single ranker making her one of the best of the best." She seemed rather excited." She took out a pen and paper from her inner pocket and headed over to Desir."

“A friend of mine is a big fan of you." Can I get an autograph? I mean from all of you." ”

All of them were surprised." They looked at each other and soon nodded in agreement."

“Of course." ”

It wasn’t a big deal, so they easily accepted her request."

As she waited for all of the autographs, Ladoria gaze settled on Romantica’s plate that had so much leftover food."

“You didn’t like it, did you?”

“Ahh, yeah." This isn’t really…”

Ladoria nodded her head as if she understood what Romnatica attempted to explain."

“Actually, my friends were not satisfied with today’s banquet either." But then again, what can we do? They said it was done in remembrance of people who had died from Western Kingdom Union terrorist attack." ”

Desir and his party finally understood why the menu was the way it was."

“Don’t worry about it." The menu will return to normal after a while." Alright, guys! Keep up the good work! I’ll always cheer for you!”

Ladoria left on those words."

Pram couldn’t believe what he had heard."

“Ladoria, from the Red Dragon Party, asked for our autographs… The Ladoria…”

“Wow, now I’m sure that we really are famous." ”

Romantica said delightfully in delight."

They were all Beta students before this summer break had started." It was true that they feel some kind of pressure from the other students, but nobody really expressed that feeling that they sensed."

“Well, there are a few annoying disadvantages though." ”

Adjest wasn’t really happy with their newfound reputation." Unlike Romantica, she didn’t like to be in the center of attention."

“I see it as a good thing." This is a chance to advertise our party." ”

Becoming famous meant that you can spread your name to the world." Desir had decided to use this fame."

Desir established a party for the talented people who couldn’t utilize their full potential in the future." There were no requirements to enter this party." Even if they didn’t have any discernible skill, Desir still wanted to help them if they had a strong will."

Romantica added on to this."

“It will be a good advertisement, but the important fact is that nobody wanted to join our party." ”

“… I know." ”

But so far, there was nobody that took up their offer, with the exception of Adjest."

Honestly, it was puzzling."

“It’s so strange." Let’s say they didn’t know about us before." However, now that we are pretty famous, I can’t understand why there is still no one… no one applying to join us." ”

“Well, don’t you think it’s about the rumor of our tough spartan training regime?”

“… Maybe it is." ”

Yes, Desir’s training method was definitely harsh."

As trainees, they might hate it." Even Romantica had complained about the heavy training in the beginning." She always complained and never seemed happy about it."

However, as hard as his training was, it produced results and everyone didn’t complain since they knew it as well."

“Desir’s training really works! I feel like a totally different person in comparison to the beginning of the semester!”

Pram insisted strongly."

Adjest, who had been silently listening, added her piece too."

“The training that enstated highlighted and helped the areas that we needed to improve." It was more effective than what any professor could do for us." ”

Desir smiled."

“Really? I’m going to prepare the training for tonight." All of you should come prepared!”

“Yes, sir!”

“Got it." ”

“…”

There was only one person who remained silent." Desir stared at her."

“Romantica?”

“Okay, okay! I got it!”

Romantica has been diligently participating Desir’s training lately."

There had been several occasions in the past where she skipped out on them, but since “the incident”, Romantica’s attitude had changed completely." She faithfully undertook the training offered by Desir."

While they were chatting about these things, all of a sudden, there was a loud noise."

A woman stepped up on the stage in front of the hall." She appeared to be somewhat familiar."

She was professor Bridget, the one who had taught them study of magic."

She wiped off the sweat on her face twice, then turned on the magic microphone." Her voice echoed deeply in the hall."

“It is great to see you again, Hebrion students." I am professor Bridget, the study of magic teacher." I want to explain some of the changes we will be implementing this semester that couldn’t be explained at the opening ceremony." ”

Immediately, the entire hall was silent."

“I assume that you all have heard what happened in the Western Kingdom Union." The Outsiders invaded and caused serious damage to the Western Kingdom Union." Therefore we, Hebrion Academy, have decided to take measures and prepare against such a serious threat." As a result, a patrol squad of graduates now reside at Hebrion Academy and some security regulations will now be enforced to keep you all safe." ”

Security regulations."

“These are the measures regarding external activities." In order to leave the Hebrion Academy grounds, you will now need to get approval from your grade professors." Your grade professors must be informed of where your party will be going." Also, in order to enter the dormitory after 10PM, you will now need to submit a reasonable excuse for the late entrance." ”

Romantica sighed." She left Hebrion Academy pretty often and thought it was going to be an extra hassle for her." Professor Briggette continued listing the additional regulations."

“We will now also start imposing a curfew from 6PM." We encourage all students to follow the instructions from all members of the faculty." I have personally increased the security magic around our school." If you are not higher than Fifth-Circle, don’t even think about sneaking out." ”

She continued on for a couple more minutes after this." To summarize it all, school life was about to get a lot more strict and tiring."

After finishing her words, Professor Bridget announced that all of the information regarding the new regulations would be sent to the communication pads." She then left the stage." The hall soon returned to a normal level of noise again, as students discussed the implications of these regulations."

“Oh my, so she is saying that we have nowhere but here to go." ”

“I can’t even date." ”

“I need to shop for chips and snacks." ”

Many students including Romantica were not happy about this, but Desir thought differently."

“Think about what would happen if the Western Kingdom Union tragedy was repeated here." It’d be horrible." ”

“…”

Romantica involuntarily recalled what happened and ceased complaining."

“Yeah, you’re right." I can’t imagine the result of them unleashing such havoc here." ”

She ripped a piece off of the rye bread in her hand and shoved it into her mouth, as if trying to block that thought."

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**RMSBS - Episode 88 . In Between Summer and Winter (2)**

After dinner, they headed over to their party office."

Desir picked up the schedule from his desk and distributed it to the party members." Everyone read through the schedule that would dictate whether their semester as would be heaven or hell." Their schedules seemed to differ a lot from the first semester." Pram was carefully looking at his schedule and his lips ended up forming a smile."

“We have three courses together, Desir!”

Pram shouted out in delight."

Desir was a magician." Pram was a swordman." As they had different foundational curriculum to follow, they barely had a chance to share the same class."

Starting this second semester, they had a couple of mandatory common classes." As a result, Desir and Pram would be taking quite a few classes together."

Romantica narrowed her eyes as she checked out her schedule."

“Look at this." The previous sparring class professor is sick, and they hired a new professor for the class." Their name is… Essenblanc Tistachia? It doesn’t sound like he is from Hebrion." What do you think?”

“You can tell when you hear his accent." ”

“I don’t care who that is, but I just hope he’s better than the Magic Engineering professor." ”

The professor of the Magic Engineer class was Pugman."

\* \* \*

The next day, the full schedule of Hebrion Academy academic curriculum began."

Botany Class lecture."

The professor of Botany, for the Alpha Class, was Prof." Katweek." She was in her mid-50s." Her voice was slow and calm." Her lecture was mainly theoretical." Romantica was already bored while sitting in this lecture."

“Perhaps, she’s going to focus on Mandra Gondra." I don’t even know why we need to know that Mandra Gondra’s scream is closely related to abdominal pain and all of that." ”

Harrumphed Romantica."

“There will be times when you need to act based on all of your knowledge." ”

Desir responded."

History Class lecture."

The professor of this class was a young man, Prof." Kevin." He has had a very sharp nose and wore rectangular glasses with sharp angles on their edges." He always assigned a tremendous amount of homework to his students as he felt that History Class was the most important class of all."

“Professor Kevin thinks that we only have History Class in this school." ”

Romantica criticized as she dumped the history textbook in her locker." So far, there was no class that she really liked and felt positive about."

“Plus, we have Rune class next." I don’t know how I will be able to fix myself to a seat for those long dragging hours." ”

Romantica sighed deeply, as if trying to sink into the ground." Prof." Banquick had the longest lecture of them all."

Surprisingly though, the lecture wasn’t boring at all." It was fantastic." Prof." Banquick was an old man in his 60s with thick glasses." His lecture today ended 10 minutes earlier than it was supposed to." Students screamed, bursting out into the hallway when they found out the lecture was over."

“I can’t believe that he ended his lecture early." Why do you think he did that?”

“Maybe he had something to celebrate?”

They tried to guess how this miracle occured."

“I think it’s you, Desir." ”

Adjest pointed out."

“Me?”

“Yeah." It’s because… um…”

“Because that professor is also a commoner like you." ”

A strange voice jumped into the conversation." It was a tall boy with dark eyebrows." He was wearing a blue coat that represented the Blue Moon Party." Grade 1, single ranker top 3." Donetta Hadune." His tone was pretty haughty."

“Commoners have a barbaric misconception that they will be successful if others of their kind are successful." They are like parasites living off of each other." Don’t you think so?”

A frown crept onto Romantica face." Just as she was about to say something, Desir turned his head away."

“Not worth it." Ignore him." ”

What just happened was going to be nothing in comparison with what was instore for them in Magic Engineering class." As soon as Desir and his friends entered the lecture room, all of the attention spotted fell onto them."

It was anything but warm, welcoming attention." Most of the students in this lecture were Blue Moon Grade 1 and 2 single rankers who were outright hostile to Desir and his party members."

After Adjest changed party from Blue Moon to Desir’s, they were more sensitive and harsh towards Desir’s party."

The director of Blue Moon Party is was Professor Pugman." He hates hated commoners." He disliked Desir in particular since during the promotion period, he involved himself in the problem of the transfer of Adjest from Blue Moon to Desir’s party." He had even managed to somehow become meaner than he was in the last semester." One day, during a practical lesson on building a First-Circle magic sequence using a Class Six magic stone, Desir submitted a complete sequence before everybody else." However, he got a minus mark on his grade." Prof." Pugman said that Desir didn’t check his work carefully, but everyone knew it was just an excuse."

“That was a ridiculous nitpick." ”

Romantica said as she poured salt into her soup."

“You did build it perfectly." You didn’t even have to review it." ”

“He just needed an excuse to deduct points." ”

Said Adjest as she shrugged her shoulders as if it were no surprise."

Things have always been like this." It’s always been a Blue Moon Party member who gets the top score." Desir’s party always had something less than them."

“What’s next?”

“Magic Theory." ”

“Is it Prof." Bridget?”

After the lunch was over, Desir, Adjest, and Romantica headed over to the lecture room for Magic Theory class."

“It is a beautiful day to talk about magic theory!”

Prof." Bridget was always calm." She was well-known as a Hollow Witch through out the continent." She was a magnificent sorcerer, and her lecture was just so great and that nothing else could compare."

Unlike other lectures that emphasized theories and were filled up with rambling discussions and tangential tirades, her lecture was more skewed towards practical exercises based on real situations." Therefore it was easy but contained so much useful information."

After explaining a concept, Prof." Bridget spoke to the students."

“Okay, we are now going to practice alternating the magic we already know." Make groups of three, and after you practice performing it, give feedback to each other." Today’s lecture and practice will be applied to the final evaluation." ”

The students spread out to practice magic on their own."

Prof." Bridget was busy walking around the lecture room and helping students cast magic correctly, giving feedback on how they invoked their magic." After the lecture was over, Prof." Bridget walked up to Desir."

“Please follow me to my office, Desir." ”

“Yes." ”

He answered as he nodded." It was a surprise to Desir, but he tried not to show any awkwardness."

\* \* \*

Her room was full of well-organized books and references, just like a library." Among them there were unique and antique references." Desir had been to this office a couple of times already, but every time he came here, he couldn’t help but be astonished at the scale of it."

Prof." Bridget brought out two cups of hot tea." She placed them on the table, then signalled Desir to come over with her hand." As soon as Desir had a seat, she started talking."

“Desir, do you remember when we first met?”

“Of course, I do." ”

Desir nodded quickly."

“The Royal Library that all citizens are allowed to visit freely." You were reading a book there." Even though you were so young at that time, you were so thirsty for knowledge and eager to read more." ”

“It was my only learning place and I was pretty desperate at that time." ”

Prof." Bridget made a bitter smile."

“I felt bad for you because I knew that you had so much passion for learning, but you couldn’t due to the limited environment you were in." That’s why I gave you a recommendation for Hebrion Academy." ”

Desir nodded his head as the memory of his past was still so vivid."

Without her help, it was impossible for Desir to enter Hebrion Academy to begin with." Desir already had excellent skills." With her help, he could create First-Circle spells and was accepted by Hebrion Academy with Bridget’s recommendation."

Bridget was a savior to Desir."

“Desir, you were someone beyond what I could imagine." And honestly, I couldn’t ever imagine you reaching where you are now." ”

Then, her face darkened."

“You again saved so many people in a foreign land." I am truly proud of you." But… I wish you would take care of yourself more…”

Desir couldn’t say anything to her."

“I know that you didn’t have a choice, but I still think that this is way too dangerous To sacrifice yourself all of the time to save other’s lives." ”

Bridget’s voice betrayed her worry on this matter."

“You must be so sick of hearing this from other people." I want you to remember that there are so many people who think about you." Do you know what I mean?”

“… Yes, I do." Professor." ”

“Alright, you should go now." ”

When Bridget finally heard Desir’s response, her face regained its smile."

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**RMSBS - Episode 89 . In between Summer and Winter (3)**

All of the Grade 1 and Grade 2 single rankers participated in the sparring class." Most of the single rankers were part of the Blue Moon party."

Donetta Hadune was talking to his party members excitedly."

“He probably begged Zod with something like ‘Can you please tell people that I beat this?’ ”

“Saying that he is the only hope for the Hebrion Academy commoners." ”

People giggled." When Desir and his party arrived, they deliberately raised their voices and shared hostile jokes with the intent to embarrass the party."

Adjest and Romantica stared at them but would not react unless Desir did so first." The crowd was mainly targeting Desir, so there was nothing that they could do."

Adjest spoke in an annoyed tone."

“One day… I’ll beat them up until they die." ”

“I’ll join you." ”

Donetta finally shut up when the professor arrived."

“Nice to meet you all." I’m professor Essenblanc Tistachia." I’ll be facilitating the sparring lecture today." ”

Essenblanc had a huge scar on his face and his hair was elegantly brushed back." He was in his mid 30s." He also had thick scars on his arms that made him look strong."

“I was once a soldier, captain rank, for the Golden Hawk Knights of the Hebrion Empire." I used to train and raise little kids like you into a state of combat readiness." ”

One of the students seemed upset by his words." Essenblanc raised his voice even louder."

“I believe that your true ability only comes with real experience." But you are still inexperienced and immature." You are just like plants grown in a greenhouse." Through these sparring courses you will experience something very close to real battles and grow to your maximum power and strength." ”

“I have a feeling that this professor is super strict…”

Romantica muttered."

“From what I have heard… there are a lot of interesting students here who are single rankers." First…”

He scanned through the single ranker section and his eyes stopped on Desir."

“So… Are you the number one single ranker, Desir Arman?”

“Yes, I am." ”

The corner of the professor’s lips curled up into a smirk."

“Desir, please come down." ”

When Desir came down to the podium, Essenblanc squeezed Desir’s shoulder."

“When I said ‘inexperienced and immature’, that doesn’t apply to this young man." This student has realized his full combat potential." You know that, don’t you?”

“Thanks for your kind words." ”

“Rumors say that even before the opening ceremony, you have achieved great things." You have killed elite Outsiders and an ancient demon with Zod Exarion, the world’s greatest wizard." You are also a technical advisor for the Mage Tower? What a great list of achievements at such a young age." ”

As Essenblanc continued, Donetta’s face contorted with a frown even greater than before."

“I know that all of the nobles at Hebrion Academy are haughty." You have proven that they are no different than anyone else." You should be proud as a commoner." ”

“… Professor?”

“But Desir, look around yourself within the school." Look at how all of the noble’s attention now falls upon you." This is the treatment you get as the hero who saved thousands of people." ”

“Because it is a lie." ”

Donetta couldn’t stay quiet for a moment longer."

“There is no one who witnessed him killing the demon." Zod probably saw him and sympathised with this commoner, sharing some part of his achievement with Desir." ”

“Oh… Is that what you think? You are… Donetta Hadune? Is that your opinion?”

“Most of us think so." We know that commoners are not capable of doing such things." ”

“Please stand up, Donetta." ”

Essenblanc walked away from Desir and strode towards the Blue Moon party section." Each step he made seemed to resonate, creating a subtle change in the atmosphere of the room." Before anyone realised, the room felt very cold and threatening." It also felt like he would unsheathe his sword and attack someone at any moment."

Surprisingly though, Essenblanc agreed with Donetta."

“Well, you are right, Donetta." Unlike nobles, commoners are inferior in many respects." For the most part, they are not capable, or just can’t do various things that are easy for nobles." You can simply see this from the test results." You can easily compare the ability of the students of Hebrion Academy via these tests." The noble students are way better than the commoners." ”

With Essenblanc’s words Donetta’s face brightened." Essenblanc continued."

“Some people think that it is a waste of time and money to even accept them into Hebrion Academy." Maybe Desir himself spread this rumor to build the reputation of the commoners." ”

“That’s right! That’s what I wanted to say!”

Donetta clapped his hands in excitement from finally finding someone to connect with."

Essenblanc smiled."

“Then, why don’t you come down here and spar with him?”

“Wh… at?”

“If you can’t believe it because you didn’t see Desir fighting against the demon, then you can come up right now and fight with him." Win and prove that he is a liar." ”

Desir thought it was ridiculous how Essenblanc brought about this whole situation without asking what he thought about it, but he decided to go with the flow since it didn’t seem too bad."

“Well… That’s…”

Donetta couldn’t finish his sentence." His mouth flapped open and shut, as if trying to say something, but no voice came out."

“If you are not going to come down, just find your seat." ”

Donetta hesitated a few seconds." He looked at Desir and plopped himself down into his seat." Romantica snickered."

“I love that professor." What do you think?”

Romantica proclaimed."

She nudged Adjest and realized that her face looked serious." Adjest was looking at the professor very unpleasantly."

“… He is discriminating against commoners." This only feeds the nobles’ superiority complex." This makes it all the more uncomfortable." ”

“Why? It’s true though." ”

“But…”

She swallowed her words but definitely felt this situation was slightly suspicious."

“Raise your hand if you think you can beat Desir." ”

Essenblanc announced."

Nobody raised their hand."

“You guys claimed that commoners are inferior and less worthy than nobles." Is this all you can do? Mock and tease others with just words." Are you one of those pathetic people who can take pride in yourself without proving your ability?”

He taunted the Blue Moon party."

“So… I guess there is no noble that can beat this commoner?”

One student raised their hand and Essenblanc smiled in response."

“Great." Come on down." ”

One man walked down." He was tall with hair that stopped at ear length." The students who saw him were appalled." Desir knew who he was."

“What’s your name?”

“Kelt Pasil Niplica." ”

He was the younger brother of Professor Pugman."

“Wow… A big shot." ”

Essenblanc laughed." He seemed to be enjoying this moment."

\* \* \*

The wind felt chilly." It was now fall."

Desir and Kelt walked up onto the cold and empty stage." The stage was located in the center of the field and was surrounded by stone and granite boulders."

Kelt started talking."

“I want to apologize on behalf of Donetta." He never stopped gossiping, even though I told him to stop several times." ”

Desir questioned."

“Why are you apologizing? You have nothing to do with it." ”

“We are the Blue Moon party." ”

Desir thought that he would also hate commoners." He thought that it was mistaken to believe that he’d be different as he was the brother of Professor Pugman."

“I just want to make it clear that I didn’t challenge you just because you’re a commoner." I did it because I wanted to see if you are as good as the rumours say you are." ”

“Sure." ”

Desir carefully scanned him."

‘Unlike other noble men, he doesn’t appear to be discriminatory against commoners." Is he Fourth-Circle…’

Fourth-Circle is the level where one can be considered strong." He must be one of the best in Grade 2." Most of the crowd predicted that it was easily going to be Kelt’s win." Kelt was well known and confirmed to be an experienced sorcerer."

Kelt offered his hand towards Desir."

“Let me introduce myself again." Kelt Niplica." ”

Desir liked this guy." He had a good first impression of him." He was strong, but humble and well mannered." Before all of that, he wasn’t biased by social class."

‘… I’ll let you have this one by making it close." ’

Desir accepted the handshake."

“Desir Arman." ”

After the handshake, they separated and maintained a distance between each other." Both of them wore Clothes Lines." As they were wizards, they didn’t have any weapons in their hands."

“If you’re ready, let’s start the duel." ”

Essenblanc announced the beginning of the duel." Simultaneously, magical spells starting arranging themselves in front of both wizards."

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TLC: N/A

QC: N/A

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**RMSBS - Episode 90 . In Between Summer and Winter (4)**

[Sea Blast]

Desir was a lot faster and used more intricate formations when casting his spells." Nobody could mimic how he cast spells."

[Water Strike]

However, Kelt was a Fourth-Circle magician." Even though Desir had created Third-Circle magic by using the power of an artifact, Kelt’s magic was a lot stronger than Desir’s." They traded magic attacks, like a game of tennis the spells went back and forth between the two." Both wizards swapped between attack and defence." As their spells collided with each other, the stage cracked and tiles flew off of it."

‘I guess the gossip about him was exaggerated." ’

Kelt heard that Desir defeated the ancient demon and was on high alert regarding his strength, but a few minutes into the fight, he realized that the power of Desir’s magic was not as great as his speed and intricate casting."

‘… I heard that he had some skill with inverting magic." ’

Desir hadn’t inverted Kelt’s magic yet." Kelt thought that Desir was still just dipping his toe in the water, holding back against him." He decided to attack him with something stronger and unexpected."

Desir’s magic flew directly at Kelt’s face." Kelt cast a spell of a higher level to defend with."

[Splash]

Kelt’s body transformed into water, and Desir’s magic penetrated through Kelt’s body without causing any damages." After a few attacks from Desir’s and Kelt’s defensive magic, the stage was flooded with water." It was hard to locate where Kelt, who was entirely made up of water, was hiding on the stage." Desir looked around."

[Fire Bolt]

Desir shot fire magic toward the water, but it only left an empty stage behind as the water evaporated in just that spot." Kelt wasn’t there." Kelt silently observed Desir’s reaction and thought it was funny."

‘Come on." There is now only one thing that you can do." Use wide-area magic." ’

Wide-area magic typically required a long time to cast." There should be a gap when casting this type of magic." That’s what Kelt aimed for." He wanted to attack Desir when he was busy casting a wide-area magic."

Desir started casting magic." It seemed like he was casting wide-area magic, just as Kelt expected." Kelt waited continued to wait though, as he didn’t want to show his body while he wasn’t absolutely sure what Desir was doing." Instead, he cast magic that didn’t require a physical body."

The water still left on the stage transformed into blades and surrounded Desir." Just as all of the blades were about to fly towards Desir…

“When you cast Splash magic, you can choose the timing of when to attack…”

Desir spoke out loud, to no-one in particular."

\*Crunch\*

Desir’s magic stopped all of a sudden." No… it was already complete."

“… and you can’t defend in that condition." ”

“Wait… it wasn't wide-area magic?”

It was Desir just pretending all along." By the time Kelt realized that he was outsmarted, Desir’s magic poured down upon Kelt."

[Summon Lightning]

Countless spears with great sparks on their tips flew at where Kelt was hiding." Kelt, who was in a state of shock for a short moment, still somehow managed to swiftly cancel his splash magic, removing the blades around Desir and then cast a magic that he could defend himself with."

[Create Water] was a spell that created pure water." The curtains of pure water formed a screen in front of Kelt." The pure water redirected the electrical current into the ground." When the lightning stabbed into the water curtain, it exploded like a balloon."

The explosion pushed Kelt back a few steps." If he was pushed back just three more steps, he would fall off of the stage and lose the battle."

“You seem to know how to handle electric magic well enough." When you boldly cast Splash magic, I thought you had no idea." ”

Desir remarked."

The flood on the stage started making sparks and crackling noise soon reverberated throughout the field."

“… Sure." Now I learnt so much about you." ”

Kelt strongly clenched his fists."

“The warm-up has ended." ”

Kelt underestimated Desir because he was at a lower circle as a wizard and the magic he cast was not all that strong." He recognised that he had been careless."

He stretched his hand out in front of himself." He started to cast a vast number of spells." The scale of the magic showed that Kelt had changed his attitude and was putting his best effort into it now."

[Create Water]

[Create Water]

[Create Water]

[Create Water]

The level of water on the stage rapidly increased and finally stopped at their ankles."

With a minor motion of Kelt’s finger, the water became a tsunami and rushed towards Desir."

Desir’s eyes moved quickly to read the path of the water waves."

‘Right." ’

[Gravity Reverse]

Magic that flipped the effects of gravity."

The currents could no longer reach where Desir was standing as the opposing gravity pulled it down."

Desir could simply walk out of the path of the raging current." Still, it wasn’t the solution for this situation as the water was overflowing the entire stage and could attack Desir from any angle at any time."

‘It’s impossible to evaporate all of the water using fire magic." ’

The amount of water was so great that even if Desir evaporated some of it, Kelt would just make more water in a heartbeat."

Then, Desir just had to evaporate all of the water at once, not little by little." However, it was impossible for Desir as he wasn’t a Fourth-Circle magician." He didn’t have equal power to strike Kelt’s magic."

\*Brrrrrng\*

“I can tell you can’t beat this one." ”

The water was in the exact position that Kelt carefully desired it to be." It made currents and waves to apply continuous pressure on Desir."

Desir decided to focus on blocking Kelt’s attacks." Although he couldn’t come up with a solution to the water magic, he wasn’t getting outright trounced either." He continued to think about how he could react to this as he kept casting."

‘Then… OUCH!’

Desir was lifted by a huge wave." Luckily, he regained his balance before he was pushed off of the stage." The damage from the water pressure was great enough that it was actually painful to be on the receiving end of."

‘I guess I was too close to him." ’

Desir bit his lips."

It was an attack from the left side." Desir couldn’t pay attention to maintaining a distance from Kelt due to the distraction of currents attacking from every angle."

‘I need to figure this out." ’

Ever since Desir lost eyesight in his left eye, estimating distances had become very difficult for him." For the battles where every movement and every magic counted, his new impediment was now his greatest weakness."

Kelt didn’t know about that of course." However, as he observed Desir only attacking him in certain ways, he noticed that Desir’s sense of direction and distance was terribly weak."

It was questionable." Now that Kelt had battled with Desir, Desir truly was a strong magician." Not as much as people described him as, but Desir still had a great level of skill." Above all, he was experienced in real battles." Desir sharply cut off or blocked the attacks aimed at him from all directions except his left." Kelt wondered, for some reason, Desir was peculiarly slow to react to all the attacks aimed at his left."

Well, it was a chance for Kelt." Kelt didn’t hesitate and poured magic out at Desir."

[Aqua Tornado]

Third-Circle magic."

Since the area was full of water it could actually do damage at level of Fourth-Circle."

\*Fwoosh\*

All of the water started to gather as it twisted into and formed a pillar of water." The number of water tornados increased extremely fast." They started to sweep everywhere on the field." The stage was made of stone and it began to crack under this merciless assault."

Desir didn't sit down and just watch this happen though."

[Liquid Oxygen]

A liquid that created spooky smoke that spread out like dense fog." As this liquid spread out from where Desir was standing, all of the water that it touched instantly froze…

‘Oh, boy!’

All of the water on the stage gradually froze and broke out of Kelt’s control." The liquid that Desir created also stiffened the frightening water tornado pillars into uselessness."

Desir looked at Kelt."

“So, you can’t cast that kind of magic anymore." ”

“…”

Kelt didn’t immediately reply." He was busy chuckling in his mind."

“This is all you could think of?”

Kelt pointed at his surroundings."

“Look around you." Now your magic has been spread out over the entire stage to freeze the water." Even at your feet, too." ”

The liquid had indeed spread everywhere as it froze everything that it touched." The only area that the liquid hadn’t covered was the tiny space where Desir was standing."

“That said, you can’t escape from my magic anymore." ”

“But you can’t cast any more magic." ”

“You’ll see." ”

Kelt pointed at the sky." The sky started to darken in all directions."

Mana moved in a colossal torrent." It was mana on the scale of the Fourth-Circle."

As Desir looked up at the sky,it started to rain on the stage." Desir realized what it was right away."

‘It’s narrow in scope and only temporary in terms of controlling the climate, but this is definitely…’

“It’s weather control magic." ”

Kelt replied, as if reading Desir’s mind."

[Weather control]

It interrupts the climate and forcibly changes the weather instantly." Initially, this was one of the highest spells that belong to the Fifth-Circle level of wide-area magic, but Kelt minimized the scale and cast it at the Fourth-Circle."

\*Pitter\* \*Patter\*

It started with just one or two drops of rain and soon became a downpour."

Kelt arranged another spell in front of himself." Immediately the downpour intensified as raindrops fell like bullets."

\*Cling\* \*Cling\*

Desir took his Clothes Line jacket off and covered his head with it." The coat ceaselessly made sounds indicating that its defensive function was activating." However, it wouldn’t last much longer than a couple more seconds."

“You had better surrender before the Clothes Line is destroyed."."

Kelt said triumphantly."

“You’re great for your age." ”

Desir said as he took the Clothes Line jacket off his head."

“What?”

\*Clap\*

Desir suddenly clapped." And what happened next was entirely unexpected." The stage just exploded all of a sudden."

“Eeek!”

There was a gasp." White smoke started to rise into the sky."

Kelt’s body bounced off of the stage." Kelt couldn’t do anything as everything happened in an instant."

Kelt had a Clothes Line on too and it protected Kelt from injury." He slowly got up and made a face that revealed that even he had no idea what had just happened to him."

“What happened?”

Kelt enquired."

“What I invoked is magic that spreads out liquid oxygen." When the liquid oxygen froze the water, it expanded and eventually created an explosion." With that amount of water and liquid oxygen it would simply blow you off the stage."."

Kelt looked at the stage that did not even exist anymore."

“I clearly lost." ”

Kelt laughed bitterly."

“I couldn’t even see your strongest asset, inversion." ”

“…”

Desir couldn’t say that he didn't try his best just because he wanted to see how strong Kelt was." He wanted to observe Kelt’s movement."

“Fine." I admit that I lost." ”

Kelt nodded and made a genuine smile."

----

TLC: N/A

QC: N/A

Note : Please download the sponsor's game to support us!

**RMSBS - Episode 91 . So They Go On (1)**

Kelt Pasil Niplica was one of the top students within the academy who had earned great titles like being the Grade 2 leader of the Blue Moon party and also being a single ranker at the Fourth-Cirlce." He was also the younger brother of Professor Pugman." Every single person in Hebrion Academy knew who he was."

And Desir beat Kelt." In front of all of the Grade 1 and 2 single rankers." Desir knocked him off the stage clearly and fairly." This of course brought a significant change to Desir’s school life."

“Did you see how he walked away? It was bizarre." ”

Romantica said."

They were sitting in Desir’s party office." Romantica’s laughter was loudly amplified in the small room." Just like Romantica had said, after the big battle, they had confronted Donetta a few more times during lectures." He had completely lost his morale." He was too dispirited to spend energy blaming and finger pointing at Desir." Rather he was busy rushing out of his way to avoid Desir whenever he encountered him."

“You look happy, Romantica." ”

Desir voiced and Romantica nodded in response to."

“Of course! You knocked them down a few pegs so easily!”

This unfortunately hadn’t changed how people looked at Desir’s party." It had however slightly reduced the bawling of the nobles that had been blatantly expressing their unpleasant thoughts and emotions up until now." There were now far fewer people questioning Desir’s ability to fight."

Desir’s party members no longer needed to blush in anger and bottle up their anger at these people." It was a very peaceful and comfortable school life that they had not been able to experience previously."

Finally, there were more."

\*Knock knock\*

“Another one?”

Romantica got up from the couch and adjusted her sleeves." She dragged over a chair and set it up in front of Desir."

“I’ll bring the tea." ”

Pram chirped as he went into the kitchen."

“Come in." ”

After Desir’s greeting, the door opened." A girl with short brown hair and huge dark-framed glasses walked into the room."

“How can we help you?”

Romantica kindly but impatiently asked the girl."

“Professor Vanquik told me that your party helps people train with no requirements to join… I would like to join the party." ”

Professor Vanquik."

He taught Rune class and had supported Desir since the second semester started." He was a commoner like Desir."

“Well, please take a seat first." ”

When Desir sat down in front of the girl, Pram brought over some snacks." From the pile of papers, Desir pulled out an application form."

“So, what’s your name?”

“Freechel." Freechel Kay." ”

Freechel looked nervous and uncomfortable." She looked around the room and carefully asked Desir."

“Is it really true that this party also accepts Beta students?”

\*Drop\*

“What made you think that we won’t accept them?”

Freechel hesitated."

“Well, your party is so powerful, and I’m only a Beta student…”

“There are no limitations or restrictions for application." You don’t have to worry about it, but Freechel, have you heard about our party?”

“Yes, I have." The training is really hard, and all of the nobles hate this party." ”

“Then, why do you want to join our party?”

Of course, there were parties that existed among the Beta classes." However, their primary mission was a lot different from the clearing of the Shadow Worlds." For some of the lucky students, they could participate in Class Seven Shadow Worlds to receive some advantages from the Alpha Class party." Unfortunately, some Beta class parties were only established to serve the Alpha class." It was an ugly result of unfairness and injustice."

Desir used his communication pad to retrieve information about Freechel." Her old party was called Arach, one of the subcontracted parties that assisted Alpha class by looking up information related to the Shadow World battles."

“… I couldn’t stand it anymore." ”

Freechel pulled out her communication pad from her inner pocket and showed Desir some pictures from it." There were many pictures." The pictures of textbooks torn apart, desks with broken legs…

Desir frowned his face." Now he fully understood why Freechel had come to him."

“Did you get bullied?”

“…”

Freechel nodded and continued."

“But no one in my party could help me." Even the professor." He couldn’t oppose the Alpha class by helping me out." ”

In Hebrion Academy, all of the bullying and hazing by the nobles was ignored and overlooked without exception."

Even though all of the party members of Arach seemed like they had ignored the violence and cruelty, Freechel didn’t seem to be bothered." It wasn’t that they didn’t want to help, but it was more of a case that they couldn’t help."

Desir pressed on his left eye with his fingers." It was not easy to help other people as doing so increases one’s own exposure to dangerous situations." The people who needed to be blamed and punished were the people who bullied her."

“… if it’s only because of this, you don’t have to join our party." We can solve this problem for you." ”

Freechel shook her head."

“No, I don’t think it’s meaningful in that way." Sure, I want to pay them back." Doing so would make me feel better." That’s why I came here." You train your members with no requirements." ”

“Ok." We will train you to the best of our ability." ”

So Freechel was accepted as a member of the party."

Desir looked at the list of the party members." There were three new members, including Freechel, on the list." Ever since Desir won the sparring fight with Kelt, people had come to Desir’s party to join."

‘The Beta class students who were bullied by nobles, and couldn’t do anything about it, have started coming to our party." ’

It was a good sign." Everything that Desir had deliberately shown to people had now started to show its effect."

‘It’s really disappointing how Beta Class training is designed." ’

There were no big changes to the Beta classes."

‘And there will be some talented people who will fall into Beta classes next year as well." ’

These students couldn’t take decent classes, simply because they were commoners." Amongst them there would be talented students that had a decent amount of potential but without professional training, would never realise it." They needed to be trained, not tamed by the Alpha Class."

The cause of all of this was a deeply rooted prejudice against commoners by the nobles."

‘It all came from the revolution that the Revolutionaries caused." ’

This even happened twelve years ago, leaving an unavoidable scar on both the commoners and nobles, with lasting effects to this very day." The situation just wouldn’t change unless the hatred from both sides disappeared."

‘We need to change this." ’

Nobles and commoners needed to reconcile, so that commoners could be recognized."

‘Gather all of the talented students." Then, provide them with an environment where they can get decent training and flourish." ’

There were so many students from Beta Classes that would ace things with proper training."

‘Like capturing a Shadow Labyrinth." ’

\* \* \*

Adjest was standing in the middle of the training facility." The dawn fog had not even disappeared yet."

She swung her sword nonstop as her shiny silver hair danced in the air." She brought out her mana to the fullest extent and didn’t stop practicing until reaching her limit." It was a practice to handle the sword more delicately and she had been repeating this since the second semester started."

Adjest bit her lip incredibly hard."

‘I couldn’t do a single thing." ’

Adjest recalled how helpless she was in the Prillecha Empire."

Until she had encountered the Crow Mask, she thought that she was on the same level as Desir." However, it was purely her own delusion of grandeur."

“Can you stop Pram and Romantica from leaving the ship?”

Desir asked Adjest while they were running away from Dadenewt."

Then, Desir sacrificed himself." Adjest couldn’t take it." She couldn’t take herself watching helplessly from the sidelines." She couldn’t do anything at all."

\*Crack\*

She momentarily lost her attention." The ice attached to her sword fell off." Adjest decided to stop practicing and sat down for a short rest."

“Phew…”

Adjest’s ability was unimaginably great in comparison to others, but the wall of the Fourth-Circle Bishop class was not so easy to break through as a magic-swordsman."

\*Pitapat\*

Adjest felt someone approaching her and immediately turned to look in that direction."

“You’re early today, Adjest." ”

Romantica was walking towards her." She was wearing light training clothes." She clapped, and the dawn fog disappeared."

“Do you have any business with me?”

Romantica stopped in front of Adjest."

“Well, I’m at the training facility." What do you think I’m here for? I’m here to train, too." ”

Then Romantica cast a spell at Adjest without warning." It was a Second-Circle spell."

Adjest lifted her sword and blocked it."

\*Thud\*

A grand sound echoed across the training facility."

“What the heck was that?”

“A practical training session!”

A practical training session."

“You want to be stronger, don’t you? I want to be stronger." And we can finally end the duel we started at the Yellow Ocean Competition." ”

The Yellow Ocean Competition."

Romantica and Adjest had a chance to compete with each other, but they were interrupted by the Outsider’s terrorist attack and lost that opportunity."

“I want to settle it." How about you?”

Adjest assumed that Romantica wasn’t simply saying it to figure out what the result of that competition would have been." Romantica had always kept Adjest in check." She had always been like that."

‘But this is not a bad opportunity." ’

Adjest decided that it wasn’t a bad time to practice her magic sword, like in a real battle." Romantica had been trained by Desir for more than a half year." She was a great magician."

Adjest had no reason to decline." She lifted her sword as her answer."

“But it’s no fun if we ONLY practice with nothing on the line." ”

Adjest responded with."

“What?”

“The person who loses will clean up the office until we have another competition, and the result is flipped." If you accept this condition, then I’ll practice with you." ”

She suggested."

Romantica was speechless."

‘Cleaning…? That’s nonsense!’

Romantica grew up as a noble girl." She wasn’t used to doing menial chores like cleaning." And it was a big problem that there was no specified duration to this ridiculous outcome." It was possible that she might end up cleaning the office forever."

‘I should win." If I win, I can watch Adjest clean up the office all the time." ’

Romantica hesitated for a bit, but soon she nodded her head."

“Sure, I’ll take that bet." Don’t complain later." ”

“I like that." ”

Adjest smiled."

She raised her magic power, and calmly planned her strategy." She had a feeling that for the first time in a long while, she would finally be able to fight at her peak strength."

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TLC: N/A

QC: N/A

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**RMSBS - Episode 92 . So They Go On (2)**

Desir’s party had seven members now." He had to place another couch in the office to accomodate all of the party members."

Freechel first thought the office was big on her first visit, but she had since changed her mind." The room felt cramped with seven people stuffed into this tiny space."

She didn’t mind though." It was nothing compared to what she had to endure at her previous office." At least this place didn’t smell like garbage." The desks here had all four legs intact and the wall wasn’t covered in mold." The floor was polished so clean it shone like a mirror."

‘Who did the cleaning? They did such a good job." This is like heaven compared to her Beta Class office, but…’

Freechel tried so hard not to show her nervousness as she looked around the room." The office was already crowded with party members." Desir had called in everyone."

‘I hope everyone here is nice…’

Freechel tried to say something to the other newbies, and for her own sake, but it wasn’t easy." Two brothers who were also from Beta class, Len and Tarky, were here too." They were swordsmen and had overwhelming physiques." They didn’t look like the friendly type that you could start a casual conversation with."

Freechel sighed and looked away, finding Adjest reading a book calmly." Her shiny silver hair dangled down to waist height." Even though she wasn’t smiling, her overwhelming beauty radiated out."

Freechel already felt an incredible distance between themselves, mentally that is."

‘Oh, boy, I can’t." ’

Freechel quickly gave up talking to Adjest." Maybe part of it was that Freechel was too timid, but another part of it was that Adjest was too high-spec for anybody to casually talk with." She moved her sight to another person." A girl was helplessly sitting on a rocking chair with her hands, squeezing her head." It was a cute girl with blue hair."

“Oh!”

Freechel screamed out of joy to find Romantica." Romantica was here when Freechel came to join the party." Freechel believed that it would be easy to talk to Romantica." She tried to move next to where Romantica was sitting." But soon she realized that it wasn’t going to work."

Romantica was grabbing her head." She seemed to be in deep contemplation, but actually, she was covering a bump on her forehead." She was wearing a fierce expression, so fierce in fact that she could be mistaken for an angry lion."

‘She is not in a condition to talk with someone." ’

There was no one in the office to hold a delightful conversation with." Her analysis complete, Freechel realised that she could only sit awkwardly until the end of this meeting."

‘I can’t do anything about this." ’

‘I’ll give up." It’s easy when I give up." ’

Freechel decided to keep her mouth shut." Then, someone walked toward her."

“We meet again, Freechel." ”

It was Pram Schneider." With a welcoming smile, he handed her a hot teacup with steam billowing out of it."

“Oh, hi." It’s great to meet you again, Pram." ”

“Don’t be nervous, Freechel." Romantica needs some time to be alone." ”

“Oh, sure?”

“Yes, she is really nice and sweet." You will get to know her very soon." May I sit next to you?”

“Sure." ”

“I’ll stay next to you." If you have any questions, let me know." I understand that there are so many things you want to know since it’s your first time." ”

“Oh, thank you." ”

“No problem." We are now a family." ”

‘An angel." This person is an angel." ’

Freechel declared."

At that moment, Desir entered the office."

“So everyone is here." ”

Desir looked around the office."

“The reason I have gathered everyone here is… hey, Romantica, what happened to your forehead?”

Romantica was not happy that Desir asked that specific question."

“Don’t ask." ”

Romantica huffed."

“…”

Desir felt that it was not a good time and place to enquire further." Otherwise, he was sure that he would hear something terrible." He looked away from Romantica and resumed talking."

“I don’t know if you know this, but there will be a competition among parties in the second semester." ”

Everyone nodded, except Freechel." Pram noticed that and explained it to her."

“The party competition is held by all of the existing parties in the Hebrion Academy." ”

“Is it like a promotional contest?”

“No, it’s different." The promotional contest is all about assessing individuals." Parties were only used to support the students, but this party competition is more about assessing each party as a team, not as strong individuals." You can’t play as a single player." And for this one, unlike in the promotional exam, all of the grades will participate together." ”

Students in the Alpha Class and Beta Class show a huge gap as they move up to higher grades." It tends to become a stage for Alpha Class students since they are more dominant in skills."

“Of course, we will all compete, and naturally, we will achieve great results." I will not be satisfied with average results." ”

Desir calmly stated, as if this was not a big deal to him."

“And we will win this contest." ”

Freechel grasped." Her face turned a little pale, and she looked towards Pram."

“Did I hear that right?”

“… Yes, you did." Definitely." ”

“But… But winning this kind of contest means…”

“It means that we need to beat up all the parties, including the Blue Moon party." He wants to stand on the top of the Hebrion Academy." ”

“It’s not easy, but he said it so easily." ”

“Oh, you’ll get used to it." Desir is always like that, and…”

Pram’s eyes stayed on Desir, and he solemnly declared."

“He has always achieved it." ”

“… !”

Freechel tightly shut her mouth." Unlike her, there were some party members who opposedthis declaration."

“Did you say that we will win the contest?”

Takiran stood up in agitation."

“Is there a problem?”

“Is it realistic? I know that your party is so amazing, and that’s why we are all here." But… The party competition is quite different from the promotional contest." ”

Desir nodded."

“You’re right." The party competition is different from the promotional contest." Especially since for the party competition all of the grades participate together and we can easily experience gaps in skill level first-hand." But let me tell you." It is truly possible." ”

“… What?”

Takiran thought Desir was a dreamer, and he was reaching out toward a dream that could never be achieved."

Adjest added her piece to the conversation."

“Desir, what does it mean when we are all pressured by the result of the competition? Our party is already getting enough support from the school, and what we need right now is not winning or becoming a top ranked party." ”

“Good question, Adjest." ”

Desir’s party was getting so much support financially from the tower already." They lacked nothing financially, as a brief glance at their bank account would attest to."

“Like you said, we’ve got enough support from the tower." It’s really enough." We’ve been promoted to single rankers as Beta Class students." We also were made famous from the Deltaheim case." ”

The Mage Tower truly was the best sponsor and filled Desir’s party’s pockets full." The reputation of Desir’s party was as great as Blue Moon’s."

“You need to know that the reason I started this party and aimed to become a single ranker wasn’t for our individual benefit." ”

Desir looked back and forth between Pram and Romantica." In response, they both nodded their heads."

To prove the proficiency of individuals and change the education system of the Hebrion Academy which neglected and ignored the potential of commoners, labelling them incompetent." Desir’s ultimate goal was the beginning of all of the preparation required for battle with the Shadow World." However, Desir did not need to disclose that here." He was looking way too far into the future."

“It is a simple reason that Hebrion Academy doesn’t provide a decent education for Beta Classes." They think it’s not worth it." They claim that we will never produce as great of a result as nobles will." ”

The commoner professors put so much effort into teaching them." On the other hand, the noble professors didn’t even bother to teach them." It was obvious from the beginning that the Beta Class would not be properly educated, since the majority of the professors at the Hebrion Academy were aristocratic."

Len, Takiran, and Freechel bit their lips unconsciously." They were mad." It was frustrating to show what they were capable of to people who didn’t want to see anything from them."

“All of our new members are from the Beta classes." What did you learn from your classes today? Freechel, can you share what you learned from your classes today?”

“… Well, it was a self-study session." ”

Freechel answered."

“Len and Takiran, how about you guys? Have you made some progress since you started attending this school? You can say something if you disagree with me." ”

Nobody spoke up." Desir’s words had uncovered the reality that was so brutal to everyone present."

“It is true that your skills are not as competent as the students from the Alpha Classes, but it’s not about what you are and who you are." It’s not because you are untalented." It’s not because you are commoners." ”

Desir voice raised a little as he delivered his speech passionately."

“Status doesn’t mean anything." It shouldn’t be a tool to judge you." You just couldn’t learn because there was no opportunity to do so." ”

Everyone focused on his words."

“I am not just speaking nonsense." I wish everyone was treated equally." When you stand on the top of the Hebrion Academy, you will be the proof that we, as commoners, can do as well when given the same opportunity and the same education as the nobles do." And when this change continues, nobility will have to admit it." At least, on the surface, the school can no longer treat Beta Classes unfairly or unequally." ”

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TLC: N/A

QC: N/A

Note : Please download the sponsor's game to support us!

**RMSBS - Episode 93 . So They Go On (3)**

Desir’s party had officially started training."

All of the new party members were newbies who had never experienced a real battle." There was a huge amount of training that they required." They needed everything from training on basic formations to what their areas of weakness were."

Desir knew all of the basic movements of different swordsmanship styles since he spent so much time with the knights and swordsmen from different continents in his past life." He settled on teaching the Hebrion Emperor swordsmanship to Lan and the aggressive Northern swordsmanship to Takiran."

Freechel was a water-based mage and she only knew a few spells." Therefore, she focused on learning more spells to increase her repertoire." This was the first task given to her." Desir taught her a couple First-Circle water-based spells that she could practice on her."

After setting the newbies straight, Desir went to check on the old members’ training." Pram was the one who had accomplished the most amongst them."

“Great work, Pram!”

Desir found blue flames covering the tip of his sword." However, these flames were neither bright nor clear, meaning it was definitely an aura." Pram was a step closer to the Bishop level."

“Thank you, Desir." You know that I practiced so hard to get this far." ”

“This is wonderful." Keep doing what you’re doing." When you get enough of the aura on your sword, we can start sparring together." ”

“Yes!”

Desir then went over to Romantica."

In the Wind Magic field metal shot-puts were flung around at 200 kilometers per hour." The shot-puts were fist-sized, but as they burst into the far distance, they quickly became the size of small dots."

There, Romantica was holding her rifle, aiming somewhere in the sky." With a loud noise, the magic she invoked into the rifle was launched into the air."

\*Boom!\*

[Success." ]

A robotic voice sounded from a nearby machine."

Romantica’s shot put was torn into pieces."

When Romantica was done reloading her rifle, Desir applauded."

“Wow, impressive growth." With your capacity, you can shoot someone so far away." You’ll have fewer enemies who can detect your sniping." It’s a great achievement!”

“Well." This is really easy." ”

Wordless invoking was Romantica’s greatest trait." Since her sniping can be done at great speed, it was challenging to defend against this magic." She once used this sniping magic during the battle with Crow Mask and even managed to break his mask."

“Try again." ”

Desir signalled Romantica with the sign to go one more time."

Romantica brought her riflescope to her eye."

“But you should know that your sniper training isn’t complete yet." Your shot is effective when you are dealing with one person, but there’s no guarantee that there will always be only one enemy." ”

Desir pulled down on the lever and a shot-put burst into the sky." Romantica started aiming it while Desir pulled the lever again before Romantica even had a chance to pull the trigger."

The second shot-put was streaking through the air." Romantica lost her composure and her aim was thrown off in panic."

“Wa… Wait!”

“Focus, Romantica." ”

Desir pulled another lever." Romantica tightly bit her lips and stared down the scope."

‘Which one should I shoot first? Forget about the first one, it’s so far away now." Then, the second one? No… the first one isn’t too far away yet." It’s not too late!’

The second of agitation had tremendously affected her accuracy." After making up her mind she took her first shot, but it missed the target."

[Failure]

[Failure]

[Failure]

Terrible results."

“…”

Romantica lowered the rifle from her eye."

“That adds to the list of what I need to practice, right?”

Lastly, Desir headed over to Adjest."

“So, you feel that your rate of progress has slowed down?”

“Yes." ”

“That’s why you practiced so much with the magic sword." ”

“… is there something wrong with that?”

Desir shook his head."

“No, there’s nothing wrong with that." We always have to practice the skills we have not mastered." But if the Bishop Class and the Fourth-Circle are your ultimate goal, then there’s a little bit of a problem." ”

“What should I do then?”

“There are only a few people who can reach the Fourth-Circle." They’re really talented." Even though you have the talent, it is still hard to achieve the elusive Fourth-Circle." ”

Indeed, Fourth-Circle is not something that can be reached with just talent."

“It is because it is incredibly hard to have a solid heart." ”

Fundamentally, only magicians with a solid heart could cast higher tiered magic." Not only that, the more solid the heart is, the stronger the magic they can cast with greater precision and robust structure."

“For Fourth-Circle in particular, you need to have not only skill and casting ability, but more importantly a solid heart that can not be compared to others." ”

“… A solid heart." ”

“Yup." Training for a solid heart will help you not only achieve Fourth-Circle but also allow you to cast any kind of magic in the future." ”

It was homework assigned to Adjest." If she could build a solid heart, ultimately it would serve as her foundation and allow her to become a brilliant magician in the future."

Adjest was lost in her own thought."

Desir’s party’s training continued."

\* \* \*

On the same day, Kelt was busy working on a pile of documents for the Blue Moon party." The Blue Moon party was so huge that they had a leader for each grade inorder to manage all of the students."

Kelt was the Grade 2 leader." Not due to his brother being a professor of this school, but due to his own hard-work and ability." He also had a great reputation amongst his peers."

His feather pen suddenly stopped dancing across the documents." Before he was aware, his brother, Prof." Pugman had come and sat infront him."

“How is everything going?”

Pugman Pasil Niplica was a dean professor of Hebrion Academy and taught magic engineering." He was a big man." There were hints of handsomeness that he had once perhaps possessed, but they were all obscured by the weight he had since put on."

“I’m almost done with all of the paperwork for the new party members." I just need to finish the financial management piece documents." ”

“Great." You’re very useful." You know, the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree." ”

Then, Pugman brought out an apple from his pocket."

“You want one?”

Kelt shook his head."

Pugman took an enormous bite from the apple and the juice popped sprayed everywhere, including onto the documents on the desk." Kelt smudged it off with his hand."

“But, you know, Kelt." I heard that you lost your duel with Desir." ”

Lost."

After Pugman’s statement, Kelt had no idea where to look and what to say in response."

The word, lost, was not acceptable to the Niplica family." It was way too strong." The Niplica family didn’t accept any kind of failure." They had always been on the winning side." It was due to this that they could survive the revolution."

“Um… that…”

Kelt tried to remain calm."

“… Desir was stronger than I thought." You know… I thought it was a baseless rumor, but it wasn’t." I thought all commoners were incompetent and useless." I was totally wrong." ”

“… Oh, Kelt." ”

Pugman’s face quickly changed and Kelt realized that he had said something wrong unacceptable." Pugman leered at Kelt once, then placed the apple onto the desk."

‘Okay, I should wrap up my work now." I don’t think I can continue." ’

Kelt grimmaced." He then quickly cleaned up his desk and put all of the documents in a drawer underneath."

“Kelt, based on what you just said, does that mean you are acknowledging commoners? You should never be fooled by them." ”

Pugman calmly spoke, but the message he wanted to deliver wasn’t very comfortable."

“Commoners are cruel." I still remember so clearly what they have done." The commoners killed so many nobilities who supported the empire." Even our family, the Niplica, had to go through so much sacrifice to survive." Kelt, did you forget all of this?”

“Yes, I remember." ”

Every time Pugman repeated this story, Kelt told him that he still remembered it." However, Kelt honestly didn’t remember any of it." It was way too long ago."

“Commoners always take a chance presented to them to rise up again." If they gain any power, even if it’s little, they will start another revolution." That chance should never be presented to them again, Kelt." Never." ”

Pugman picked up the apple on the desk and had another bite."

“But these days, they have been acting up more flagrantly, forgetting who they really are." They think that they are at a similar level to nobles, which is ridiculous." They even established some parties and now move in organizations." ”

He was describing Desir’s party."

Pugman hated Desir so much."

“They are practicing for the Party Competition." Kelt, you should teach them a lesson." ”

Kelt could only nod his head to this statement."

- - - -

TLC: N/A

QC: N/A

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**RMSBS - Episode 94 . So They Go On (4)**

Freechel felt more at home as she worked through her first week’s training schedule."

The training was tough, but it was also very refreshing for Freechel as she finally felt that she was learning something new." It finally felt like she was now attending the great school known as the Hebrion Academy."

Desir’s party taught her so many things and it all became fuel to further drive her studies." For example, she successfully completed casting [Watering], the so-called hardest First-Circle water magic to cast."

‘What’s in store for me tomorrow? What will I learn?’

Freechel’s confidence had increased." To the shock of other people that knew her, she now greeted everyone with delight." They asked her things like:

“Is this really Freechel?”

“… ?”

Freechel walked past a hallway and saw a crowd murmuring about something." Her feet naturally led her to the epicentre of the trouble."

It was where the lockers were located." Once there she saw a familiar face." She pushed herself through the crowd and as soon as she saw the face of the person sitting in the center of the crowd, she couldn’t help screaming."

“Erje!”

Erje was Freechel’s former party member." She was a pleasant person that was always surrounded by friends." Of course, Freechel was one of her friends." Erje was staring at her locker with a pale face."

Freechel was speechless when she saw the condition the locker was in." There was an unbearable scent wafting out from inside it." The intestines of some kind of animal were thrown into the locker and blood had splattered everywhere, even dripping down onto the floor."

“Oh, this…”

Freechel was familiar with the scene in front of her." It was all too familiar to her."

“Erje! Are you okay? Are you hurt?”

“Freechel… ?”

Erje turned her head and found Freechel in the crowd." Her eyes changed as if she had suddenly found herself face to face with a mortal enemy."

“Wh… What’s wrong, Erje?”

Erje wiped her tears with her sleeve before speaking."

“You’re such a hypocrite." You’re disgusting." ”

Freechel didn’t expect to hear this." Freechel and Erje were not best friends, but they were still relatively close." Freechel found herself without any clues as to why the Erje standing in front of her was consumed by hatred." Freechel’s face betrayed her bewilderment at this change of heart."

Erje manically grinned."

“If you didn’t leave, this wouldn’t have happened to me." ”

Her words tore Freechel’s heart into pieces."

“Who do you think I’m doing all of this for?”

All of this."

Hazing."

This was something that Freechel had been on the receiving end of up until she left the party." After she moved to Desir’s party, the bullying stopped."

She thought it had stopped."

No, it hadn’t." The target of it had just changed."

“It’s all because of you." Because you ran away." ”

“…”

The new target of the bullying was Erje." The charm that she usually displayed had completely disappeared."

“Get the fuck away." I don’t need your pity." ”

Erje turned around and started cleaning up her locker."

Freechel’s heart hurt so much." She was in this exact situation, getting bullied all the time up until recently, and nobody helped her." She was all alone." Freechel understood how Erje felt." She must be sad, miserable, and resentful."

But that’s all it was."

“Erje, I think you're missing something." ”

Erje stopped moving her hands."

“It’s not me who you need to hate." I didn’t do anything wrong to deserve your blame." ”

“… What? I became the new target all because you transferred to another party! What the heck are you talking about?”

Erje growled."

“Why do you think it’s because of me? You are bullied because there are bullies out there! Stop trying to avoid reality." ”

“You became so ballsy, Freechel." Does your new party teach you how to lecture someone?”

\*Click-clack\*

A girl in a school uniform walked down the hallway."

Llada Iddel."

She was a member of the party that used to give Freechel’s previous party work and also happened to be the one that had bullied her."

“… I’m saying what needs to be said." I should have spoken up about this issue before." ”

Freechel stated with pure determination."

“Really? So what difference does talking about it now make? Whatever you say, it will only tickle me." ”

Llada said as she shook her hand as if shooing away a fly."

“I have no interest in you anymore." You better stay out of my way and watch from the sidelines." This has nothing to do with you." ”

“No, I can’t do that." ”

“What? You…”

“Now, I can see it so clearly." You are just a coward who only picks on the weak." ”

Freechel’s impassioned words had clearly upset Llada."

“Freechel, you seem to have misunderstood something." ”

Llada started casting magic."

“The fact that you are now in Desir’s party doesn’t mean that your blood has now changed." ”

It was a violation of the rules to cast magic in the school building, but Llada didn’t care." Second-Circle magic was hurled at Freechel."

[Empage]

Freechel cast defense magic, but she was only a First-Circle magician." Her magic couldn’t block it."

[Water Shield]

“Owww!!”

\*Thud\*

It didn’t do anything at all." Freechel’s defense magic was torn as if it was a thin piece of paper." A wooden fist struck her abdomen and she flew back into the lockers."

“Arrgghh…”

Llada had clearly heard Freechel moaning in pain but she didn’t care." She walked towards Freechel and stomped on her back." It didn’t look like anyone would step up to stop her rampage." She walked back a few steps and then cast another Second-Circle spell."

[Root Binding]

\*Crack\*

From the magic web, tree branches spread out and wrapped Freechel’s body." The pressure it exerted was overwhelming."

“Now, repeat after me." ‘I as a worthless commoner, blamed a noble, and therefore deserve death." ’”

“… You are the worst." ”

“Well, if you say so." ”

The tree branches started to tighten even further around Freechel’s body." Her bones were at extreme risk of breaking into pieces, assuming she could withstand this pain for much longer."

However, Freechel didn’t let any sound of discomfort escape her lips."

“That’s enough." ”

\*Snap\*

Some unknown force instantly destroyed Llada’s magic." The tree branches around Freechel disappeared."

“You!”

“Get away from Freechel." ”

It was Desir." He slowly walked toward the girls and gestured with his hand." Llada felt embarrassed, but she knew how strong Desir was." She stepped backward."

Llada didn’t notice Desir’s casting." His magic and capability were so overwhelmingly strong that her ability was nothing great in front of Desir."

“Desir…”

Freechel got up as she coughed." Desir noticed some bruises on her skin." He also saw some red marks here and there too."

“I tried so hard not to yell at students." ”

Desir sighed as he continued walking."

Llada felt the rage emanating from Desir and instinctively walked backward in an attempt to escape." But she found herself backed into a wall." There was no where else to go."

“This is too much." ”

[Slate]

[Create Marsh]

Llada felt her back start to get wet." It then felt as if the wall was about to swallow her whole." She stirred her body into action to get away from it, but as she moved her body sank into the wall faster."

“Wa… Wait! What are you doing?”

In the span of just a second, her body was half-buried in the wall." She could only twitch her fingers."

“Get me out!”

“I wouldn’t bury you if I had to take you out so soon." ”

Llada tried to cast magic to escape, but Desir simply swung his hand and blocked her magic." Llada was truly helpless."

“Do you think you’ll be okay after this? If any professor comes by, you’re dead meat." ”

“Worry about yourself, kiddo." Your body is trapped in the wall under my Slate magic." I can rip your body into pieces very easily." ”

“What?”

Desir started casting magic again."

Llada sensed that she was in danger." She struggled in an attempt to free herself, however it was all in vain." After her struggles she found herself in the exact same place in the exact same wall."

The magic was almost complete."

“And this is magnifying magic." I usually use this to enlarge the size of an object, but today, I can use it to fill up the gaps and holes in the wall." ”

Desir’s finger swung in a curved shape towards where Llada was buried in the wall."

“Imagine if you were the hole in this wall." What would happen to you if I just closed up this hole?”

She’d be suffocated."

“… !”

“I guarantee that it’s pain on a whole other level to what you have experienced in your life so far." ”

\*Grin\*

Desir’s smile gave everyone a chill."

“Stop! This is enough! I understand what you’re trying to teach me!”

“Did you stop torturing others when you were told to stop?”

The magic cast started to glow."

“Aeeeeeiik!”

‘Is he even going to stop?’

Tears poured out of Llada’s eyes." She started sobbing uncontrollably." She was well past the point of caring about how shameful she would look." She then screamed."

“Sorry! I’m so sorry! Please forgive me!”

Her make-up blended with her tears and started to streak down her face." Her face became uglier as she cried and shouted." Desir didn’t seem to care." He continued with his magic."

“I’m so sorry! Please… Please forgive me!”

The magic was invoked and left Desir’s finger." Llada closed her eyes tight and screamed."

“Yaiiiikkkkkkk!”

Llada bounced out from the wall as if it had barfed her out."

“Screeeek!”

Llada didn’t feel any pain." It was strange." She carefully opened her eyes, and she saw Desir standing in front of her looking down on her with a bleak face."

“That’s how you say it." ”

“…”

Desir turned around and walked towards Freechel." He helped her to her feet."

“I’ll bring you to the medical center." ”

“How did you know I was here?”

Freechel inquired with a look of curiosity plastered on her face."

“I was walking by and sensed that someone cast magic." I just came by to check it out." I didn’t expect this." ”

If Freechel was only abused physically, then Desir wouldn’t have realised until it was too late."

“I’m so sorry, Freechel." I know you tried to solve this by yourself, but I couldn’t help myself from jumping in." ”

Freechel was beat up mercilessly." Desir couldn’t walk away from what he saw."

Freechel smiled at Desir."

“No, thank you very much Desir." Thank you for helping me." ”

Desir saw an unmistakable trace of agony concealed behind her smile." It was a bitter grin."

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TLC: N/A

QC: N/A

Note : Please download the sponsor's game to support us!

**RMSBS - Episode 95 . Dungeon Invasion (1)**

It was the first day of the party competition." All of the party leaders headed over to the auditorium for an orientation." Naturally, Desir was also on his way to attend this meeting."

Desir calmly looked around to check out the other participants." A tremendous amount of energy filled the room as all of the party leaders gathered." There was one strange thing about where the leaders chose to stand though." The Alpha and Beta classes grouped up and naturally kept apart from each other, showing their obvious aversion to each other." It was as if an invisible wall had divided the groups of nobles and commoners." Desir shook his head at this spectacle."

A person walked up onto the stage."

“Welcome, Hebrion’s brave leaders." ”

Pelsta, the World History professor exclaimed."

He had been the person responsible for running the party competition in prior years." After a brief greeting he started talking about the format of this year’s competition."

“The theme of the party competition for this year is ‘Dungeon Invasion." ’ The dungeons have three stages in total." The level of each stage is based on the same scaling as the Shadow Worlds." The first stage is Class 6, the second stage is Class 5, and the third stage is Class 4." If you judge that your party cannot precede any farther you may surrender." Your score will reflect how far your party makes it before surrendering." ”

Since Desir’ party had previously invaded a Class 4 Shadow World it should be a simple matter to clear this." However, this naive manner of thinking doesn’t reflect reality."

It was a completely different situation between entering a dungeon with prior research on it, and entering a dungeon blind." If you had some basic idea of what the Shadow World was about you could prepare counter measures for whatever you were inevitably going to face."

“The party competition will be scored based not only on how fast and effectively each of you handle and clear the obstacles, but also how team members take their roles and work cooperatively." ”

Professor Peslta droned on."

He continued on with the boring instructions that everybody already knew well in advance and had practiced against." Upon finishing his explanation he ended the assembly with a formal closing ceremony."

“So, let us begin the party competition in two hours from now." ”

With these formalities out of the way the party leaders dispersed." Handling sudden and unexpected events was part of the assessment, therefore the orientation had been held just a few hours before the competition actually started." They now had a few hours to get their parties ready."

Desir hurried back to his party members."

‘I participated in the party competition in my prior life." ’

Desir was once a member of the Beta Class party and had participated in the party competition." Therefore, he already had some of the information about it, but he couldn’t directly share it with anybody." With that said, Desir had two hours to explain all of the rules to his party, just like other party leaders."

While he was walking and contemplating the matter, someone approached Desir."

“Desir, do you have a moment?”

It was Prof." Essenblanc." The one who always carried a long sword as if it was permanently attached to his body."

“Sure, but not for long since the party competition starts in two hours." ”

Desir casually responded with."

“Just a minute is fine." ”

Essenblanc brought Desir to a corner where nobody could see them." Only after checking their surroundings and confirming that there was no one in close-proximity to over-hear them, he continued to talk."

“Desir, you know that I have a huge expectation for you." The only person who can defeat the nobles is you." I know you have power but you don’t use it for yourself, but for commoners." I respect that." ”

Essenblanc spoke with a trace of passion seeping through."

Desir listened to him silently."

“This is a good chance for us to change the relationship between the nobles and the commoners." Let’s just say, it’s like a revolution." ”

“Professor." ”

Desir cut off Essenblanc."

It was true that Desir wanted to change the relationship between the nobles and commoners, but his perspective was slightly different from Essenblanc’s."

Essenblanc didn’t mind and continued delivering his impassioned words."

“Some of the Outsiders that attacked the Prillecha Empire were part of the revolutionary army." What do you think about that?”

Essenblanc enquired."

Through the investigation of the Outsiders, some of the information about the Prillecha Empire invasion and the Outsiders had managed to leak and spread far and wide." Essenblanc probably obtained this information from that."

“I think they were wrong." ”

Desir didn’t leave it at just that."

“The first intention that they might have had was right, but their intention right now is twisted so much that it has made their current actions completely wrong." They harm people to achieve their goals." For this reason, they are nothing more than just terrorists." ”

“It sounds like you agree with some parts of their intention." Don’t you want to cooperate with them? Even just a little?”

Desir shook his head."

“I never have and never will." ”

As Essenblanc was about to say something else, someone called his name from the back."

“That’s enough, Prof." Essenblanc." ”

It was Professor Vanquik, the one with the gorgeous beard."

Essenblanc saw the face and took his hand off his sword."

“… We’ll continue this conversation later." ”

He said to Desir while turning around to leave."

Essenblanc nodded as an acknowledgement to Vanquik as he passed by him." Vanquik winked at Desir."

\* \* \*

[All party competition participants please come to the auditorium." ]

Only one team representing each party can participate in the party competition and each group can have a maximum of six people."

Desir’s party has seven members in total." They decided to exclude Len as he was the youngest member." When they arrived at the Shadow Auditorium they could see long Tv-like panels arranged in the area." Professors would watch the participant’s performances through these panels and assess them."

Romantica tapped Desir’s shoulder and pointed in a direction."

“Look over there." ”

Her finger was pointing at the professors who were staring at Desir."

It was somewhat expected that all of the professors were highly interested in Desir as every action he made caused record breaking results." Not only students, but also the professors would now carefully watch Desir’s actions."

Desir had accepted the Beta Class students as new members to his party." It was obvious why he took Beta Class members in when his original members were at top levels already."

It was to show-off the power of the commoners."

Prof." Pugman furiously glared at Desir." Desir chuckled in response."

“Don’t even bother with them." Let’s focus on what’s in front of us." I just need to show them what we are capable of." Then, they’ll all shut up." ”

It was necessary to show-off the strength of Desir and his party." And it wasn’t his intention, but the calamity involving the Outsider’s invasion of the Prillecha Empire had already gained him some fame."

But in reality, he was facing a big wall as a commoner." Hebrion Academy was truly the greatest educational institution of the various nations, but it wasn’t the best environment for commoners."

Desir felt that he could end this discrimination today." There was no doubt that it could change how the world sees them, if he were to win the competition."

There was now only a little bit of time remaining." It was time to cease thinking about such lofty goals and instead prepare for the real enemy." Desir squeezed his hands into fists."

“Do you think we can win?”

Freechel enquired."

She was wearing the Clothes Line from the Mage Tower."

Desir put his hand on her shoulder in a reassuring manner."

“Freechel, believe in you and us." You have changed." You are different now." And we will never forget you when you need our help." ”

“Oh, okay." I’ll do my best." ”

Freechel blushed in response before walking away."

Romantica watched the brief interaction between these two." She then reached up to touch her own shoulder, but stopped before doing so."

‘So stupid." ’

She hurriedly lowered her hand."

Shortly afterwards, Desir called the party members together."

“I’ll start with the briefing." We will participate in the three different stages…”

Desir conveyed the critical points from the prior leaders’ meeting." As he was in the middle of explaining, other parties started to arrive and the room started to fill up." There was a huge number of people as each party had six members participating." Most of these participants were single rankers." Some of them were even well known experts and most of them were from the Alpha Class." As Desir monitored his surroundings, he could tell that this competition would not be as easy as he hoped for."

When Desir was finished explaining all the rules, it was finally time to start the competition." The bell rang from the clock tower." An announcement sounded from each communication pad."

[All participants please come to the front of the gate." ]

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TLC: N/A

QC: N/A

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**RMSBS - Episode 96 . Dungeon Attack (2)**

As soon as Desir’s party entered the simulated Shadow World, ‘Eienbez’s Dungeon’, an announcement sounded."

- You have encountered a quest."

This is the dungeon of the great wizard, Eienbez." He spent his entire life in this place in the devotion to furthering his studies." Break through this dungeon to gain the legacy left behind by Eienbez."

- This dungeon is composed of three stages." You are currently in the first stage."

The spaces that wizards created for their own research were generally called dungeons." They were like treasure chests since wizards usually hid their life’s achievements and findings in them."

This party challenge would be held in Eienbez’s dungeon and the participants were to play the role of treasure hunters."

Desir looked around but couldn’t make out anything at all." He was shrouded in total darkness."

[Light]

He cast magic to light up his surroundings." People nearby saw this and used their magic to do the same."

The bones of dozens of skeletons were scattered all over the ground and the now illuminated walls of the dungeon were covered in letters and pictures of unknown meaning." Some parties acted fast and started working to interpret these letters and pictures."

‘There’s no point." They’re meaningless." ’

Desir already knew what they meant." They were just warnings." He had participated in the party competition as a member of a Beta Class party in his previous life." Well, his party completely failed before even finishing the first stage." Not only his party, but all of the Beta class parties had failed." There were no Beta class students that had entered the second stage."

‘The Beta Class usually participates in Level 7 Shadow Worlds." This place is already Level 6 at just the first stage." It was impossible for them to clear it." ’

But it was different now."

Desir turned towards Romantica."

“Romantica, cast the detective magic." ”

“Sure." ”

Romantica replied as she cast a spell." The wind then stirred around her and shot towards the forked path that was not too far away from the starting point."

The most important thing during a dungeon attack was to find out the structure of the dungeon." Doing this would help plan a safe route." Romantica continued to cast this spell to find potential paths in this place."

“Hey, Desir! We’ll be going ahead!”

Ladoria greeted Desir and walked ahead towards a path."

The Red Dragon party that she belonged to was one of the top parties in the Hebrion Academy, which meant that it was no surprise that they had someone with outstanding detective magic skills in their team."

Thus the Red Dragon party departed." Right after that, Desir met another party." It was Kelt’s."

Kelt was about to smile at Desir, but suddenly his face hardened, as if he was reminded of something unpleasant."

“…”

He ended up not saying anything and walked away swiftly."

Desir thought that this was strange behaviour." The Kelt that he had gotten to know was a bright and considerate student." Desir really liked Kelt’s personality that was a breath of fresh air in comparison with the other nobles." The current Kelt was now a little different from the previous times Desir had interacted with him." However, Desir quickly forgot about this since there was no time to waste on minor matters like that."

“Desir, look at the 2 o’clock, 4 o’clock, and 6 o’clock paths." They seemed like the fastest ways forward." ”

“Okay, let’s take the 2 o’clock path." ”

\* \* \*

[Party of Soleun has resigned]

[Isle Kisrai failed]

[Demes Judas failed]

Within a short period of time many similar announcements were made." It had been less than an hour since the party competition had started and more than half of the Beta Class students had failed." They just couldn’t handle the first stage."

If Desir hadn’t changed his party composition and improved their overall skill level, he probably would have been amongst those that had failed."

Takiran also thought the same as he listened to the announcements." The reason he changed party with his younger brother was clear." He wanted to escape from the Beta Class." Desir’s party managed to claw their way up from Beta Class to Alpha Class and even managed to achieve single ranker status." Takiran believed that he could learn something from Desir’s party."

In fact, he had actually already learnt so much." He could feel the difference in himself after joining Desir’s party for just a couple of weeks, in-comparison to the two years he had spent in his old party." Desir had taught him a decent kind of swordsmanship and his other skills had massively improved too."

“This time, our party will win." ”

Takiran couldn’t forget the moment when he heard Desir proclaim this." He first thought at the time that it was impossible." He thought that Desir just said this to raise the party’s morale." But it wasn’t." Desir really meant it and he actually had the abilities to pull it off."

“Freechel, clear the dust on the ground." ”

“Sure." ”

Swwwwoooooosh!

“… There was a trap." It is some kind of weight sensitive trap." Adjest, can you make a bridge that we can use with your ice zone?”

“No problem." ”

\*Grrrrr\*

“Alright everyone." Let’s get across." ”

Desir’s party had proceeded quickly as if they were taking a casual stroll." The Level 6 Shadow World difficulty didn’t seem too hard for them."

“It feels like something is about to reveal itself." Romantica, check the front with your detective magic." ”

\*Whoosh\*

“I detected multiple creatures ahead." It’s a group of goblins." ”

“Pram and Takiran to the front." Romantica, back them up." Takiran, show us what you have learnt so far." ”

Takiran tightly squeezed his sword in his hands and nodded his head in acknowledgement."

Desir’s party shared the load fairly with the new members, encouraging them to practice in real situations." Desir guided Takiran and Freechel to gain practical experience." The Level 6 Shadow World was like a practice stage for the existing members."

“Adjest, cover Takiran when it becomes dangerous." ”

“Okay." ”

The party roles were pre-determined based on their training." Desir also explained things easily and in an effective manner out in the field."

“Romantica, give me an overview on how far away they are." ”

“They are about 15 meters ahead." Wait, this goblin seems a little too big, like a monster." ”

“What does it look like?”

“Huge fangs." The size of its body is way bigger than a regular goblin…”

“A huge body and fangs… then it’s an ogre… It might be too challenging for Takiran." Pram, you should take this." Make sure the ogre doesn’t even get a chance to retaliate." ”

“Roger!”

When unexpected things happened, Desir flexibly changed the strategies and responded as the situation required."

“Humans, humans!”

Goblins and an ogre approached Desir’s party." As soon as the location of the enemies was determined, Pram dashed out like a streak of lightning and assaulted the ogre." Now, only goblins were left."

Takiran, counting on the support from the remaining party members, demonstrated the swordsmanship he learned from Desir to his heart’s content."

\*Swooosh\*

\*Grrrr\*

\*Screech\*

The herd of monsters were swiftly knocked down."

Since he hadn’t fully mastered it yet, Takiran had made some mistakes here and there, but Romantica was there to support him and Adjest sometimes came to help him as well."

“Alright, it’s clear." ”

Desir announced as he cut the last one down."

“Let’s recap and get going in 5 minutes." ”

Takiran shook blood off of his sword and slid it back into the sheathe."

‘It is perhaps possible." ’

As he was looking at Desir’s back he felt a rising certainty that the party could reach the goal they had set for themselves."

Desir’s party resumed moving forward." On the way, they encountered a few more traps and monsters but they handled them all easily under Desir’s instructions."

As they kept moving, they suddenly heard a thud that sounded like a huge weapon crushing something."

“Arrrrghhh!”

Someone screamed loudly."

“… Let’s pick up the pace." ”

Desir rushed his party."

The path widened as they continued forward and it ended up leading to an enormous open space." There was a party fighting with a monster." The monster had a body and wings made of stones and a huge horn on its forehead." The horn was as big as a muscular arm."

“Gargoyle…!”

An artificial creature that wizards created to protect their dungeons." The party fighting this creature was one of the Beta Class parties." It wasn’t hard to identify them since they were using poor quality gear." They didn’t have Clothes Lines." They didn’t even have enchanted coats for defense." All they had was old armor made up of steel and leather." The swords the wielded didn’t seem strong enough for the purpose either." They were swinging their thin, stick-like swords against this intimidating gargoyle."

‘How did they get here so fast?’

Only four members were left in that party."

\*Thud\*

Before too long, a gargoyle struck one party member with its horn." His body faded away." If you were taken out, this was how your body disappeared."

[Bejray failed]

Only three remained."

This party probably started the competition with six members." Two people were probably taken out a long time ago leaving just three people, desperate to defeat this monster."

“What are we going to do, Desir?”

Romantica enquired."

“Technically, there is no reason for us to help them." ”

This was a competition amongst all parties to figure out which parties were more competent than the rest."

On the other hand, there was no policy preventing parties attacking each other, which meant it was technically allowed for them to attack and attempt to eliminate other parties." This party should be thankful that they were not getting attacked by Desir’s party."

“But, we need to pass through this path, too." We don’t have to wait until they fail." It’s just wasting our time, right?”

“Sure thing, Desir." ”

Pram chirped, knowing what Desir was trying to get at."

Nobody was opposed to this and shortly after, Desir’s party joined the fight."

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TLC: N/A

QC: N/A

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**RMSBS - Episode 97 . Dungeon Attack (3)**

A loud noise of rocks crashing down onto the ground reverberated across the cavern." The source of the noise was the destruction of a gargoyle’s body." This sound represented the action of a party invading a dungeon."

“Haaa!”

With a shout, Pram stabbed his sword into the forehead of the remaining gargoyle." The silver blade easily tore through it as if it were paper, destroying the gargoyle’s core." With a deft motion, Pram lightly withdrew his sword from the falling rock."

Surrounding Desir’s party was the rubble of eight gargoyles." These creatures were the most challenging obstacle in the first stage of this dungeon since First-Circle magic didn’t affect them at all." Until their core was destroyed, they would tirelessly attack regardless of their body tearing and breaking." On top of that, they moved at an overwhelming speed." For those that did not have powerful gear equipped, these gargoyles were simply invincible."

Desir’s party had strong enough equipment and strategies to triumph over them." Each member of their power was also powerful enough to take on a gargoyle head-on too." It goes without saying that their battle with the gargoyles ended swiftly, wrapping up completely within an hour."

“Are you alright?”

“Awesome, you’re just awesome." ”

Exclaimed Edwin, the leader of the party that was defeated by the gargoyles prior to Desir arriving." His party was grateful that Desir’s party actually intervened in the battle and saved them."

“Your ability is well-known." I was still surprised to see you defeat these gargoyles so easily though." You’re just awesome." ”

Some of them stepped forward to request handshakes with Desir’s party."

“You lost three of your members to gargoyles?”

Edwin smiled awkwardly."

The situation was now settled." Behind the defeated gargoyles there was a path and a set of stairs leading towards the second stage."

“Why don’t you rest and confirm your party status here first? We’ll start moving onwards in the meantime." ”

Desir suggested."

“Thanks for saving us, but we are not going to proceed to the second stage." ”

Edwin replied."

“How did you get up here?”

“We… skipped." ”

“What?”

“You know all of the traps and monsters… we couldn’t defeat them with our limited ability and gear." This was quite clear to us." Instead, we just ran." Literally." We tried to get as far as we could." We didn’t care about failure, but look at us now." ”

This was the worst strategy." Charging through enemy territory without thinking about any escape routes or backup plans." The sacrifice of team members, one by one, was expected with such a ‘plan’, if you could even really call it such."

“I know it is such a stupid strategy." You can easily tell how we would end up." When one person fails, it’s nearly impossible to form any strategy." But this was our best shot at it." This is all we could do." ”

A few announcements sounded."

[Korsious Party surrendered]

[Taimu Li failed]

[Urjen Kios failed]

Other Beta Class parties had declared their surrender." None of them could make it through the first stage." They were simply incompetent in the face of this trial."

It was rare for someone to be able to succeed with just effort, especially in the fields of swordsmanship and magic." It was clear that they would not improve and would always be defined by their current status as Beta Class students." It was essentially an inescapable destiny."

Desir was speechless."

“Recently, I thought…”

Edwin choked out as he looked up at Desir."

“That you, Desir, can change all of this nonsense and unfairness." With you, one day, the commoners will not be discriminated against and be able to learn whatever we want to learn." ”

“… Sure." ”

Desir nodded in affirmation as he replied."

“I promise." I’ll change the world and prove this to you." ”

“I trust you all." ”

Edwin then shouted."

“Betherway Party surrenders!”

[Betherway party surrendered]

[Dia Mesis failed]

[…]

The announcement listed all of the remaining members of their party." Their bodies faded and soon disappeared."

“Did you all hear that?”

After the bodies had disappeared Desir turned towards his party members."

“This is why we need to win this thing." ”

Once again, Desir’s party members were reminded of their goal."

\* \* \*

[Placing third, Desir Arman Party has entered Stage Two]

Of course, Stage Two was a lot more challenging than Stage One." As the paths in this stage were wider, larger scales of attacks and traps were to be expected." The traps were trickier and more sinister while the monsters were harder to defeat."

In comparison to the skeletons and goblins in Stage One, monsters such as packs of Orcs and Great Worms were much tougher to tackle head-on." The difficulty level in this stage was about Level 5."

“Formation! There is a sign of Great Worms ahead." ”

Desir instructed the party as he sensed movement in the ground."

Even though they had irregular breaks in between continuous battles, Desir’s party members were more serious and more alert than they were before." Instead of giving opportunities to the new members to lead the battles, they were now protecting them in their formation."

Great Worms attack invaders by launching ambushes based on their sense of vibration and heat as they crawl beneath the ground." Their bodies were covered in specially treated metal." It was outstandingly strong but at the same time very smooth, allowing it to rapidly move under the ground."

\*Crash\*

A Great Worm exploded out of the ground, landing on the surface." Takiran was standing in its trajectory." He quickly rolled his body out of harm's way before charging at the Great Worm with his sword."

“Aiyaaahh!”

\*Tuk\*

It didn’t so much as leave a scratch on the giant worm." The sword was not strong enough to penetrate the metal and just bounced off." There was no room to be surprised at this."

“Takiran, back off!”

Desir shouted."

“… Okay!”

\*Bang\*

Right away, Romantica’s magic streaked through the air." With a huge noise, the Great Worm’s body shook." A small region of its metallic skin cracked and bodily fluid started to leak out of it."

Pram didn’t miss that opportunity." He stabbed his sword into that crack and deftly widened the crack by slicing through it."

\*Slice\*

In just a moment the worm’s body was cut in half."

“Hiss! Hisssss!”

The Great Worm wobbled its body abruptly in an attempt to get away from Pram." Black liquid splashed everywhere." The Great Worm noticed that it was facing people it had no chance of defeating." It turned its head around and wriggled its body in an attempt to dig into the ground and escape."

Due to the natural abilities of Great Worms underground, when they manage to escape back into the ground there is typically no way to find them again." Great Worms also tend to form packs." If this Great Worm managed to return to its pack, it would bring its whole family to challenge them again later."

Adjest quickly reacted." She invoked area of effect magic." A sheet of ice covered the area surrounding the worm."

\*Boom\*

The Great Worm slammed its head against the ice." Fortunately, the ice was dense enough." Actually, it was unimaginably hard." It soon realized that it wouldn’t be able to return to its pack." It instead started slamming its body against the ceiling and walls and eventually charged at Desir’s party."

For a sub-surface dweller, it was surprisingly fast."

The Great Worm opened its mouth wide, revealing thousands of sharp teeth." It crushed everything in its path with this mouth as it charged forward."

“Freechel, stand behind me." ”

“Oh, sure." ”

“Romantica, I’m going to use explosive magic." I need oxygen." ”

The Great Worm approached so loudly that dust snowed down from the ceiling." Desir didn’t panic." He raised his hand calmly towards the worm."

[Explosion]

A massive amount of magic from the Third-Circle spell exploded in the mouth of the Great Worm."

\*Boom\*

Hot air billowed out along with a huge amount of flame." The Great Worm cooked from the inside out as it suffocated from the hot air that prevented it from breathing." Of course, it was hard for the rest of the party members to breathe also." It was almost suicidal to use explosion magic in a closed area like this, but of course Desir wouldn’t use such a thing without a plan." Romantica cast a spell."

[Refrain Air]

Fresh air blew and helped all of the members to breathe again." The Great Worm twitched its body." More black liquid poured out of its wounds." Takiran and Pram used their swords to steal its last breath."

“Hisss!”

With a short shriek the thrashing of the Great Worm stopped."

“The battle is over." ”

This battle took a long time to finish." Desirs needed to use higher-level magic as well." They couldn’t maintain their pace from Stage One."

However, while traversing through this stage was a bit more complicated, it was still safe and within the capabilities of the party." It was still doable." Achievable." Beatable."

‘But we are still in 3rd place." ’

Currently, the Red Dragon party was in first place." The Blue Moon party was second."

Desir needed to slightly increase their pace in order to catch up to them."

“We’ll take a 10 minute breather, then we’ll resume." ”

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RMSBS - Episode 98." Dungeon Attack (4)

“The Blue Moon party is rather impressive." They are very skillful." ”

“The Red Dragon party is in first place." They’re indeed an honor party." ”

The audience made various comments on the performance of the parties."

On the other side of the room, professors busily scored the performance of the parties." As it had always been, they paid no attention to the low-level parties." They were only interested in the students that occupied the top ranks."

“The third rank is Desir’s party." ”

“Oh, you mean the party that doesn’t have an official name yet? The new one?”

“I had some hope for them, but they are a Beta Class party after all." They did a great job reaching third place though." ”

The professors continued to converse with each other."

“Nice to see you, Prof." Bridgette." ”

A husky voice squeezed out a greeting." His attitude immediately showed that he habitually treated others with disrespect." He then sat next to Bridgette." It was Pugman Niplica."

“Nice to see you, Prof." Pugman." ”

It was a rare occasion for Pugman to start a conversation with Bridgette." Bridgette was uncomfortable talking to Pugman as a result." After a short exchange of greetings, she returned her focus back onto the display panels."

“You don’t seem well." ”

“It’s none of your business." ”

“Of course." You probably don’t feel like talking." I can tell by the situation." ”

Pugman deeply breathed in, staring at Bridgette’s face as if enjoying it." For some reason, he looked oddly determined."

“It’s over, Bridgette." ”

In a moment, there was a loud scream amongst the professors." The Blue Moon party cleared a high-level obstacle in Stage Two and claimed the rank one position."

Bridgette turned to look at Pugman."

“You’ll never know until it’s really over, Professor." ”

“If it makes you feel any better." ”

Pugman replied with a slight smirk."

“Desir… maybe this is his limit." ”

“What do you mean by that?”

Bridgette enquired."

“I admit that he is competent, but he is a commoner." He came all the way up to this point by pure luck, but there is a glass ceiling as a commoner." ”

“Well, there was a person who lost to a commoner." ”

She was referring to Kelt."

“… That was a careless mistake." ”

“If that makes you feel any better." ”

It felt like cold air was billowing between the two." Eventually they focused on the display panels again."

“It won’t be as easy as it was before." ”

“Is there a reason that you are so confident?”

“Hmph." It is a party competition after all." ”

Pugman replied as he continued staring at the display panels."

“Even the honor parties attempted this with their best members." But this one… is made up of Beta Class members." All of them! Aren’t they too full of themselves?”

“…”

Maybe they were." For this competition, the top magicians had gathered." This was what Desir was trying to do — compete against them with commoners who were regarded as incompetent."

‘But…’

It didn’t phase Bridgette at all though." She shook her head."

“I’ll admit, Pugman." Your bravado is incredible." ”

This time fire seemed to spark between the two as they stared at each other."

However, on the display panels that displayed the Beta Class parties, nobody noticed that there was something going on in the corner of a panel." A spot that no one paid attention to."

\* \* \* \*

“They went ahead to the next stage!”

Back in Stage One of the dungeon, a place where many parties struggled and tried their best to clear, there was a party moving forward effortlessly."

“Any traps or monsters?”

“Nope, they completely cleared them out." ”

“Great." They don’t leave any debris behind them as I expected." ”

O’Quinn smiled after the report from their scout." His prediction was correct." It was a great choice to select Desir’s party." He turned towards his party members."

“Good news everyone! It’s time to resume our journey!”

The party, Arachne, was a Beta Class party." They had neither decent gear nor skills." Surprisingly, all six members were still alive." As a Beta Class party, it was certainly a miracle that all of their members had survived with the entrance to Stage Two right around the corner."

O’Quinn, the leader of Arachne, was smart enough to know that his party was not competent enough to finish Stage One on their own merit."

‘Then, I can literally follow in the footsteps of a good party?’

When a party clears traps and monsters, just follow quietly behind them." This was their strategy." People would say that it was sly, unfair, and sneaky, but O’Quinn thought that it was foolish to go head to head when he could go around."

The downside to this strategy was that if the leading party found out, the whole competition would be over for O’Quinn’s party." Not only that, dire consequences would swiftly follow after the tournament."

Therefore, they tried to select a party that would be magnanimous about this matter even if they were caught: Desir’s party."

“They wouldn’t harm us, even after finding out that we were chasing right behind them." ”

O’Quinn smirked."

“They even took our ace, Freechel, away from us." At the very least, they should let us follow them." ”

The Arachne party members responded with somewhat vacant gazes."

“S… Sure." ”

“We were so nice to Freechel." ”

O’Quinn shrugged his shoulders."

“You’re right." She was the one who couldn’t take our ‘prank." ’ It was just a little prank, and it was so awkward that she just ran out like that." ”

He then glared at the members who hadn’t said anything yet."

“Somebody has to be a toy for the Alphas, right, Aljay?”

Aljay looked away." Her eyes wandered around the area." She responded emotionlessly,

“… Right." ”

O’Quinn had a close relationship with Alpha Class parties and was subcontracted with them as a result." The party members had to be careful with O’Quinn." Otherwise, they could be made the new target."

The Arachne party walked down the hallway of Stage One." Originally, traps and monsters would have blocked them." No, there were actually some traps set up there, but they were already all dismantled and destroyed." They continued to walk through patches of dead monsters and destroyed traps." It was a non-stop collage of post-battle scenes."

There was a path leading down stairs just behind the piles of gargoyle rubble." The Arachne party went down the stairs."

[Arachne party has entered Stage Two." ]

“Great!”

They were probably the top rank amongst the Beta Class parties now." Even though they didn’t fight against a single monster or dismantle a single trap, by entering Stage Two they had gained so much credit already."

‘This is so easy." We can probably enter Stage Three if we continue moving forward like this." ’

O’Quinn announced to his party members,

“Alright, time to look for Desir’s tracks again." ”

“On it." ”

There were so many tracks on the ground." The debris from the battlefield was incomparable to the ones in Stage One."

“This way." ”

The Arachne party continued following the tracks that lead from battle to battle." After about 10 minutes, they suddenly came to a stop."

\*Thud\*

A heavy noise could be heard, swiftly followed by a large vibration."

“What is that?”

\*Thud\* \*Thud\*

And it wasn’t a one time event." The noise became louder and louder." Soon, a red dot appeared in the dark."

\*Shring\*

One of the magicians cast light magic and illuminated the surroundings." From one of many paths in front of them, there was something walking towards them." It had a huge body and it made the ground shake as it stepped forward with its gigantic feet, one step at a time." The magician who cast the light magic noticed what it was and screamed."

“A golem!?”

Golems were mythical figures that guard dungeons." They were one of the highest leveled monsters that dungeon invaders, like themselves, could face." It was nearly impossible for them to defeat this monster." Even if they did, they would sustain so much damage from the battle that they wouldn’t be able to carry on."

‘Is it just strolling around?’

Unlike the monsters in Stage One, golems in Stage Two steadily roamed in search of invaders."

While the Arachne party tried to collect themselves, the golem had approached them." A red light scanned them once."

\*Shwing\*

The golem recognized the figures in-front of it as invaders." The massive body of rock was already so close to them."

O’Quinn ordered his party."

“Back off!”

It was suicidal for them to try and defeat a golem." They needed magic of at least the Third-Circle or a Knight-Level swordsman in order to break the outer layer and damage the inside of its body."

The highest power in their party was Second-Circle." Retreating was the right decision."

The Arachne party started to run away from the golem, but the golem chasing them was surprisingly fast."

‘Way too fast." ’

It seemed like it would catch up to them in just a moment." O’Quinn had to make a decision."

“Aljay, sorry." ”

O’Quinn cast magic." He turned around and cast [Seize] magic at Aljay."

\*Crush\*

Aljay’s feet were caught and stuck to the ground." Due to her momentum and the abrupt stop, she immediately fell down to her knees." O’Quinn shouted at her."

“You need to be the bait for us." ”

“…!”

Aljay looked up at O’Quinn and the other members, but nobody came to help her." They continued escaping."

‘We can find the tracks later." We just need to get rid of this thing first." ’

Because Stage Two had a more complicated map somewhat reminiscent of spider webs, in comparison to Stage One, O’Quinn believed that he could remove this tail."

‘Next time, I should chase Desir’s party much closer." ’

Unfortunately, he couldn’t change the past to make this happen." O’Quinn’s party suddenly stopped in their tracks." O’Quinn’s could see a red light glowing in the dark in front of them." It was another golem."

“We’ll turn around and take the side path that we just passed!”

\*Thump\*

It was a heavy sound from behind them." The first golem had caught up."

‘Wait, it’s here already? Aljay, you useless piece of shit." ’

Two golems, on either side of the party, slowly closed in on them blocking any path out of this predicament." They were completely trapped."

“We’re done." ”

All of the members heard what O’Quinn muttered and gave up on escaping their fate."

‘Well, we made it to Stage Two." We did pretty well." ’

“Arachne party, we surrender." ”

As the party leader claimed their surrender, all party members’ bodies faded as they were transported to the place where they first started the competition." At least, that was what was meant to happen." It didn’t happen this time though."

“…Why aren’t we being transported?”

Nothing had happened to their bodies." In a moment, the golem in the back swung its gigantic arm."

\*Crush\*

“Arrrrrrrr!!!”

An ear piercing scream resounded."

It was the party member in the rear." His armor and shield were crushed and a terrible amount of blood squirted out through the holes that had appeared in it." It was a serious injury." His bones were smashed into pieces and his body was thrown to the ground."

[Anin Pailmint failed." ]

There was an announcement about the party member failing the mission, but the body that was supposed to fade and disappear was still there." In a short moment, the rest of the party realized what had just happened." Rather, what hadn’t happened."

“He’s dead for real!?”

The golems surrounding them came much closer."

Their faces were plastered with misery at their inevitable fate."

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**RMSBS - Episode 99 . Configuration Demolition (1)**

\*Plop\*

“Gosh!”

Water droplets fell onto Pram’s head." He immediately shook his head to rid himself of the water." Looking up, the water droplets that had accumulated on the ceiling due to condensation, were falling down at regular intervals."

Pram moved away and turned back towards his party."

“I felt it when I first came in, but I really don't like it here." ”

It had almost passed the four hour mark since entering the dungeon." Two hours had passed since entering the second stage."

It was inevitable for hunger to start setting in." It was now time to take a break and refresh."

“I agree." I don't like the food either." ”

Romantica said while frowning." Desir’s party, which was attacking the second stage, sat down for a while and started consuming their packed food." It wasn’t a luxurious meal since it had to be easy to carry." The water was in a bottle made out of iron, hence it tasted like iron too and the briskets were rather unpleasant."

‘It feels like I haven’t had a fine meal recently." ’

Frankly, this was still fine." She could still handle an inconvenience of this level."

‘But most of all, what I can’t stand… ’

Romantica used her eyes to gesture ahead." At the point where she was gesturing at, Desir and Adjest could be seen sitting together." They were holding a conversation a little further away from where the party was eating together."

They were probably talking about this dungeon raid."

But even so…

“Desir seems to think of Adjest as a sub-leader to our party." ”

Romantica responded nervously at Pram’s observation."

“Don't be silly, Pram." ”

“But if it is Adjest, I think it fits her." It’s a bit vexing to admit though." ”

Romantica couldn’t respond."

It was natural, if one thought about it." Adjest was stronger than her." No one could disagree that she was the strongest one in the party, excluding Desir."

She had talent as a swordsman and a lot of experience, even if she was at the same Third-Circle of wizardry as Romantica." She also had experience participating in the conquering of Shadow Worlds before entering Hebrion Academy."

She was talented to a whole other level."

“Well, she is pretty too… ”

“She might also be the second most famous amongst the first years, right next to Desir." ”

“And she was the leader of the freshmen when she was part of the Blue Moon party." ”

She was already a different being to Romantica."

‘Can’t I catch up to her in any other way… ever…? ’

\*Crunch\*

Romantica chewed her briskets angrily, startling Pram and Freechel who were sitting right next to her."

While they discussed this, Desir and Adjest who had already finished eating, got to work disarming traps on the path that the party would need to pass through."

Desir unlocked traps whilst teaching Adjest."

“Adjest, there’s a trap in front of you." If you check the flow of mana, you can feel that it is different only around that area." ”

“Oh, it sure is." ”

“It’s easier to check the trap’s grade by the amount of mana it uses." And when it’s a lower level trap, it’s better to deal with it by just preparing a defense and triggering it." But if you can’t figure out what the trap is, like I do, it’s better to just avoid it." Just in case, if you do have to trigger it, then do it like this… ”

Desir put his hand against the ground." Mana then flowed down into the ground from it." The flow of mana that powered the trap was slightly distorted as a result." After that, Desir then stepped on the trap."

Something mechanical clicked but nothing happened."

“You can break a trap with just a little change to its mana flow." It should feel like you’re changing the flow of water in a rippling stream by putting stones down to disrupt it." I’m putting my mana on the flowing mana and changing the flow ever so slightly." This can be applied to most of the trap spells that are driven by mana." ”

It was not a technique that could be learnt, regardless of how much you paid someone." It required practice." Adjest tried to familiarize herself with the technique, but she couldn’t help but be worried."

“Desir, you look very relaxed but I’m honestly worried." ”

“Huh?”

“Can we keep up with the parties ahead of us?”

Adjest checked the leaderboard on her communication pad."

---

1st: Blue Moon Party." Leader: Argeria G Roglan Nimbias

Progress Points 2300, Party Points 1700

2nd: Red Dragon Party." Leader: Radoria von Dorice

Progression Points 2100, Party Points 1560

3rd: Unknown Party." Leader: Desir Arman

Progression Points 1700, Party Points 1800

---

The points of each party were scored in real time by the professors watching the party competition through the display panels and the results were shared via the communication pads."

“We are ahead with party points, but far behind other parties in progress." That means we are that much slower than the others." ”

The party points were a measure of how well the party worked together to effectively clear the dungeon, and the progression points quantified how much of the dungeon they had completed."

“We lost a lot of time on the first stage giving our new party members experience." Thank you for teaching us but the purpose of our participation in this party competition is to win." I’m worried that we can’t achieve that goal." ”

“You don’t have to worry." It’s not such a big problem to worry about." Our party can always take the first place in this competition." ”

“Do you have a plan? Due to the structure of the dungeon, it will be very difficult to reverse the standings at this point." ”

The second stage was a labyrinth consisting of a total of five zones." The distinction between each zone was demarcated by the presence of halls leading one to enter the next zone." The structure of the labyrinth varied from zone to zone and the goal for the second stage was to proceed to the fifth zone that contained the way forward to the third stage."

It was very difficult to reverse the standing since it required a minimum amount of time to break through the labyrinth varying from zone to zone."

“But there’s always a way." ”

At the same time as Desir finished speaking, the Desir Party, which had since stopped resting, arrived at a huge hall marking the end of the first zone."

As soon as Adjest recognized the three paths in the hall of the second zone, she could hear the announcement in her ear."

---

- You’ve reached the Hall of the third zone in the second stage."

Before entering the third zone, a normal passage to the third zone as well as two additional options are given to parties that reach this area."

-The passage of folly."

This is a passage filled with monsters and traps at the level found in the first stage." The difficulty will drop but the length of the labyrinth will be much longer."

-Passage of suffering."

This is a direct route to the fifth zone which is guarded by Tyrant-Tula."

The passage is completely straight but Tyrant-Tula has nested here."

Tyrant-Tula targets invaders who pass through the passage in the dark."

The difficulty of this passage is much greater but the length of the zone is shorter."

---

The passage of folly is the choice of a party that has lost or lack sufficient power, and the passage of suffering is a choice that strong parties might opt to take."

Most of the time, the majority of parties chose to use the normal passage way or the passage of folly." The difficulty level of the Tyrant-Tula, which was described as appearing in the passage of suffering, was comparable to fourth level Shadow Worlds."

Reaching the third stage would be made much more difficult for most parties if they lost just one member, hence there were very few parties willing to take such a risk or make such a sacrifice just to quickly break through."

The risk was just too high in comparison to the benefits."

It was better to traverse the labyrinth at a suitable level for the party, even if the path would be a little bit longer." In fact, almost every party would make such a decision."

“But we’re entering here." ”

With what Pram was saying, Romantica could only sigh."

“Well… it is not the first time." ”

“Do you mean to take a gamble?”

Adjest enquired and Desir shook his head."

“Of course, I’m not suggesting it out of desperation." I have a clear plan." I promise you that we’ll not drop out due to this choice." ”

Desir spoke with confidence while choosing a passage."

“We’ll be reversing the rankings and snatching first place." ”

- You’ve entered the passage of suffering."

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**RMSBS - Episode 99 . Configuration Demolition (1)
Sponsored Content**

There were several bodies on the floor." They were from the Alpha Class parties of the Hebrion Academy." The Clothes Lines that boast such strong defense were torn and blood leaked from lacerations that covered their entire bodies."

But these weren’t fatal wounds." The wounds themselves were not that deep."

\*Splash\*

The reason they had died from such shallow wounds was from the poison that the Tyrant-Tula injected into their bodies."

The poison of the Tyrant-Tula, which was definitely classed as belonging to a monster of the highest level, was powerful enough to paralyze and melt the inside of the body on contact."

Due to the power of such a poison, they were immediately eliminated and marked to return to reality…

However, something had gone wrong."

\*Splash\*

The noise easily echoed throughout the desiccated passageway."

One of the bodies rolled over." Black legs sharp as blades ripped into it as the beast ravenously devoured it."

\*Splash\* \*Splash\* \*Splash\*

There was a loud sound of filthy water spilling onto the ground."

This process was repeated several times." Each body was meticulously wrapped into a spider web." The figures of each quickly disappeared as they were sealed within the spider’s silk." Before long, the bodies that once littered the hallway were securely stowed within their new silk cocoons."

The silk that was once visible started to turn transparent and before long the grisly scene was no longer visible." The sharp, knife-like legs were also concealed in spider silk and became transparent."

The blood and bodies that were strewn everywhere had disappeared, as if they had never existed." There was only an empty passage leading into the distance."

Not too long after, the presence of people could be detected and the passage that was completely silent up until then was filled with the echoes of a voice."

“The reason why Tyrant-Tula is dangerous is due to the poison on the edge of its legs." There is also a special gimmick related to its spider silk." ”

The source of the noise was none other than Desir’s party."

Desir moved forward carefully." The filthy water on the ground splattered everywhere as the party traipsed through it."

“Tyrant-Tula’s web has the effect of making anything that it wraps transparent." ”

Most people knew this but Desir explained it for the sake of anyone who didn’t."

\*Tap\*

Desir stopped."

[Create Water]

Water droplets were suspended mysteriously in the air."

“Yes." It’s literally invisible." Tyrant-Tula has transparent webs everywhere like this and wraps itself in them." That’s why nothing is visible." To unknowing prey, there’s nothing in this passage." ”

Given how empty it was, believing such a monster existed in the passageway they were currently standing in was rather difficult."

“If we go fast and get caught in a spider web, we will get attacked by an invisible enemy." This is why people avoid Tyrant-Tula’s nest." ”

“What do we have to do then? Is there something special? ”

Freechel asked with curiosity after Desir’s explanation."

Desir nodded."

“The principle of the spider’s webs in this passage is simple: Tyrant-Tula uses the webs to sense and attack its prey." So, how should we overcome this?”

“Well… don’t touch the web at all?”

“That’s impossible." ”

Desir pointed at the passage extending straight ahead."

“You can’t see them, but from this point on, there are countless spider webs." As soon as you touch any of the webs, Tyrant-Tula will come running." It’s incredibly fast and invisible." You have no chance of coping." What can we do?”

After no one could offer a suggestion, Adjest opened her mouth."

“What about sabotaging the spider’s perception? Since we have to touch the web, we need to make it so we can break through without being detected." ”

Desir clapped."

“That is the correct answer." Tyrant-Tula’s perception is restricted to the spider’s web." In other words, if we irritate several spider webs at the same time, its perception will be confused." That’s the opportunity that we have to aim for." ”

Its limited perception was Tyrant-Tula’s only exploitable weakness."

“Hit the web with magic and shake Tyrant-Tula’s perception." Of course, we can’t just invoke random magic." ”

Desir opened his palms."

“To induce a stimulus strong enough that masks other human movement at the same time, we must hit at least five magic spells of at least the Second-Circle at the same time." This will give Tyrant-Tula no chance to recognize us." ”

“Let me take that role, Desir." ”

Adjest hurriedly suggested."

“It’s possible for me to arrange more than five spells at the same time at my level." ”

“You can arrange five spells but the problem is landing them at the right time." That kind of accurate magical arrangement is something only I can do." ”

No mistakes were allowed." At the same time, the magic had to hit a thin spider web."

“I’ll distract Tyrant-Tula from a little bit further away." You break though in that chance." Once you do, I’ll be right behind you." ”

“Is this a guaranteed method for success?”

“… Of course." ”

In the strange gap between the question and answer, Romantica frowned."

“Are you sure?”

“I’m serious." I’m sure of this." ”

Eventually, Romantica sighed and allowed the plan."

After getting everyone’s consent, Desir began preparation for his part in the plan."

“Even though Tyrant-Tula’s perception via its spider’s web can be avoided, be careful not to get stuck in its webs." They still have great adhesive force, so proceed with caution." ”

“I know that much." ”

“Good." ”

They got ready to run after exchanging a few more pieces of advice with each other."

“One… Two… ”

Five spells were formed in front of Desir."

“Three." ”

As soon as Desir invoked the spells, all party members except Desir began to run."

Pram swung his sword forward, cleaving open a webless path for the party to traverse."

Desir watched them escape quickly."

After that, the magic arrangements in front of him stopped and faded away."

‘Did it work?'

Desir checked that all of them had escaped and sighed in relief."

‘They would never allow me to do this if I told them the truth." ’

It was true that Tyrant-Tula’s weakness was disrupting its perception, but the way Tyrant-Tula perceived its prey was very different to what Desir had explained."

Desir had to deceive his party again since the actual method did guarantee the safe escape of the bait."

‘The real way it perceives people is… ’

Desir reached his hands forward and felt something on his fingertips." He caught the web."

Entangling it, he brought it to his heart."

‘Bio signal." And amongst them, it responds the most to heartbeats." ’

Tyrant-Tula’s favorite food was ‘live prey’." Inevitably, it responded the greatest to bioreactions."

Desir stopped breathing and began to concentrate."

‘Recognizing changes in environment:’

‘Detect the slightest changes amongst this absolute silence." Nothing seems to have changed on the surface." ’

Silence."

\*Tap\*

After a moment or two, dust and debris began to fall off the walls."

Desir smiled."

“How many monsters do you think I’ve killed? Hundreds? Thousands?”

\*Frack\*

Tyrant-Tula appeared out of nowhere and ripped through the air, aiming to skewer Desir through the back with its leg."

Although there was the expectation that it could only make a small wound to the Clothes Line of a single ranker, it was still incredibly dangerous due to its terrible poison, able to kill its opponent with just the slightest cut from its leg."

So far, no student had ever been able to attack it, since it was able to appear out of nowhere."

At least so far."

However, Desir naturally reached towards his back as if expecting such an attack."

And with the spell that formed behind him -

\*\*\*

When Desir opened the gate, his eyes and ears were immediately assaulted by Romantica’s loud displeasure."

“What took you so long, Desir?!”

Desir smiled and replied."

“Ah, I made a mistake and failed to disrupt its perception." Fortunately, I ran as well." ”

“You idiot!”

“Well, what’s our ranking anyway?”

“Yes, our ranking!”

Everyone in the party turned on their communication pads and checked the leaderboard."

The leaderboard on the communication pad was as follows:

---

1st: Unknown Party." Leader: Desir Arman

Progression Points 2350, Party Points 1900

2nd: Blue Moon Party." Leader: Argeria G Roglan Nimbias

Progress Points 2320, Party Points 1850

3rd: Red Dragon Party." Leader: Radoria von Dorice

Progression Points 2200, Party Points 1700

---

The party looked at each other in a mixture of surprise and joy."

“OH-YEAH!”

They had succeeded in taking first place."

They had surpassed the Blue Moon party."

“Let’s continue on with this momentum and clear it all at once." ”

“I agree!”

“I will do my best." ”

“Well, you should." ”

While everyone merrily continued down the passage, Desir noticed a scratch on his finger."

‘Hm… It may be from the debris." ’

‘It’s pretty painful for a simulated 30 percent pain limit… am I just imagining things?’

Desir kept his thoughts to himself." He couldn’t give them anything else to worry about." Desir entered the fifth zone while rubbing his bloody finger on his lapel."

----

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**RMSBS - Episode 99 . Configuration Demolition (3)**

1st: Unknown Party." Leader: Desir Arman

2nd: Blue Moon Party." Leader: Argeria G Roglan Nimbias

3rd: Red Dragon Party." Leader: Radoria von Dorice

Desir’s party, that had only been in 3rd place up until now, suddenly reached the top rank in an instant." Confirming this fact with his communication pad, Kelt took a deep breath."

‘This is rather ridiculous." ’

The increase in points was massive." It was never meant to be possible to reverse the rankings like this."

Snapping out of his reverie, Kelt looked around to confirm how the others were handling this." The reaction of the Blue Moon party members was fairly similar across the board." They all felt horrible."

“They just passed us? That doesn’t make sense." We are at the last zone of the second stage." ”

“This doesn’t make sense at all." The difference between our progress points was almost 500." That’s like three zones worth of distance… ”

How did they shorten the point gap? How did they catch up? Kelt Nippleca could only think of one possibility."

‘No way… Did they take on the Tyrant-Tula passage?’

Other than that, it was impossible to explain."

It was not easy to locate the Tyrant-Tula in its natural habitat, let alone take it on." The Blue Moon party was skilled enough to do so, but not without taking casualties." If the party suffered a great loss in the second level, it was almost impossible to reach the third stage of the dungeon." It simply wasn’t necessary to attack Tyrant-Tula when there were such large demerits associated with doing so."

‘He is not a man that would gamble like that." ’

After recalling what he knew about Desir Arman, Kelt Neppleca immediately corrected this view."

‘If he knew that he could do it safely… ’

After sorting out his thoughts, Kelt shared his hypothesis behind the Desir party’s meteoric rise in the rankings." After contemplating the matter, the Blue Moon party leader, a first place single ranker of the third-grade, Argeria G Roglan Nimbia’s expression turned into one of utter seriousness." He intuitively felt that this was the only reasonable explanation for the phenomena."

Argeria glared at the leaderboard on his communication pad and after confirming the rankings for the umpteenth time, he finally opened his dried lips."

“… this can’t be." ”

The Blue Moon party was the largest gathering of Alpha Class talent." In other words, it was the most powerful party in Hebrion Academy."

They were provided with high quality armor and weapons suited for the best of the best." Professor Pugman also invested heavily in them to demonstrate the superiority of the noble class." It was due to this fact that Prof." Pugman, who was in charge of this party, had placed his high expectations on them to do well in this tournament."

Argeria turned to Kelt, who happened to be standing right next to him."

“Kelt, did the professor tell you anything before the party competition started?”

“Be sure to defeat the Desir party… ”

“Hmmm." ”

Argeria knew how Prof." Pugman felt about Desir." For Prof." Pugman, who had fully subscribed to the belief that nobles were superior to commoners in every way, he was like a thorn under one’s nail." In particular, Desir was directly combatting this ideology of noble supremacy by including Beta Class party members in their party for this competition."

If he was beaten by a party like Desir’s…

\*Gulp\*

Argeria suddenly felt a bout of intense anxiety." He was no longer so certain about his well being after this competition ended."

Argeria’s footsteps that were laden with all kinds of thoughts suddenly came to a stop."

He pointed forward after signaling the party members to be quiet."

Desir’s party was resting where his finger pointed at." It seemed like they had just finished fighting a tough battle and were in the middle of a short break."

The Blue Moon party unexpectedly felt a growing sense of relief and thrill."

“This is our chance, leader." ”

The sixth place ranker of the third grade, M’né whispered."

“If they just finished attacking the Tyrant-Tula, there is no chance that they are in fighting condition." Let’s attack them before they recover." ”

The Blue Moon party was shaken out of their depression."

Surely as he said, this was their best chance."

“Furthermore, they are not as vigilant as they normally would be." If we attack them all of a sudden then… ”

A voice cut off M’né’s goading."

“It’s silly for us to attack them." ”

It was Kelt." He had pointed his finger at Desir’s party a little earlier than the rest of the party members even realised what was in front of them."

“Look at them now." Do you think they look tired?”

The party members looked over towards them again."

“Um… ”

Desir’s party was laughing and relaxing." It didn’t look like they were tired from conducting a massive battle at all." No wounds could be seen." It wouldn’t even be a surprise to see them suddenly leap up and start fighting."

“I don’t know what they’ve done but they’ve defeated Tyrant-Tula without sustaining any damage from it." ”

Kelt continued."

“I’m honestly not convinced that we can win against them without losing." So while they are taking a break, I suggest just ignoring them and moving on quickly." ”

Argeria nodded." This course of action had merit."

He had heard several rumors about Desir Arman." Whether the rumors were true or not, the recurring theme was that he was not one to be trifled with."

Even if some of their party were from Beta Class, he wasn’t sure that they could easily win."

Then, will we just pass by them?

Argeria shook his head." They couldn’t do that either."

“But if we don’t deal with them now, we may end up regretting it." ”

After all, it was Desir’s party that had overturned a significant point difference in one go." Even if they managed to regain their lead, they couldn’t be sure that Desir’s party wouldn’t do the same thing again."

“If that’s the case, are we going to attack them then?”

“As Kelt mentioned earlier, we can’t." Even if we defeat them, the damage to our side will be huge." We would be helping the Red Dragon Party by doing so." ”

“If so… ”

“We don’t have to attack them directly, do we?”

“The Great Worm." ”

A mean grin found its way onto Argeria’s face."

“Do they have a trait that would summon a crowd of them?”

\*\*\*

Romantica’s detection magic spread out encompassing a large distance."

She drew the dungeon’s terrain on paper based on the information that she got from the detection magic and handed it over to Desir."

“Okay, this is the path we should take." ”

Desir’s party was smoothly raiding this dungeon." They were calmly killing monsters and destroying traps." Then proceeding forward until something else came into range of their detection magic, before repeating the entire process again." They had been doing this for so long that it had almost become a comfortable routine for the party."

After the fifth cycle of spreading out detection magic since their short break, Romantica started to complain…

“How long do we have to keep on doing this for?”

Rather than being taxing on one’s mana or magic formation skills, detection magic consumes a lot of mental power due to the strain from processing the sheer volume of information from it." She had repeated this process of detection and fighting several times already, so she could not help but be tired."

“I’m almost done, Romantica." ”

Desir showed her a nearly completed map."

“We will find the exit out of the fifth zone soon." There is not much left for us to explore until we inevitably find the entrance to the third stage." ”

Romantica took back the map and pen from Desir."

“… Alright." I’ll invoke it again." ”

In the front of Romantica, detection magic arrays started to form again."

[Detect]

\*Hoowoong\*

They were finding less and less obstacles and monsters after coming this far." A huge vacant cavern soon appeared in her senses, as well as a set of stairs that led downwards."

Romantica smiled."

“I’ve found it." ”

“Well done, Romantica." ”

“But wait, there’s something in front of it." This is… !”

Romantica’s voice suddenly softened in despair."

“There are Great Worms!”

“We’ve met one or two Great Worms already." You don’t have to make such a fuss now." ”

“You idiot! I said Great Worm “S”! Not one or two! More than thirty!”

Desir’s pupils instantly dilated."

“What?”

\*Clank\*

\*CLAAAANK\*

As if to prove the words of Romantica, the sound of the ground crumbling from far away echoed down the passage."

The sound was getting closer." The ground also began to vibrate." Dust billowed up in great big clouds."

“Everyone get into formation!”

Desir’s party began to quickly move into battle ready positions." In the meantime, a conversation was quickly shared between the worried party members."

“What, what happened?”

“This can’t be happening." Great Worms basically move alone unless a wounded worm runs away and calls a colleague… ”

“We defeated everything clearly! We didn’t miss a single one!”

“We did indeed." Unless someone was fooling around and let one go… Wait a minute." ”

Desir raised his head."

“No way… ”

The ground started to crack with a crumbling sound and a bunch of Great Worms jumped out of the wall and on to the floor as if they were swimming through water."

That wasn’t the end to them though." A procession of worms filed into the area, seemingly ready to overrun the party." Explosive bursts of dust and stone debris were continually launched."

\*Baaaam\*

There were sparks as Takiran’s great sword and the body of a Great Worm collided." Pram’s sword pierced the body of a Great Worm in an instant, like a blinding flash of light." Bodily fluids started pouring out of the wound." A myriad of spells were launched by Adjest, Romantica and Desir."

Great Worms by themselves were not particularly strong in comparison to Desir’s party." However, the growing problem in this situation was the sheer number of them." They were rapidly losing control."

At that time, the Blue Moon party moved past Desir’s party, ignoring the Great Worms as if to prove Desir’s hypothesis."

“Take care." ”

They continued to move along while flashing smirks filled with ridicule."

Kelt turned and looked at Desir." As soon as their eyes met, he bowed slightly to Desir and followed after his party again."

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**RMSBS - Episode 99 . Configuration Demolition (4)**

Blue Moon Party quickly moved away from the fight that kept the Desir party occupied." The sound of fighting gradually faded away, until just the footsteps of their party of six could be heard in the now silent cave." Argeria finally broke the silence."

“Did we make it?”

His excited voice echoed in the labyrinth." Other voices agreed with the assertion in agitation."

“Did you see how embarrassed they looked? It was truly a spectacle." ”

“It looked like they were struggling to survive." ”

It was a simple plan." Killing that many Great Worms would take a lot of time, no matter which party was confronted with such a situation, regardless of whether it was Desir’s party or their own."

The Blue Moon party used this situation to increase their lead over Desir’s party."

“You look unhappy, Kelt." ”

Kelt turned to look at Argeria."

“I don't know if this will come back to bite us or not." ”

“Think of it as a mock skirmish." Can you defeat an enemy while taking care of them? Think of the enemy party as virtual beings in a mock Shadow World." There really is no big difference between those two concepts here anyway." Even if you die in here, you don’t really die." ”

“Of course, that is… ”

“If your mind wanders during practice, how will you stay focused in a real dungeon? It’s your responsibility to prioritise the party and your own wellbeing over the enemy’s." Unless you take this seriously, one day you’ll get both yourself and your party killed." ”

After sharing his advice, Argeria focussed back on the cave in front of himself and increased his pace."

Kelt, however, looked over his shoulder to confirm whether he had any regrets."

‘I can’t believe that defeating other parties in this way is acceptable." ’

Even though he thought that this was an inevitable situation, he still felt guilty in some small part of his heart."

They had not defeated them with their ability but through their own cowardice."

‘I guess the ends justify the means." ’

Kelt remembered what his brother had told him and reluctantly turned his head forward and focused on the path in front of him."

Not long afterwards, they broke through the last zone within the second stage."

“I found it! There’s an exit just up ahead." ”

Indeed, in just a short moment, the narrow labyrinth had widened and a huge space was revealed." A spacious hall was nestled in the middle of this open area." It was large enough to accommodate hundreds of people simultaneously." What would have normally been a dark and foreboding chamber was instead brightly lit." The walls were composed of some kind of luminous stone, which emanated a bright light more than capable of lighting up a room."

“We’ve finally arrived." ”

The hall was so silent that a pin drop could be heard." Argeria’s murmur was hence loud enough to fill the hall with its echo." There was a door opposite to the side they had entered from." It was probably the passage to the third stage." Once they passed through it, they would be the first ones to enter the third stage."

Argeria confidently stepped forward and his party members followed him."

Without any warning, a sound loud enough to tear eardrums reverberated throughout the hall."

The Blue Moon party came to an abrupt stop."

“It’s a Great Worm." ”

Great Worms made a unique, but loud, noise due to the way they ate and displaced the ground as they moved." Unless they had heard wrong, this was obviously the sound of a Great Worm."

‘Have some of them been chased off by Desir’s party?’

Kelt felt that this was possible."

The number of Great Worms that the Blue Moon party had led to Desir’s party was about a thousand." It was plausible for some of them to have chased the Blue Moon party instead of staying to fight Desir."

\*Crack\* \*Craaack\*

The noise of digging coming from the walls was exceptionally loud." The walls soon began to show signs of cracking while the noise assaulting their ear drums increased." As the cracks continued to grow, the luminous stone illuminating the area began to dim and soon the light disappeared completely."

\*Crash\*

One by one, the luminous stone walls faded to dark." Before they knew it, the surroundings had become pitch black."

“Secure vision of the area." ”

On Argeria’s command, the wizards of the Blue Moon party arranged and invoked various illumination spells."

[Light Whisper]

[Candle Swift]

They continually unleashed light spells." Before too long, there were a dozen light sources that formed a huge central source of light as well as many periphery smaller light sources that spread out to cover the area." One might think that the luminous stone had turned back on, if not for the massive shadow that loomed over the Blue Moon party."

“… !”

Kelt doubted his own eyes."

It moved in like a massive wall, preventing all escape." This was an area that could afford space to hundreds of people simultaneously, which made the size of this being all the more frightening."

A party member shouted in alarm."

“… is this the work of a Great Worm?”

“No, this is too much… Then it must be… !”

It was too big to call it a Great Worm, based on what they had seen before." No, this was something that stimulated the fear of man due to its sheer size."

The surface of its exoskeleton reflected the light." The giant which had not yet left the wall had already filled the hall with its enormity." Its legs, as if made up of dozens of broken knives somehow glued end to end, made a grating noise as they moved in-sync with its constant cycle of breathing."

As they began to recognize exactly what exactly they were up against, the party who had thought that they were the strongest began to feel embarrassed."

At the same time, a notification sounded."

-'Great Mother Worm' has appeared in response to the massive amount of Great Worm blood that has been spilled."

The Great Mother Worm who oversees the Great Worms feels threatened by the death of so many Great Worms and will now kill all intruders that it finds."

-A hidden quest has appeared."

Defeat the Great Mother Worm in order to advance to the next stage."

\*\*\*

\*Bam\*

\*Bam\*

Stone fragments scattered everywhere." A Great Worm protruded from a wall." Almost instantaneously, Pram’s rapier penetrated the Great Worm’s head." Pram then took one step forward while spinning his rapier round and round, piercing the Great Worm in many different places." Bodily fluids burst out, splattering over a wide area."

“Kaeeh!”

The Great Worm twisted and fell to the floor, intermittently spasming."

Pram stabbed his rapier a few more times into its body to ensure it was dead."

He then turned around to identify any other nearby threats." A short distance away, he saw a Great Worm wriggling backwards, attempting to dig a path to escape."

‘I have to handle that before it’s too late." ’

Pram flitted forward."

[Ragna Break]

Pram glanced backwards at the source of the sudden explosion behind him." Half of a Great Worm was roasted black while the other half of it was flying away as Desir reached out to Pram."

“Don’t go too deep on your own, Pram! We must maintain formation." ”

“Sorry!”

Pram realized he had acted too hastily, and hurriedly returned to his position."

“I understand that this is a hassle, but we cannot relax until this battle is over." ”

Pram replied in embarrassment."

“I’ll keep that in mind." ”

Meanwhile, wind magic poured out from the center of the party formation and mutilated the Great Worm trying to escape back into the ground."

Their tactic for this battle was dead simple."

The swordsmen, Pram and Takiran, confronted the Great Worms in front of them to halt their advance and protect the party." In the meantime, Adjest and Desir dealt massive damage with their magic while Fritzel flexed to assist the party where required." Finally, when Great Worms attempt to escape, Romantica deals with them via sniper magic to prevent more reinforcements from coming."

The battle was nearing its end." There were not many Great Worms left that could still move." Adjest took out the last Great Worm, signaling that the battle had ended."

“It’s finally over." ”

Innumerable slices and chunks of Great Worm littered the ground that was flooded with bodily fluids." It was as if they had defeated all of the Great Worms in this dungeon."

As the party’s adrenaline wore off, they finally took in their surroundings." The odor wafting from the body fluids and Great Worm viscera was nauseating, and quickly became the source of the party’s anguish."

Romantica frowned at the unpleasant environment."

“Really, that was just too many." They’re really pushing their luck." Those Blue Moon party guys, no matter how much they hate us, how could they do something so shameful? ”

Pram also spoke up while shaking off fluid that had accumulated on his rapier." He did not sound like his usual self, sounding far more upset than Desir had ever heard him before."

“That Blue Moon party is so dirty." ”

“…”

Adjest looked the same as usual on the surface, but it was clear that she was also angry." Even though the battle was now over, the way she carried herself remained the same."

Everyone was filled with anger at the Blue Moon party and annoyed at the senseless fight they had to undertake."

In the meantime, Desir focused more on other things than his seething rage at the Blue Moon party." He looked at the carcasses of the Great Worms scattered everywhere."

“Mm… there were too many." This was too dangerous." ”

Pram chirped in response next to him."

“We’ve already handled everything, Desir." ”

Desir silently collected and burned the bodies of the Great Worms." His party members were curious at what he had been doing, acting completely normal, instead of joining them in expressing their rage."

As he continued working, he started talking to the party members."

“In order to control the Great Worms in an artificial environment like this, there is a need for an entity to lead and manipulate them." A being that represents the will of all colonies." Of course, this entity usually doesn’t get involved and instead remains in the colony that they spawn in…”

Sensing how seriously Desir was treating the situation, the party members all quietly listened to him."

“However, when it comes to situations where the entire colony is threatened, this all changes." When so many Great Worms all die at once… it might make a move." ”

“I see, so… ”

“We definitely need to get rid of all traces of this battle." It absolutely can’t know how many we slaughtered." This entity is really tricky to deal with." Very annoying." ”

Desir looked at the burning flames." In the flames, the body of a Great Worm crumbled and scattered to ash."

“Desir." ”

Adjest was looking far away into the dark."

“I think we are already too late." ”

----

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**RMSBS - Episode 99 . Configuration Demolition (5)**

“We’re going to break through." ”

Argeria decided to move forward with the appearance of the Mother Great Worm." He could not give up the attack in this way."

They decisively fell back to launch their assault."

“No matter how strong it is, there’s still only one enemy." If we do our best, we can somehow get past it." ”

He felt that they could win." They were the strongest party of Hebrion Academy, after all."

The modifier ‘strongest’ was never an exaggeration." They had two Fourth-Circle wizards and three Rook-Level knights in their party."

No other party that participated in this party competition had this much power at their disposal." This was something only the Blue Moon party could achieve."

No matter how strong the opponent was, it was just one enemy afterall, and it was against the best six people in the Academy student body."

The plan was also perfect."

While Rook-Level knights and Third-Circle wizards slow the Mother Great Worm, the two Fourth-Circle wizards, including Kelt, would unleash magic that could damage the Mother Great Worm."

It was fine if they failed to defeat it." They could just break through if they keep it preoccupied for just a few seconds as a result of their offensive."

For a party this well equipped and with a plan this fool-proof, moving on to the third stage was a guarantee."

After they re-entered the hall, they put their plan into action." They used shields to form a barrier of defense against the Mother Great Worm’s acid and the wizards used magic to damage it."

As everyone expected, the battle was proceeding smoothly."

But it was all just a delusion."

The tail of the Mother Great Worm, which was buried in the wall up until that moment, freed itself from the wall and sped towards the party."

A massive amount of dirt was flung into the air, obscuring everyone’s sight." At the same time, the Mother Great Worm’s tail struck someone in the neck."

\*Thud\*

Their head was flung from their body." The body fell down a bit later."

Shortly afterwards, an announcement sounded."

[Kashu Madahit is eliminated." ]

Argeria whined in complaint."

“Damn it! Such an idiot! How could we lose someone here?! ”

If just one person dropped out at the second stage, it would be very difficult to get far in the third." Without going this far though, it would be very difficult to deal with the Mother Great Worm in front of them."

The opponent in front of them was like a boss monster from a Level Three Shadow World." It was a very powerful opponent." Even as the Blue Moon party, they would need to try their absolute hardest to have a chance at beating it."

\*Bam\*

“Eek”

Argeria screamed as some part of the Mother Great Worm bounced off of his shield."

“Focus on your opponent first!”

Focus was the most important thing when dealing with strong monsters."

There was no way out of this now." He would be eliminated and moved to the real world." This was the reality of the situation unfolding in front of him."

Unexpectedly though, there was a voice in his ear."

“That… Look over there leader… ”

It was Kelt."

“What?”

“His body… It’s still there?”

To confirm it for himself, Argeria’s eyes turned towards the party member who had lost his head before."

“Whaaa… ”

The corpse that had lost its head had not disappeared and instead remained in the dungeon."

“It isn’t gone… ?”

The blood was vividly oozing out of the corpse that had lost its head."

Argeria was a veteran amongst veterans and immediately noticed what this meant." Not only him but the other Blue Moon party members also realized what situation they were in."

It meant that this was no longer simulated training but an actual dungeon invasion."

In this space created by the technology of the Hebrion Acedemy, death should be impossible and pain should be limited."

Argeria shook his head and tried to deny the reality he was faced with."

\*Throb\*

As if to immediately snap him out of it, his wrist sharply throbbed in pain." When he lifted his gloves, he saw a deep black bruise." This wound was probably caused by blocking an attack from the Mother Great Worm." There was absolutely no pain reduction in effect."

“This is… real… ”

“Kiyaa aaahhh!”

However, the Mother Great Worm in front of him wasn’t kind enough to wait until they had sorted out their thoughts." Opening its mouth wide, it charged at those who had threatened its colony."

“… ”

He thought this was a no-risk environment." He thought it was just a test." That’s why he was willing to take the risk and make such a daring assault."

However, in reality it was truly a test with consequences unlike any practice or mock battle."

If he knew that they were risking their actual lives, he would never have approached this so recklessly." He had taken dozens of precautionary measures to lower the risk of death and figure out all relevant attack patterns up until now." This was how he had survived in this dungeon so far."

But it was now too late."

Not only was it too late but the level of the enemy they were dealing with was far from normal."

“Ha”

As soon as Argeria laughed at such an incomprehensible situation, the body of Mother Great Worm swept over towards him."

\*Thud\*

He flew away as if swept by waves on the level of a tsunami."

“Cough”

He was in excruciating pain." Argeria coughed up several mouthfuls of blood." All he could taste and smell was blood." His right arm seemed completely broken and the pain in his abdomen was also serious."

Argeria could only tremble in the face of guaranteed death."

\*Booooom\*

Something was launched from behind him." It was Fourth-Circle water and electric magic." They were the most powerful spells that Fourth-Circle mages could invoke."

Magic exploded on the body of the Mother Great Worm." The magic made a loud burst and a brilliant light could be seen by all! The two Fourth-Circle magic wizards had unleashed their strongest spells."

“Kia-a-a-ak!”

The Mother Great Worm that had been aggressively attacking them so far, temporarily ceased moving."

It was clear that the magic had hit." Its body was singed all over and part of its outer carapace had even crumbled."

But that was all." It was neither decisive nor fatal." Almost as if it were human, the Mother Great Worm seemed to frown and complain about the pain but it then resumed moving faster than ever."

The Fourth-Circle spells that had just been used required a long time to prepare and using them had merely bought a short reprieve for the party."

Argeria stood up while leaning heavily on his sword." His legs shook in response."

‘However… ’

The Mother Great Worm was devastating the Blue Moon party."

It was different from when it had first encountered them."

“Was our plan too reckless to defeat such a ferocious monster?”

They were struggling but it wouldn’t last much longer." They were falling one by one."

If the front knights couldn’t stand, then the next would be the wizards." In short, the party was on the brink of a total wipe out."

“Ha”

\*Clink\*

The Mother Great Worm moved." Its countless legs were a thing of nightmare now." Its attacks were strong and merciless."

Forget about trying to defeat it, or even getting to the third stage." Was it even possible to survive this ordeal they had gotten themselves into?

\*\*\*

“What the hell is happening?”

“Check the situation!”

The Hebrion Academy had a crisis on their hands."

This was an unprecedented event." The Party Competition, such a historical test, had malfunctioned somehow." Such a brutal massacre was by far the worst tragedy to ever occur on academy grounds."

“We have confirmed that the dropouts in the first stage are safe." ”

Those who fell in the first stage had all returned safely through the shadow gate." But none of those who dropped out after entering the second level were coming back."

As to why this had happened, the panel in front of them was clearly showing the answer." Those that hadn’t returned had all faced death in the virtual space created for the Party Competition."

There was no exception."

“Is there a problem with the configuration?”

“If so, there should have been abnormalities from the start of the first stage too." ”

The biggest problem, above all, is that most of the Alpha Class students had entered the second level." They were gradually made aware of the abnormalities, but there were also a lot of people who had not yet noticed." There was also a party currently dealing with an enemy beyond their abilities that they couldn’t afford to lose."

“This can’t be happening!”

Pugman shrieked."

The centre-most panel showed the party at the top of the leaderboard."

The Blue Moon Party."

The Mother Great Worm was flailing its legs and trampling the Blue Moon party members with its massive frame." The acid that it flung melted even rock while its hard carapace acted like an impenetrable armor."

“My brother is in there! What measures can we take… ?!”

As more than two students had died already they were in dire need of assistance." Annihilation didn’t look to be too far away."

“Check the number of students!”

“How many Alpha Class students have entered the second level?"

Prof." Bridgette calmly tried to grasp the situation." She slowly but deliberately confirmed what had happened and what information they had to work with." After arranging the information that she had, she then talked, no longer staring at the panel."

“What has happened here? Is there something wrong with the magic ore?”

The virtual Shadow World was created by extracting traces contained in the magic stone obtained by clearing a real Shadow World."

There were ways to change the various configuration settings, but considering the current situation, there was no choice but to suspect that there was a problem with the ore."

“It seems that the configuration in the stone was changed right before the Party Competition began." ”

Prof." Bridgette’s question was answered by the professor of Shadow World Studies, Pelsta."

“Someone deliberately manipulated what was set in the ore?”

“… I believe so." ”

It was the most terrifying possibility."

“Damn it!”

Prof." Bridgette bit her lips."

‘Obviously the security was multiplied several fold." Someone couldn’t just break in from the outside… ’

Her fine brows furrowed into a frown."

‘How on Earth… No, who the hell did this… ’

It was clearly an act of terrorism against Hebrion Academy."

“Is there any way to force the students to all quit?”

“No, our controls are completely unresponsive… At the moment, their only chance of survival is to clear the dungeon." ”

“So it’s just like a real Shadow World… ”

Listening to Pelstar’s despairing answer, Bridgette looked at the panel in serious contemplation."

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**RMSBS - Episode 104 . The Clue to Transcendence (1)**

The way forward had been cleared long ago."

Desir and his party members ran towards the exit of the second stage."

Desir began to briefly explain the Mother Great Worm, the entity that commanded all Great Worms, to his party members."

“Her strength increases as she lives longer, but you can assume that her attacks will be stronger than your Clothes Lines can handle." ”

Tough exterior aside, she was capable of withstanding any sort of physical attack." Only magic coming from at least the Third-Circle would be able to pierce her carapace."

If its tough defense were the only barrier then it wouldn’t pose much of a threat." However…

“Whatever damage we inflict will be meaningless; her rapid regeneration allows her to healin an instant." ”

“What an unassailable monster… ”

Pram replied in a strained voice."

Almost impenetrable defense and rapid regeneration." How troublesome."

That wasn’t even addressing her offensive prowess." A powerful attack coming from her immense size couldn’t be ignored."

“That’s why I’d hoped that the Mother Great Worm wouldn’t show up…”

Desir trailed off."

Adjest said that she had heard the screams of the Blue Moon party."

As they hurried down the passage, a wide-open area appeared." However, all they could see after arriving at the hall was debris and dirt strewn everywhere."

Despite injuries all over him, Kelt continued invoking spells, deflecting and diverting the Mother Great Worm’s attacks." Beside him stood Argeria, clutching his mangled arm."

It was a battle that was already lost."

The frontlines had already fallen." One warrior and one magician already lay dead." There was no way that they could stand up to the Mother Great Worm."

There was only one reason why they were still alive."

As if she’d discovered a new toy, the Mother Great Worm sadistically tormented them as she blocked the exit with her massive body."

Every time she sprayed acidic fluid, screams from the Blue Moon party filled the room."

But there was something else that horrified Desir’s party more than anything."

“Corpses… ?”

Two bodies were splayed across the floor." Something that wasn’t supposed to happen in this simulated world."

Desir’s party was shaken."

“… No way." ”

“When pushed to the brink of death, you’re transported out of the system." How did this… ”

Desir wordlessly stroked his injured finger."

It ached." No matter how much he thought about it, it felt no different from the real world." In other words, it was dangerous to assume that any of the protective measures set up by Hebrion Academy were still in place."

Desir’s gaze then turned to the two bodies that were scattered on the floor."

‘Does this mean that the safeguards against death have fallen along with our resistance to pain?’

There was no way Hebrion Academy hadn’t caught on to what was happening within the dungeon." Evaluation footage of the parties’ battles were being transmitted in real-time to the panel of judges."

However, despite this anomaly, the parties’ struggle to survive waged on." This meant that the current situation was out of the Academy’s control."

Since the beginning of Hebrion Academy’s history, this level of disaster had never occurred before."

There were many possible causes, but after recalling what had happened in the Prillecha Empire, Desir narrowed down the list of possible actors right away."

‘… An Outsider." ’

Desir looked straight ahead."

“SKRIIIIIIIIIT”

The Mother Great Worm let out a scream."

“Desir, what do we do now?”

At Adjest’s question, Desir confided his thoughts."

“Right now, our priority is to take care of what’s in front of us." ”

What had originally been used as a simple hindrance to conquering the dungeon, had now come back to bite them as a life-threatening danger."

Desir had to make a choice."

He could help the Blue Moon party that was still fighting, by defeating Mother Great Worm for them." Or he could choose to run away and prioritise the safety of his party members."

Allying with the Blue Moon party would guarantee a win against the Mother Great Worm, but that didn’t mean that everyone would survive the battle."

This right here was a real battle." Dying here would mean dying in the real world." The best way to protect his party members was to leave immediately."

‘… But there’s no way I can do something like that." ’

Desir shook his head."

He couldn’t ignore the people dying in front of his eyes."

Although they were nobles that looked down on commoners, their skills were the real deal."

Even within the Blue Moon party that boasted the best skills of Hebrion Academy, they were selected as the elites of the elite." They would later go on to play an active role in saving lives in the Shadow Labyrinths of the future." Letting them die here would change the future he had experienced."

For the sake of clearing the Shadow Labyrinths and for the lives of countless others, he could not just leave them to die."

‘Besides, it’s not just the Blue Moon party that we’re saving." None of the following parties will be able to escape annihilation by the Mother Great Worm if we leave her in this state." ’

The many parties that had yet to arrive would do so eventually, and they would have to face off against the Mother Great Worm too."

If they hadn’t noticed that the configuration of the simulated world was changed, they would have attacked the Mother Great Worm without hesitation." A dungeon of this level was easily defeatable by Alpha Class students of their caliber." Why would they fear a bigger Great Worm?

“Everyone, ready for battle." ”

Desir spoke."

At his command, each member of Desir’s party raised their weapons." Desir studied their expressions."

Adjest was stone-faced as usual." As for Pram, he too was simply following orders." Romantica may have displayed some signs of disgust, but she wasn’t scared in any way."

They were calm." Despite witnessing the Mother Great Worm overpowering the Blue Moon party and knowing that they could lose their lives, they were unshaken."

After all, they had already encountered a being many fold more horrifying."

The Demon of Destruction, Dadenewt."

‘Compared to then, this ordeal is way easier to deal with." ’

It was undeniably a strong opponent, but their experience was unmatched." They didn’t make the mistake of panicking like rookies."

‘Seems like yesterday when we were struggling with lower level demons." ’

However, the two new members were exceptions."

Freechel and Takiren didn’t dare move as they stood with their mouths hanging open." They had been completely overwhelmed by the spectacle before their eyes."

“You two watch from the rear." ”

Desir addressed Freechel and Takiren before turning to Adjest."

“Adjest." ”

“Leave it to me." ”

Adjest raised her sword." The ice magic that she cast formed a massive wall, splitting the gap between the Blue Moon party and Mother Great Worm at last."

The sudden appearance of a giant ice wall took the Mother Great Worm by surprise." For just a split-second, its unrelenting assault ceased."

\*Bang\*

Romantica’s bullets instantaneously streaked through the air."

She was a Third-Circle magician, but her sniper skills were powerful enough that they actually approached the Fourth-Circle."

Her Wind Bullet punctured the Mother Great Worm’s carapace and penetrated deep into her flesh."

The Mother Great Worm stopped her attacks and drew back in pain." At the same time, red foam boiled over the chunk of the body that Romantica had blasted off."

Regeneration."

The damaged part was instantly restored." It was a truly exceptional ability."

But dealing permanent damage wasn’t the goal in the first place."

The real goal had been the brief window of opportunity presented as she stood still to regenerate."

During this window, Desir and Adjest’s spells finished invoking."

[Ice Crown]

The Mother Great Worm’s body was frozen solid."

[Rumble Crush]

Desir’s spell then collided with the Mother Great Worm." With a loud crack, her body started crumbling slightly."

“Hrrragghhh!”

Immediately, Pram’s blade followed up and pierced the Mother Great Worm’s body."

A silver wave danced along the trajectory, which was then followed by a sharp piercing noise that rang out."

‘Did it not break through?’

As Pram took a step back, he gripped his rapier tightly." In that moment, a faint light trickled out of it." An aura appeared and wrapped itself around Pram’s rapier, albeit the quality of it showcased the inexperience of the wielder." To a swordsman, this was the crystallization of their mastery in the way of the sword."

Pram took a step forward and just like that, he easily sliced into the Mother Great Worm."

\*Slash\*

A long red mark was drawn across the Mother Great Worm’s body." Bodily fluid and what appeared to be blood gushed out from the wound."

As this happened, Desir yelled towards the Blue Moon party members."

“Hurry up and escape before she finishes regenerating!”

Foam bubbled over and spilled forth." But the undeniable severity of her injuries meant that she needed more time to heal."

The Blue Moon party scrambled to escape the area." Every single one of them was covered in injuries and they were clearly weary after fighting their hearts out."

“SKRIIIIIIIIIT”

The Mother Great Worm let out a yell as she attempted to pursue the Blue Moon party that was attempting to escape."

But Desir’s party wouldn’t allow that to happen."

Romantica’s shots rained down and Pram’s blade blocked the Mother Great Worm’s path."

Pram had only recently climbed up the ranks." As a swordsman who relied on his attacking skills, his defenses were rather weak."

Hence why he chose not to take a defensive stance against the Mother Great Worm."

\*Swish\*

Every time he swung his rapier, the Mother Great Worm’s tough exterior cracked, allowing him to slice deeply into her flesh."

By inflicting damage and forcing her to regenerate constantly, Pram didn’t give the Mother Great Worm any time to attack." This was only possible for a swordsman that was both talented and wielded a blade crafted out of Blankšum."

While Romantica and Pram bought some time, the Blue Moon party reached Desir."

Fortunately, there were no more casualties, but everyone had sustained heavy injuries." The only people that could still move were Kelt and Argeria."

“Um… ”

“We can talk after the battle has ended." Can you still move?”

As Argeria struggled to open his mouth, Desir cut him off with a curt answer."

Argeria’s weary eyes shot open."

“Wait, did you say that you’re going up against that thing?”

“Unless someone is willing to be bait, no one will be able to escape safely." Our only option is to fight." ”

“You must have seen what it’s capable of though?”

Argeria stammered while pointing to the bodies scattered across the floor."

“You might die." Commoner, I acknowledge that your party is strong." However, that isn’t a monster that can be defeated with who we have right now." It’s at least on the level of a boss in a Level Three Shadow World." ”

A Level Three Shadow World."

That was the objective evaluation of Argeria, Hebrion’s number one single ranker of the third grade, who had been clearing Shadow Worlds of all levels."

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